

Guest Preacher - Rev. Donald N Martin

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Preacher: Rev. Donald N Martin

[0 : 00] Well, part of the reason we are up in Lewis at this time is that we had a traditional church! I've got a couple of services. That was a little bit earlier on in the year, but it wasn't possible because I had other services in the mainland. But I said to him, I've got a wedding in July and maybe I could do something for you then. Oh, he says, yes, can you do the Sunday after you do the wedding and maybe the next Sunday as well.

So that's how I'm with you at this time. And it's been a joy today to be in your company, worshipping the Lord together. So as I said, we had a, what you call a traditional church wedding in the family, followed by a traditional meal, or as they say in Gardenson, a feed. When is a feed? That's most important to many people.

And on days like that, we catch up with the family, we catch up with friends that we haven't seen for a lot of time, and we have lots and lots of memories to look back on.

And as we know, when we gather around a meal, especially at a wedding or, you know, if we're out for a meal, we meet other people, and it's wonderful to do that.

[1 : 43] Whether it's friends or acquaintances, it does us good. And of course, the most special meal that we, as children of God, have is the wedding supper of the Lamb.

And it's a great delight for us when we meet together around the Lord's table and celebrate together what he has done for us.

Speaking about the fellowship with the Lord, Jesus often spoke about meals, meals with others. He frequently met with others over a meal. Often it's with his disciples, of course, naturally. Other times with the multitudes, and he fed them.

And even with tax collectors and sinners. And all of these were opportunities that Jesus used for teaching the Word of God.

[2 : 51] They were for fellowship. But he was also showing the love of God to the people he was among. In fact, Luke's Gospel that we're looking at tonight, speaks of at least ten occasions where a meal is involved in the story.

Including the account we have here in Luke chapter 14 of Jesus at the Pharisee's house. So we didn't read it earlier on.

Chapter 14 begins by saying in verse 1, One Sabbath, when he went to dine at the house of the ruler of the Pharisees, they were watching him carefully.

They were watching him carefully. So when Jesus accepted this invitation to the Pharisee's house, he was open to speak about anything they threw at him.

Any topic. Hot topics. Like working on the Sabbath. Like who had the place of honour at a table.

[3 : 57] Who gets to sit at God's banquet table. And in these situations, Jesus didn't try to avoid answering the questions.

Rather, he answered by asking some very pointed questions to those who were asking. And they were a challenge.

These questions were a challenge to the people in attendance. As in this case, Jesus told some interesting stories, parables. To those who had ears to hear.

You see, Jesus wanted to bring the people, whoever they were, into a right relationship with God the Father. And isn't that our desire for our friends, for our families and others?

That they come into a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ. Is that not our prayer for the families who are still out of Christ? I remember a time when we were in Stornoway.

[5 : 07] And a lady from Barbarus came and spoke to me after the service. And she said to me, You know, your granny prayed people into the kingdom.

Never let go. Are we letting go of praying for our families these days? The reason we pray for our families is that they too can come to this great banquet at the end of time.

The banquet that is yet to come. The marriage supper of the Lamb. Do we not want our families to be there as well? This searching parable we read earlier reassures the faithful that they already have a place at the banquet.

And that we too can say when we follow Jesus, When the role is called a beyonder, I'll be there. Can we all say that tonight? When the role is called a beyonder, I'll be there in the words of the old hymn.

This parable is told by Jesus, of course, as a result of being invited to eat at a prominent Pharisee's house, as we read there in verse 1. And the Pharisees were seen as a stuffy group, a legalistic, religious group.

[6 : 36] And certainly they didn't care much for Jesus. They had their own rules. And they wanted rid of Jesus because he was upsetting the way they did things.

And they tried all sorts of ways to bring him down. But frequently he rebukes them through these challenges he gives, confronting them as to their ideas, their beliefs.

And verse 2 of chapter 14 reads, There in front of him was a man suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?

But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him away to the Pharisees present that day.

This was an abomination. To heal, to work on Shabbat, on the Sabbath. On one of our visits to Israel, we arrived at the hotel in Jerusalem on the eve of the Day of Atonement.

[7 : 49] And we were told to be there early because the Sabbath begins at sundown on the Friday evening. That was Friday the 29th of September 2017.

And we were told that it would be a cold buffet they would get that night because even the staff in the restaurant weren't willing to cook a meal for guests that night.

They had done it before. They had done the preparation before. And in the morning, there was nobody to cook us breakfast either. We had cold eggs and cold toast and that's how the Jews work. So, the Sabbath began at sundown and it lasts for 25 hours. It's an extra hour. I'm not sure why that is. But were there not times in these islands when Sunday dinner was cooked on Saturday?

I remember in our own home, that's how it was. It was heated before serving. But not so were the Jews. They don't do a hand's turn on the Sabbath.

[9 : 04] And the streets of Jerusalem on that Sabbath was absolutely empty. Not a car moving. And the only people you saw were the Orthodox Jews going to the synagogues.

