

Luke 14: 12 – 14

November 18, 2018

Thanksgiving Sunday

(11/18/12/could not locate/probably somewhere in another year's files)

By Invitation of Jesus

Have you ever been 'without'....on Thanksgiving? 'Ever spent a Christmas...with no presents? Or maybe you're feeling like you've not - a lot for which to be thankful this year? Come on along; join us as we watch and hear together....what God is doing...among us.

We will 'set the table'...with an armchair reading from Peter Marshall*... for a 'Thanksgiving afternoon'.....

Scripture Reading – (read by Liturgist as I am preparing for the 'fireside homily')

Hear now our morning lesson....from the Message Translation. This is Luke's Gospel, chapter 14, verses 12 through 14.

¹²⁻¹⁴ Then Jesus turned to his host and said, "The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors, the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You will experience...and you will be...a blessing. They are not able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people."

One bitterly cold night, when Lincoln was covered with a blanket of snow and ice, a man sat in his home on Sheridan Boulevard. The house was very comfortable...

A crackling log fire in the fireplace threw dancing shadows on the paneled walls. The wind outside was moaning softly like someone in pain, and the reading lamp cast a soft, warm glow on the Book this man was reading.

He was alone, for his children had gone to Southpointe shopping and his wife had retired early after a strenuous afternoon's bridge game.

He read the passage of Luke which is our text, and then could read no more.

Somehow he could not get away from those simple words. He had read the Bible often, for he was a good man, but never before did the words seem printed in flame.

He closed the Bible, and sat musing, conscious for the first time in his life of the challenge of Christ. He felt as though Someone were standing behind him; he knew he was no longer alone.

What strange fancy was this? Why was it that he kept hearing – in a whisper – the words he had just read?

“I must be sleepy, almost dreaming”, he thought to himself. “It’s time I went to bed.” But it was long ere he fell asleep, for still the voice whispered and still he was conscious of a Presence in the room.

He could not shake it off. Never before had he been so challenged. He thought of the dinners and parties they had given in this beautiful home.

He thought of those whom he usually invited. Most of them were listed in “Who’s Who in Nebraska” and there were those whose names were widely known in business, finance, clubs and government circles. Men with power to grant political and social favors. But they were not poor. Or maimed. Or lame. Or blind.

What had put this absurd thought into his head anyhow? He tried to sleep, but somehow he could not close the door of his mind to the procession that shuffled and tapped its way down the corridors of his soul.

As he watched them pass, he felt his own heart touched. He whispered a prayer that, if the Lord would give him courage, he would take Him at His word and do what He wanted him to do. Only then...did he find peace and fall asleep.

When morning came, his determination gave him new strength and zest for the day. His first call was on the printer who knew him well. At the counter he drafted the card he wished engraved, chuckling now and then as he wrote, his eyes shining. ...The clerk who read the card looked somewhat puzzled but made no comment, although he stood watching the retreating form swing down the street.

The card read:

Jesus of Nazareth

Requests the honor of your presence

At a banquet honoring

The Sons of Want

Friday evening, in a home on Sheridan Boulevard.

Cars will await you at the People’s City Mission

At six o’clock

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”

In the printing room, they did not know what to make of it but the conclusion they reached was that someone had more money than sense.

A few days later, with the cards of invitation in his hands, he walked downtown and gave them out, and within an hour there were several people wondering what could be the meaning of the card that a kindly, happy, well-dressed man..had placed in their hands.

There was the old man seated on a box trying to sell pencils, and another on the corner with a racking cough and a bundle of papers under his arms. There was a blind man saying over and over to himself, “Jesus of Nazareth requests the honor of your presence.”

A fellow who was fingering a gun in his pocket and thinking of suicide wondered whether he should wait until night.



So at six o'clock, a strange group of men stood waiting in the vestibule of the People's City Mission, talking softly together.

“What's the catch in this gimmick?”, asked one cynical fellow. “What's the game?” “Anybody know the joker what gave out the tickets?”

“What difference does it make? I'd do anything for a hot meal on a day like this.”

The blind man, with the little boy at his side, ventured to remark: “Maybe it's some government relief program.” And the cynic was saying, “Somebody's just jerkin our chain, as if life weren't wretched enough already.”

But just then someone came over and shouted that cars were at the door; without a word, they went outside.

Perhaps there was something incongruous about it all, seeing these men, clutching their thin coats tightly around their thin bodies, huddling together, their faces

pinched and wan, blue with cold and unshaven. Toes sticking out of their shoes, climbing into two shiny limousines.

It was heart-wrenching to see the lame get in, dragging one foot. Swinging up with a twitch of pain, and see the blind man fumbling for the seat belt.

At last they were all inside and the cars glided off with the strangest and most puzzled load of passengers they had ever carried.

When they arrived and got out, they stood gazing at the house: its broad steps and portico lamps, the thick-piled carpet in the foyer. ...They entered slowly, trying to take it all in. And they were met by the host, a little nervous, but smiling none-the-less.

He was a quiet man, and they liked him – these guests of his whose names he did not know. He did not say much; only, “I’m so glad you came.”

By and by, they were seated at the dining table. They had looked at the tapestries that hung on the walls. They had seen the illuminated pictures in their massive frames, and the giant crystal chandelier. The concert grand piano that stood across the hall, the spotless linen, and gleaming silverware.

They were silent now; even the cynic had nothing to say. It seemed the banquet would be held in frozen silence.

Then the host rose in his place, and in a voice that trembled, he said: “My friends, let us ask the blessing.”

“If this is pleasing to Thee, O Lord, bless us as we sit around this table, and bless the food we are about to receive. Bless these men. You know who they are, and what they need. And help us to do what You want us to do. Accept our thanks in Jesus’ name. Amen.”

