

SERMON NOTES

Third Sunday of Hisnag
(Third Sunday of Advent)

Synaxis Gospel
Luke 14:12-24

THE HONOR OF DINING WITH GOD

INTRODUCTION

For the last several weeks, our Synaxis Gospel readings have been drawn from Luke's account of our Lord's last journey to Jerusalem—a journey that would end with the Cross. These readings have shown us how Jesus prepared His first disciples for the difficult days ahead and for their ministry and message to the world after His Resurrection. They prepare us, as well, for our ministry as Jesus' twenty-first century disciples.

On His way to Jerusalem, Jesus was invited to the home of a Pharisee in some unnamed town. It was the Sabbath, and Jesus was invited to dinner. Luke does not tell us that the disciples were also invited. They probably were not. However, since these dinners were more or less open to the public to observe, some of the disciples may have been watching and listening in the background.

A man with dropsy, perhaps one of the onlookers, appeared in front of Jesus. This form of edema that the man suffered from was probably a severe swelling of the legs and feet. All the other invited diners watched Jesus closely to see if He would heal the man on the Sabbath. Of course, Jesus did.

Afterwards He began to speak to the other diners about their self-seeking scramble for the places of honor at the dinner party. In our portion of the story, Jesus had turned from his discussion with the other dinner guests to address His host.

SYNAXIS READING

Luke 14:12-24

And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you.

"But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

And when one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this, he said to Him, "Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

But He said to him, "A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many; and at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is ready now.'

"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first one said to him: 'I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.'

"And another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.'

"And another one said, 'I have married a wife, for that reason I cannot come.'

"And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.'

"And the slave said, 'Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.' And the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you [pl.], none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.' "

NOTES

And He also went on to say to the one, who had invited Him,

A ruler, who was also a Pharisee, had invited Jesus to a dinner party. Jesus now turned to address him.

"When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return, and repayment come to you.

A luncheon (ἀριστον – earlier usage indicated breakfast, later usage indicated lunch), as in our day, was mid-day to early afternoon; a dinner (δειπνον) was towards the evening.

We know that this is not a general prohibition. Jesus Himself dined with His friends.

Jesus is making a point about their custom (and ours?) of reciprocal meal hosting.

This group, probably the rich, the influential and the powerful of the local community, no doubt entertained each other on a regular basis. No one was really doing anything for the others; it was just tit for tat. They simply took turns ‘picking up the check.’ Still, there was prestige in being part of the elite group. They were set apart from the common onlookers.

This reciprocity was not a reward the host should be seeking.

But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you;

‘Reception’ (δοχή) is a different word and could be translated ‘banquet’ or ‘dinner-party.’ This is an even grander event. The poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind were those folk who were excluded from participating in the grand events. They were the dregs, the socially undesirables.

If the host did invite them, these folk would have neither the monetary means nor the physical ability to return the favor. But these are the very people Jesus said the host should invite.

“Blessed” indicates that God would be the source of the happiness of the host.

for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

‘For’ (γάρ) should be understood as an adverb of assurance such as ‘indeed’. Rewards for truly good deeds, not self-serving ‘good deeds’ will be awarded at the resurrection.

Indeed, such a host will be rewarded at the resurrection of the upright.

And when one of those who were reclining at the table with Him heard this,

The custom was to recline on couches at meals. They did not sit on benches or chairs.
This last remark made by Jesus interested at least one of the invited guests.

he said to Him, “Blessed is everyone who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!”

This guest put together what Jesus was saying. Instead of being invited to a meal by an ordinary human being in repayment for a dinner invitation, God would be the host for those who obeyed Jesus’ words. The invitation to God’s banquet would be at the resurrection. What an honor!

But He said to him, “A certain man was giving a big dinner, and he invited many;

Although some have taken the man’s statement as a platitude, or trite religious response, Jesus took the man seriously. Turning from his address to the host, now Jesus directed his remarks to this man.