And Jesus here had something to say about their traditions. How they would conceitedly choose the best seats at the banquets. And they risked humiliation if they took a reserved seat.

Back in Proverbs 25, it says, Do not exalt yourself in the King's presence and do not claim a place among great men. It is better for him to say to you, Come up here.

Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not. And in verses 12 to 14, here Jesus states that those who humbled themselves and cared for the less fortunate would be blessed and would receive the return reward.

But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, although they cannot repay you. And you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

[10 : 25] Now the Gospels revealed to us that Jesus was an itinerant preacher around Galilee. Luke 13 says he went through the villages, towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem.

Jesus would also speak at the local synagogues scattered around the land. And people gathered there not just for worship. The synagogues were used for social occasions as well.

And here in chapter 14 we see that Jesus was offered hospitality and opportunity for Pharisees to examine his religious views.

And one of the Pharisees at the meal makes this declaration, blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. What he thought, he knew where he was going.

And many of us will have come across people like this. They will make a statement and they will wait for a response. And silence is hard.

[11 : 35] There's silence for a few moments. Who's going to break the silence? They were waiting to hear what Jesus had to say.

And the call goes out, come, for everything is now ready. And at the last minute, some people are already there, says, well, I'm not going to wait here very much longer. And all I like is start to make excuses.

I've got this to do, that to do. I've got to go here, go there, go. What a disappointment to the host that would be. And what a disappointment to the host of the Lord's table when people are invited into a relationship with him, and they draw away making excuses.

[17 : 56] Oh, I'll lose all my friends. I'm not good enough. And such were some of us in the past.

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said, I've bought a field and I must go and seed. Please excuse me. Now, if you think of the Middle Eastern context, maybe even our own context, that couldn't have been a genuine excuse.

For in a country where there is so much desert, the buyer would want to know where the field was, what kind of field it was, did it produce a crop? And he would spend weeks and months checking it. And he would never have bought it on spec. Would any of us buy property or land on spec without seeing it? Not at all.

We would want to know its suitability. So this was just an excuse. And the servant turns to the second guest who said, I've bought five yoke of oxen.

[19 : 03] I'm in a way to try them out. Please excuse me. Akin, we might say, this was putting the cart before the horse. No one in the right mind in that culture would even buy oxen without seeing that they were equally yoked, that they were of the same size and strength.

It's almost as if there's a collusion going on amongst the guests. There's an item bought. They must check it out. Let me be excused.

This is insulting to the host of the banquet. But the third man in the parable, the newlywed, didn't even ask to be excused. He said, still another said, I just got married, so I can't come.

How ungrateful. How rude. And there's an initial reaction from the master to fill the place at the table. It's said that anger causes great energy.

But that energy soon turns in the host's mind to grace. As the old hymn chorus says, O the love that sought me.

[20 : 24] O the blood that bought me. O the grace that brought me to the fold. Wondrous grace that brought me to the fold. The servant, verse 21, the servant came back and reported this to his master.

Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and the alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. Who would a prominent Pharisee normally invite to his banquets?

Well, it would have been people like himself, of course. Pharisees, as we know, had little time for the message of Jesus. Or those who followed Jesus.

Whereas it seems, from reading the Gospels, that the common people heard him gladly and many followed him. It is ordinary people who are following Jesus.

Not the religious people. They often followed him in crowds. The very people who would have been outcasts in Israel. They are the very ones who are now being invited to the banquet, even although they were not deemed worthy.

[21 : 48] Surely this story is about God's invitation to us to respond to the call. Come, for everything is now ready.

I have prepared a place for you. If it were not so, I would have told you.

Does this not have echoes of the Gospel itself? There are those people who think they deserve a place in the kingdom of God in heaven.

But as those who see themselves as unworthy sinners, unworthy of the least of the mercies of a merciful God, who are welcomed and humbled by the grace and mercy of God.

God, sir, the servant said, what you ordered has been done, but there is still room. There is still room.

[22 : 49] And Jesus in this parable has a genuine desire to reach out to the Pharisees, but they don't see it. Believing that observing the law, the Torah, was sufficient.

Again, another time in John 5, Jesus being persecuted for healing on the Sabbath and responds to the Jews, you diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life.

And these are the Scriptures that testify about me. And listen to this verse. You refuse to come to me to have life.

I think this is one of the most hard-hitting verses in the Gospels.

You refuse to come to me to have life. And those who refuse will be like the rich man in the parable, chapter 16, in hell, when he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.

[24 : 08] So he called him, Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I am in agony in this fire.

It's very clear that the Pharisees refused the offer of salvation.

And now the servant tells the master there is still room. Go into the roads and the country lanes and make them come in so that my house will be full.

Commentators referring to verse 23 here says that Jesus is reaching out to the Gentiles. You know, the master is still sending servants out today and he's saying there is still room in my kingdom.

Go out to the country roads and country lanes and make them come in. The older translations of the Bible says compel them to come in.

[25 : 06] This is not trying to force anyone to convert because you cannot do that. But genuinely to tell people that they are welcomed in this kingdom. basically the master says I want you to convince him that this is a genuine offer.

