

BE CAREFUL WHO YOU INVITE TO DINNER

DO YOU EVER WONDER WHY JESUS GOT INTO SUCH MUCH TROUBLE EVERYWHERE HE WENT? HE ALWAYS SEEMED TO BE BUTTING HEADS, ESPECIALLY WITH THOSE WHO EXERCISED AUTHORITY, MADE THE RULES AND HELD ON TO TRADITIONS. LUKE TELLS US OF A TIME WHEN JESUS ACCEPTED AN INVITATION TO ATTEND A DINNER, ACTUALLY IT WAS PROBABLY A WEDDING FEAST. WE CAN BE PRETTY SURE THE PHARISEE RULERS DID NOT INVITE HIM OUT OF THE GOODNESS OF THEIR HEARTS, AND I SUSPECT IF THEY HAD IT TO DO OVER AGAIN, I THINK THEY MIGHT NOT HAVE INVITED HIM. HERE WAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CATCH JESUS IN A CONTRADICTION AND THEY WATCHED HIM CLOSELY. THEY HAD AN AGENDA, NOT THE LEAST OF WHICH IS THAT THIS FEAST HAPPENED TO OCCUR ON THE SABBATH. AT ALL COST THE SANCTITY OF THE SABBATH MUST BE PRESERVED. WHAT A GOOD OPPORTUNITY TO TRIP JESUS UP. VERSES TWO THROUGH SIX TELL OF JESUS PERFORMING A HEALING ACT AND BEING QUESTIONED ABOUT THE LEGALITY OF SUCH A THING ON THE SABBATH. HE ANSWERED THEIR QUESTION ABOUT THE SABBATH BY SAYING: "IF YOU HAVE A DONKEY AND IT FELL INTO A PIT, WOULD YOU NOT IMMEDIATELY PULL HIM OUT?" THE PHARISEES HAD NO ANSWER BACK TO JESUS, BUT I SUSPECT THEY STILL KEPT A CLOSE EYE ON HIM. AND HE WATCHED THEM AS THE HOST ANNOUNCED THE SEATING ARRANGEMENTS. YOU KNOW THAT CAN BE A SERIOUS ISSUE. PROTOCOL AND DECORUM ARE VERY IMPORTANT. HOW MUCH DO WE LIKE TO BE FIRST IN LINE AT THE BUFFET AND TO TAKE OUR SEAT WITH THE IMPORTANT PEOPLE AT

THE HEAD TABLE. I HAVE TELL YOU ABOUT MY EXPERIENCE WITH POTLUCK DINNERS. IN THE CAMPGROUND WHERE WE USED TO STAY WE WOULD HAVE A COVERED DISH DINNER ABOUT ONCE A MONTH AND EVERY TABLE HAD A NUMBER. AND AS THE RESIDENT CLERGY-PERSON I WOULD USUALLY OFFER THE GRACE FOR THE MEAL. WOULDN'T YOU THINK THAT BECAUSE I PERFORMED THAT FUNCTION, MY TABLE WOULD BE CALLED FIRST? BUT, AS IT USUALLY HAPPENED WE WERE CALLED NEAR TO THE LAST. I WAS THOUGHT OF AS A JINX, BUT ALSO LEARNED A BIT OF HUMILITY.

LET'S SEE WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON HERE
HERE WAS JESUS, TELLING HIS HOSTS HOW TO ORGANIZE THEIR FEAST.

IF WE LOOK AT THE TEXT CLOSELY, WE CAN SEE FROM THE ENCOUNTER OVER THE SABBATH, THAT IT WAS ALL A SET-UP. JESUS WAS BECOMING TOO POPULAR. HIS SERMONS, MIRACLES AND HEALINGS HAD AROUSED THE PEOPLES CURIOSITY AND EMOTIONS TO THE POINT THAT THEY WANTED TO MAKE HIM KING OF ISRAEL. THAT WOULD NOT DO. SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE TO DESTROY THE PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE IN HIM. SO THE INVITATION WAS EXTENDED AND JESUS WAS TO BE THE FEATURED SPEAKER. GOOD SO FAR. THE POOR FELLOW THAT JESUS HEALED JUST DIDN'T HAPPEN TO BE PASSING BY. HE WAS THE "OTHER GUEST". THEY KNEW JESUS WOULD BE A PUSHOVER FOR SICK PEOPLE AND HE WOULD HEAL THE MAN EVEN IT HAD TO BE ON THE SABBATH. THUS, ONE STRIKE AGAINST JESUS, THE LAWBREAKER. THE POOR MAN DID NOT REALIZE HE WAS THE GUINEA PIG. ALL HE WANTED WAS TO BE HEALED. IT WAS