The man had brought up God’s great banquet to come; Jesus illustrated how things will be in that day. In the context, the man would have understood that ‘a certain man’ is indeed God.

‘The many’ (הרבה) in the Old Testament was a description of the people of God. God had promised to make them as numerous as the stars of the sky.¹ Jesus’ use of this term may have been a subtle allusion to the Israelites.

¹ Genesis 15:1, 4-5.

Luke, who also wrote the Book of the *Acts of the Apostles* in the New Testament, was used to the concept that the Gospel was “to the Jews first and also to the Gentiles.”² Jesus offered Himself first to the Jews.

And at the dinner hour he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come, for everything is ready now.’

Some commentators suggest that if ‘a certain man’ is God the Father, than the slave is Jesus as He is described in Philippians 2:7. However, in the Book of Revelation, the dinner party is the wedding supper of Jesus Christ³. The Bride is the Church and in Revelation 22:17, it is the Spirit and the bride who say “Come.”

But they all alike began to make excuses.

Suddenly the invitees all had something more important to do than to go to the great dinner. All the excuses seem lame.

The first one said to him: ‘I have bought a piece of land and I need to go out and look at it; please consider me excused.’

Couldn’t this have been done on another day? Why is this an excuse? This is an example of possessions being more important than God.

And another one said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please consider me excused.’

Why couldn’t this be postponed? This is an example of occupation with business crowding out God’s interests.

And another one said, ‘I have married a wife, for that reason I cannot come.’

At least the first two had made an attempt to be polite. Possibly, this one might have brought his wife, if women were invited (which they are at God’s banquet). Family relationships are here simply an excuse, not a reason, for neglecting duty to God.

And the slave came back and reported this to his master. Then the head of the household became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame.’

The refusal of the first group of invitees angered the host. He had gone to great expense for their sakes. Then the second group of invitees was named. They are the very ones Jesus had recommended should be invited to a banquet. This proves that they are not ‘second choices’ in God’s original plan. During Jesus’ ministry, many of this group had responded positively to Him.

On the other hand, those who had refused to accept Jesus had been the very types reclining around Him as He told this parable: the Pharisees, the lawyers, the leaders of the religion.

And the slave said, ‘Master, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’

At God’s dinner party there is room for all who will come.

² For example, Acts 13:46 and Acts 26:20. See also Romans 1:16; 2:9-10.

³ Revelation 19:6-9

And the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the highways and along the hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled.

Now the ‘slave’ is sent to bring in those outside the community. If those of the master’s community are the Jews, those outside can only mean the Gentiles. The enormous capacity of the banquet hall, God’s house, is now viewed. The Gentiles were always in God’s plan.⁴

The term “compel” (ανάγκασον) has the nuance *to put pressure on, to oblige*. Force is too strong, for they too could have refused. Indeed, the Gentiles have responded in such multitudes that Christianity is no longer thought of as a Jewish sect as it once was in the first century.

For I tell you (pl.), none of those men who were invited shall taste of my dinner.’ ”

The plural form of ‘you’ shows that the slave of the parable is no longer being addressed.

Therefore, Jesus seems to be directing His last statement to His hearers, the diners at the dinner party that Jesus was attending.

“My dinner” then might be contrasted with His host’s dinner. Thus, Jesus identifies Himself as the “certain man” of the parable, the Host of the great dinner in God’s kingdom.

The verb translated “shall taste” does not need to be translated as a subjunctive. It is a future and could be translated as a simple “will taste.” None of those who had been invited first—and refused—will participate in the dinner *because* they refused to come.

APPLICATION

“Reward mechanisms in the brain depend on how well you think other people are doing, a new neurological study suggests. The findings, published in the Nov. 23 issue of the journal *Science* are the first to lend physiological proof to a longstanding theory among contemporary economists: that people are affected not only by their own achievements and income, but also by how they stack up against their neighbors.”⁵ Could this mean that our brains are wired to seek honor, status and respect not only from, but *over* others? Or is this simply programming?