It's not a scam as we might say today. And I decide to have them with me at my banquet in the eternal kingdom. such people need someone to confirm that there is indeed a welcome awaiting them there.

It's not our role as servants of Jesus it's not our role as servants of Jesus to compel others.

to give a hearing to the message of Jesus Christ. It seems that before this command is followed through the story ends.

For during Jesus' own lifetime the Gentiles had not been reached. The apostle Paul takes up the mantle and he writes in 2 Corinthians 5 since we know what it is to fear the Lord we try to persuade men.

[26 : 35] So he's doing what Jesus has asked him to do for Christ's love compels us because we are convinced that one died for all and therefore all died.

It's the apostle Paul and others who were first commanded to go into the Gentile world with the good news. this fulfilling vision we read from Isaiah 49 and now the Lord says is it too small a thing for you to say to myself to restore the tribes of Jacob and to bring those of Israel I have kept.

I will also make you a light to the Gentiles. Aren't we thankful to God today that he made a light for the Gentiles for people like us that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth and at that time in Judea and Samaria where were the ends of the earth?

Probably where we live today here in Scotland. Because as far as I know America wasn't discovered. In this parable we find a picture of God and those who serve him.

The dialogue is between the master and the servant but down in closing Jesus adds his own voice. verse 24 I tell you and that you is a plural not one of those men who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.

[28 : 07] Of course we know there were exceptions of Jews who accepted the message of Jesus like Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night and Joseph of Aramthea who gave him his tomb to bury after the crucifixion.

St. Claf Ferguson speaking about this Joseph of Aramthea. He said Joseph of Aramthea was a man who like other Pharisees was looking for the coming of the Messianic kingdom.

Was it Nicodemus who told him what Jesus had said about entering the kingdom? I think it's highly likely. It must have cost Joseph to step out of line with the Sanhedrin to do what he did for the Lord Jesus.

Jesus speaks to all the Pharisees with whom he eats at the table and he says I tell you I'm telling all of you plural. We can say that the kingdom of heaven already existed and that the preparations for the eternal banquet was already underway and they who hear Jesus speak are welcome to come but if they refuse the offer will be extended to others in the highways and byways namely Gentiles.

I see he had a vision in his day in chapter 56 and foreigners who bind themselves to the Lord to serve him to love the name of the Lord and to worship him will be accepted on my altar for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.

[29 : 49] the sovereign Lord declares he who gathers the exiles of Israel I will gather still others to them besides those already gathered.

Isn't it wonderful that we were the apple of God's eye before we even knew it. any time we have taken part in the act of communion we have been foreshadowing the messianic banquet of Jesus and when the religious leaders of his day sought to end Jesus' mission and refused his loving invitation Jesus still calls outcasts outcasts today and will do so until the close of the age. By understanding some of the context of the great banquet we appreciate the richness and depth of the teaching of Jesus. The obedience becomes a witness for his master and takes the invitation out to outcasts and sinners.

We who have the privilege of being able to sit at his table from time to time having accepted his pardon are expected to do likewise that others may be saved.

There is still room at the table room to accommodate all those who hear the voice of Christ calling to them and those who listen to his voice.

[31 : 40] Come you who are blessed of my father take your inheritance a kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world and compel others to come in.

Isaiah says my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.

you will go out in joy and be led forth in peace. The mountains and the hills will burst into song before you and all the trees of the field will clap their hands.

Amen and may the Lord bless to us these thoughts from his holy word. Let's pray. Oh Father we thank you for the wonderful grace that came into our lives and into our hearts.

We thank you for all that you have done for us on the cross of Calvary. Lord you bore such agony there in the garden of Gethsemane. You bore pain at Calvary that we might be made one with you.

[32 : 49] And Father we who have come into our relationship with you today will need to listen to your voice and go out and compel others to come in.

Lord we just ask you in this difficult day in which we live in which there's so much rejection of your word so much rejection of God the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ Lord we just ask that you would give us a peace of heart that you would give us strength to be able to share this wonderful message that has been left with us as human beings to reach others with a wonderful message of salvation in and through Christ hear our prayers in Jesus name Amen Psalm number 27 sing

Psalm sorry number 27 verses 7 to 14 Lord hear me when I call to you be merciful and speak come seek my face you hold my heart your face Lord I will seek Lord hear me when I call to you Lord hear me when I call to you be merciful and speak come seek my face you hold my heart your face Lord I will see oh do not hide your face from me and do not turn aside your servant in your righteous wrath for you have been my guide

O God my Savior leave me not do not reject my plea my parents may forsake take Lord but you will welcome me teach me oh Lord how I should live and lead me in your way your way make straight my path because my foes oppress me every day give me every day give me not over to the will of a famous enemy for rise to the will of the will the of will the of the will be breathe the cruelties yet I am sure that in this life God's goodness I will God's goodness I will see.

[37 : 51] Wait for the Lord, be strong, take heart. For him wait patiently.

Amen.