The blind man was smiling now. He turned to the man seated next to him and asked, “What does he look like, our host?”

And so...the ice was broken; conversation began to stir around the table, and soon the first course was laid.

“My friends, I hope you will enjoy the dinner. I would suggest we waste no time, for I have no doubt we are hungry. Let’s dig in.”

It was a strange party, rather fantastic in a way, thought the host, as he served his guests. What an amazing thing; he did not know the name of a single man! His guests had no credentials, no social recommendations, no particular graces – so far as he could see.But they were hungry!

And it seemed to him these were the very men Jesus would have gathered around Him – the legion of the world’s wounded, the fraternity of the friendless, pieces of broken, human earthenware.

☺ He remembered what the family had said. How they had insisted, “Why? Why are you doing this?” Well, wasn’t it plain?!

His reason was the same old glorious reason Jesus had for every miracle, for every gesture of love, for every touch of healing. He was simply feeling what Jesus felt...and doing what Jesus did.


It was a grand feeling – a great adventure. Never before in his life had he felt this thrill. These men could not pay him back!

He watched each plate and directed the servants with a nod or glance. He encouraged them to eat; he laughed at their thinly disguised reluctance, until they laughed too. And as he sat there, it suddenly occurred to him how different was the conversation!

There were no off-color stories, nowhisperings of scandal, no one insinuating, “Well, I have it on good authority....”

They were talking about their friends in misfortune. Wishing they were here too... ‘wondering whether Charlie had managed to get a bed in the mission, whether Dick had stuck it out when he wanted to end it all. ..And wasn’t the turkey delicious?! And they marveled ~ that they still remembered how corn pudding tasted. They wondered, most of all who this man was..and why he had invited them all here.

When the meal was over, there was music. Someone came in and sat down at the piano.

He began to play softly, familiar melodies, old songs and then in a soft but understanding voice he began to sing. They listened to “Love’s Old Sweet Song”, “Silver Threads among the gold”, and then a march..by Sousa. Then Silver Bells...  ‘streams of streetlights, even stop lights’ blinking bright red and green in their minds’ eye.

Someone joined in – a cracked, wheezing voice, but it started the others. Men who had not sung for months, men who had no reason to sing, there they were, joining in.

Some old favorites: Daisy, A Bicycle Built for Two. Soon they began to request this and that, and before they knew it, they were singing hymns: What a Friend We Have in Jesus, The Church in the Wildwood, and When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.

The pianist stopped, and the guests grouped themselves in soft, comfortable chairs around the log fire and visited softly. The host moved among them smiling...his eyes shining. Then when he had settled himself again, and his guests were comfortable, he said: “I know you men are wondering what all this means. I can tell you very simply. But first, let me read you something.”

He read from the Gospels, stories of One who moved among the sick, the outcasts, the despised and the friendless. How he healed this one, cured that one, spoke kindly words of infinite meaning to another. How he visited the ostracized and what he promised to all who believed in his way.

“Now, I haven’t done much tonight for you, but it has made me very happy to have you here in my home. I hope you have enjoyed it half as much as I have. If I have given you one evening of happiness, I shall be forever glad to remember it, and you are under no obligation to me. This is not my party. It is His! I have merely lent him this house. He was your Host. He is your friend. And he has given me the honor of...knowing you.

He is sad when you are; he hurts..when you do. He weeps...when you weep. He wants the very best for you...as do I.

I’m going to give each of you his book of instructions (and forgive me; I’ve marked some of my favorite parts). When you are sick or in pain, lonely or discouraged...he will speak a message of hope and courage..and faith.

Then...I shall see each one of you tomorrow where I saw you today, and we’ll talk if you’d like of just how I can help you best.

I’ve made arrangements for each one of you to get back to your bed for the evening, and those who have nowhere to go, I invite to spend the night here.”

They shuffled out into the night, a different group from what they had been. There was a new light in their eyes, a smile where there had not been even interest before.

The blind man was smiling still, and as he stood on the doorstep, waiting, he turned to where his host stood. “God bless you, my friend, whoever you are.”

A grizzled little fellow who had not spoken all night paused to say, "I'm going to give life a try again, Mister; there is something worth livin' for."

When they had gone, he sat again by the fire and looked at the dying embers, until the feeling became overwhelming again that there was Someone in the room. He could never tell anyone how he knew this, but he knew that He..was smiling..and that He approved. And that night, on Sheridan Boulevard, a rich man smiled in his sleep.

And One who stood in the shadows...smiled too, because some of the least of these..had been treated like brothers...for His sake.

- - ...Of course, this never happened.

It is only a piece of imagination. But why...shouldn't it happen, on O Street...in Lincoln? Or South 35th? Or Park Avenue in New York, or the Gold Coast in Chicago? Or Beverly Hills?

I wonder what would happen if we all agreed to read one of the Gospels, until we came to a place that told us to do something, *then went out to do it*, and only after we had done it...began reading again?

Why don't we do..what Jesus says?

How exciting life would be were we to begin living..according to His way of life!

Friends would say we had lost our minds.

Acquaintances would say we had 'gone over the edge'.

Those who dislike us would excoriate us even more, with proof of our bleeding hearts on raw display.

.....But Someone Else, ..Someone who had these same things said about Him, would smile, and the joy and peace in our own hearts would tell us who was right.

There are aspects of the gospel that are puzzling..and difficult to understand.

But our problems are not centered around the things we don't understand; rather in the things we do understand, *the things we could not possibly..misunderstand!*

After all, this is but an illustration of the fact that our problem is not so much that we don't know what we should do.

We know perfectly well...but too often.... we don't do it.