In the verses just preceding our reading for today, Jesus, invited to a posh dinner party, had noticed the guests’ attempts to secure for themselves the seats of honor. The guests *were* trying to make sure they stacked up well against their neighbors. One also gets the impression from Jesus’ words to his host that party givers were looking to their own benefit as well: the honor of being invited themselves by someone of power, money or influence. Both the invitees and the host were seeking the same thing, honor over their neighbors; they simply went about achieving it in different ways. Moreover, ‘unimportant’ people were not even on their radar screen.

⁴ Ephesians 3:4-11.

⁵ Laura Blue/London, “Success Depends on Others Failing” *Time Magazine*, Monday, November 26, 2007. In this experiment, people were more delighted when they were rewarded more than others who had achieved exactly the same thing. So it was not the winning in competitive achievement that lit up their brain, it was the higher reward for equal achievement!

Jesus advised the guests that if the honor of men is their goal, they would do far better and avoid embarrassment if they feigned humility, and waited for the host to move them to a higher seat. We see both of these types in today's world, the pushy and the false humble; but God knows their goals are the same. He is not fooled by false humility as we so often are.

Is this urge for honor over others part of the hardware of our brains, or is it simply software that we have somehow acquired like a computer virus? Since we are made in the image of God, I believe it must be the latter. Jesus has shown us by His own example that God is not like that. He became poor, that we might become rich. He died that we might live. His love reaches out to all, especially the poor, the maimed, the blind and the lame—the very ones the honor seekers ignore.

According to Jesus, there are human beings (apparently none were in the experiment reported in *Science*) who are *not* concerned about how they stack up against their neighbors. Jesus calls them “the righteous.” The righteous are those people who, like God, are very much concerned about the ‘unimportant people’ ignored by the honor hungry. Moreover their concern for others is not simply a postponed gratification move with an eye fixed on a heavenly reward. No, their concern for others is like God's: sincere and true and self-less.

So it will do us no good if we, like the feigned humble, try to trick God by imitating the righteous in order to get ourselves rewarded with honor in heaven. God looks at the heart. Motive is everything.

However, the righteous will be honored. Their honor is not to be elevated above other men as somehow stacking up better than their neighbors or fellow human beings. Their honor is not the honor of dining with this world's presidents or kings, the mighty, the powerful, the prestigious and accomplished of whatever field. No, no, all of that is nothing compared to the honor reserved for the righteous. Their honor is to dine with God.

God does not reject the honor seekers. The parable that Jesus told the party attendees and His host clearly demonstrates that He does not. The ‘certain man’ who symbolized God invited everyone to His great dinner party. There was room for all, from the greatest to the least, from the insiders to the outsiders; He wanted them all. God wants us all at His dinner. However, the honor seekers reject God's invitation because they have ‘better things to do.’ They have their other self-promoting interests to mind about. The honor seekers, therefore, by their very desire for honor, exclude themselves from the greatest honor of all.

If the magazine, *Science*, is correct, we are all like the honor seekers. It is in our nature. Our brain, like a computer with a virus, has been compromised. God's image in us has been overridden. Physiologically, we do not respond in accordance with our original design. Our very brains have been corrupted by sin. How we would love to damn the Devil, the Serpent of old, who, like a malicious hacker, has caused our ruin! Someday,

God will. But meanwhile, what are we to do? Is there a spiritual ‘Antivirus Software’ for the soul?

Yes! Jesus Christ Himself. If we will accept our great Lord and Savior for Who He is—the God Incarnate Who selflessly died for all of our sins—He will come in and clean out the virus. He will repair His image in us and make us righteous. He even provides us with the means to stay that way. His Holy Spirit will reside in us and warn against approaching evil.

Moreover even if we fall, 1 John 1:9 promises: “If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” May none of us reject this wonderful chance to be restored. May we all be found numbered in the Righteous so that we all—all of us together—will receive the greatest honor of all, the honor of dining with God in the Resurrection of the Righteous.