PROBABLY QUITE A SCENE AS ALL ATTENTION WAS FOCUSED ON JESUS AND THE MAN NEEDED HEALING. IF JESUS DID WHAT THEY EXPECTED HE WOULD, THE TRAP WOULD SPRING AND THEY COULD BRING HIM UP ON CHARGES. EVERYONE KNEW THAT IT WAS BREAKING THE LAW TO HEAL ON THE SABBATH. JESUS WOULD BE EXPOSED AS A FRAUD AS A RABBI. EVERYBODY WAS WATCHING, BUT INSTEAD OF HAVING THE DESIRED EFFECT OF DISCREDITING JESUS, THE FOCUS TURNED ON THE ACTIONS OF THE PARISEES. AGAIN THE LESSON FOR THEM WAS—BE CAREFUL WHO YOU INVITE TO DINNER. THE SICK MAN WAS HEALED. I DOUBT HE STAYED AROUND FOR DINNER. THE WATCHED BECAME THE WATCHER. JESUS TOOK CONTROL OF THE SITUATION AND EVEN BEFORE THE MEAL BEGAN SHOWED THAT THE RULE OF LIFE IS LOVE AND NOT THE LAW. BE CAREFUL IF YOU INVITE JESUS TO DINNER, HE MAY TALK ABOUT HIS STYLE OF LOVE.

SO THE HEAD TABLE BEGINS TO FILL UP AND THIS GUEST, WHO THEY NOW WISH HAD NOT COME, STARTED GIVING ORDERS. MEEK AND MILD JESUS COULD BE VERY ASSERTIVE AND MADE THE SEATING ASSIGNMENTS. THERE WAS PROBABLY A LOT OF GRUMBLING, BUT MY HOPE IS THAT SOME HEARTS WERE TOUCHED BY HIS LESSON IN HUMILITY. HE TOLD THOSE WHO HAD A SENSE OF THEIR OWN IMPORTANCE TO MOVE DOWN AND SIT AT THE END OF THE TABLE, LEST THEY BE SHAMED TO BE TOLD TO MOVE DOWN TO A PLACE OF LESS PROMINANCE. AT THE SAME TIME OPEN UP THE PLACES FOR THE PEOPLE WHO MIGHT NOT OTHERWISE FIND ANY REGOGNITION AMONG THEIR FELLOW GUESTS. WHEN YOU CHALLENGE A PERSONS EGO AND SENSE OF

SELF-IMPORTANCE YOU TREAD ON DANGEROUS TERRITORY. BUT JESUS SAID THE NEXT TIME YOU MAKE UP A GUEST LIST, DON'T JUST INVITE YOUR COUSINS, FRIENDS, AND RICH NEIGHBORS. GO SEEK OUT THE POOR, THE MARGINALIZED, THE CHALLENGED, AND THOSE WITHOUT FRIENDS. AGAIN JESUS GOES AGAINST ALL CONVENTION, BUT IT IS JESUS TALKING. PRACTICE A LITTLE HUMILITY. IT WAS A HARD THING TO HEAR AND A HARDER THING TO PUT INTO PRACTICE. WHAT JESUS IS CALLING US FOR IS NO LESS THAN TO PUT OUR LIVES IN HIS HANDS. A LIFE THAT IS COMMITTED TO THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS WILL UNDERSTAND WHAT HE IS SAYING IN LUKE 14, NOT JUST OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD THE SABBATH OR OUR PLACES AT THE TABLE, BUT TO THE PRACTICE OF HUMILITY IN OUR DAILY RELATIONSHIPS. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE YOU HEARD THE WORD: " I AM NOT PREJUDICED, BUT--".

IF WE ARE HONEST WITH OURSELVES, WE HAVE OUR PREJUDICES, AND THEY CAN TAKE MANY FORMS. SOMEONE WHO DOESN'T LOOK LIKE US, DOESN'T THINK LIKE US, DOESN'T TALK LIKE US ENVOKES REACTIONS, MAYBE UNSPOKEN, BUT REAL ALL THE SAME AND THEY SHAPE OUR ACTIONS AND ATTITUDES. IN MANY WAYS WE ARE NOT REALLY READY TO GIVE UP OUR SEATS OF PRIVILEGE AND STATUS. WE JUST NEED TO TURN ON THE TV AND READ THE NEWSPAPER TO SEE HOW MUCH WE ARE AN "US VERSUS THEM" WORLD. OUR LEADERS WOULD RATHER DEADLOCK THAN TALK TO EACH OTHER. THE POLITICIANS AND THE ELECTIONS WILL NOT SOLVE THE PROBLEM. PASSING NEW LAWS WILL NOT CHANGE PEOPLES HEARTS TOWARD THEIR

NEIGHBORS. A TERM THAT YOU HAVE PROBABLY HEARD, ESPECIALLY IN THIS ELECTION SEASON IS "AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM". THIS USE OF THIS CHARACTERISATION OF AMERICA IS BASED ON THREE RELATED IDEAS. FIRST, IS THAT THE HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES IS INHERENTLY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER NATIONS, SECOND, IS THE IDEA THAT AMERICA HAS A UNIQUE MISSION TO TRANSFORM THE WORLD, AND THIRD, IS THE SENSE THAT ITS HISTORY AND ITS MISSION GIVE THE UNITED STATES A SUPERIORITY OVER OTHER NATIONS. THAT IS WHERE I THINK JESUS WOULD STEP IN AND SAY, "JUST A MINUTE, YOU HAVE DONE GREAT THINGS TO FEED THE WORLD AND SET AN EXAMPLE FOR DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT AND DEFENDED FREEDOM EVERYWHERE, BUT DON'T BE THE ONES WHO DEMAND A SEAT AT THE HEAD OF THE TABLE". OUR PERCEPTION OF SUPERIORITY DOES NOT WIN US MANY FRIENDS AROUND THE WORLD. NOR DOES IT WIN ANY POINTS WITH JESUS. LIKE IT OR NOT WE ARE A GLOBAL COMMUNITY. WHAT HAPPENS AROUND THE WORLD CAN BE SEEN INSTANTLY IN YOUR LIVING ROOM. WE ALL SAW THE HEART-BREAKING IMAGE OF 5 YEAR OLD OMRAN DAQNEESH BEING CARRIED FROM A BOMBED OUT HOSPITAL TO AN AMBULANCE. A CHILD MUDDIED AND COVERED IN BLOOD, THE VICTIM OF BIG-PEOPLES BRUTALITY. HOW GOD MUST HAVE WEPT WHEN HE SAW PEOPLE SITTING IN THE SEAT OF POWER KILLING INNOCENT CHILDREN. YOU CANNOT TWIST PEOPLES ARMS TO FORCE PEOPLE TOWARD GENEROSITY AND GRACIOUS LIVING. WE DON'T KNOW WHAT IMPACT JESUS WORDS

HAD ON THE PARISEES, BUT I SEE SOME HOPE IN VERSE 13 OF THIS CHAPTER WHEN ONE OF THE GUESTS SITTING NEXT TO JESUS REMARKED: 'BLESSED IS HE WHO SHALL EAT BREAD IN THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN". I HOPE IT WAS ONE OF THE RICH NEIGHBORS, WHO NOW HAD NOTHING MORE TO OFFER THAN TO GIVE HIS LIFE TO CHRIST AND REALIZED THE BLESSINGS THAT WOULD GO WITH THAT COMMITMENT. MAYBE ONE PERSON CAUGHT THE SPARK OF LOVE THAT MOVED HIM TO A HIGHER PLANE OF EXISTENCE. WE CAN'T HAVE IT OUR OWN WAY ONCE WE TURN OUR LIVES OVER TO CHRIST. WE MUST ADMIT OUR FAULTS, CONFESS OUR FAILURES AND ASK FOR GOD'S FORGIVENESS. AND THEN WE MUST DEPEND ON GOD TO GET US THROUGH THE DAY, REALIZING THAT SEPARATED FROM HIM WE CAN DO NOTHING OF REAL VALUE. THE PARISEES WOULD ANSWER: ISN'T KEEPING THE LAW THE MOST IMPORTANT VALUE? AND JESUS REMINDS THEM OF GOD'S PROMISE: "IF MY PEOPLE HUMBLE THEMSELVES AND SEEK MY FACE, I WILL HEAR, FORGIVE, AND HEAL.

BE CAREFUL WHO YOU INVITE TO DINNER. YOUR GUEST WILL KEEP AN EYE ON YOU AND MAY EVEN REARRANGE YOUR DINING ROOM AND GUEST LIST AND BE SO BOLD AS TO ASK TO BE THE LORD OF YOUR LIFE. IT IS A BIG RISK, BUT OLD VALUES WILL BE CHALLENGED, LOVE WILL EXPAND BEYOND YOUR HOME AND YOU WILL FIND WAYS TO SERVE THOSE WHO CAN NEVER REPAY YOU. LATER IN OUR WORSHIP SERVICE, DURING THE OFFERTORY WE WILL VIEW A VIDEO ENTITLED "STAND BY ME", WHICH SORT OF BRINGS TOGETHER WHAT I HAVE TRIED TO SAY TODAY. NO

MATTER WHO WE ARE AND NO MATTER WHERE WE ARE WE NEED
SOMEBODY TO STAND BY US, NOT ABOVE US OR BENEATH US.
JESUS IS ALWAYS THERE AS THE GRACIOUS HOST AND WHERE HE
PLACES US IS A GOOD PLACE. HE IS AWAITING THE INVITATION.