

## ***Radical Hospitality***

### **Jeremiah 2:4-13; Luke 14:1, 7-14**

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

Today is Rally Day at First Presbyterian Church! In every church I have served this day has had a different meaning and reason for being. Here, it means that at the close of this worship service we will move into the Fellowship Hall, where we will celebrate the Lord's Supper and share a Banquet Feast.

As we gather around the tables, we will share the Bread and Cup that is the feast of our Lord. We come and God gives to us the bread of life, the host, the food given to strangers, the food which changes us from strangers into friends, indeed transforms us from pilgrims into hosts. As we relate this text to our table fellowship in Holy Communion, it is important for us to ask, who do we invite to this meal? Do we keep some people out?

Some of you may remember the 1967 film, starring Spencer Tracey, Sidney Poitier, Katherine Hepburn and Katherine Houghton, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?". In this film, the daughter of a well-to-do white family, Joanna Drayton (played by Houghton), comes home from a vacation to announce her intentions of marrying a well-to-do black physician, John Prentice (played by Poitier). The plot thickens as Joanna Drayton brings John Prentice home to dinner to meet her parents who do not know John is black; John's parents also come into town for the Drayton's dinner in order to meet Joanna, who they learn is white at the airport. This might not be such a big deal today but in 1967 to present a positive representation of a controversial subject like interracial marriage was bold. Bold because historically interracial marriage was illegal in most states and was still illegal in 17 states until June 12, 1967. This movie presents a cultural taboo of that time and it does so around the dinner table because who's at the table says something about who's in and who's out.

Hebrews 13 reminds us, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." Matthew 18, Jesus reminds the disciples, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me."

Hospitality has us seeing people as God see them and seeing Jesus in the people God brings before us. But Jesus' hospitality extends beyond the cordial welcome we offer when someone appears at the threshold of the church and then feel good that we have completed our obligations. God intends for us to live in community – communion – each other. God intends for people to live their lives interlaced by the grace of God with others, to know the gift and task of community from birth to death, giving us the structures of faith to sustain us through times of joy and periods of desperate agony. It is by God's grace that we accept the invitation and initiative of Christ that is ours through radical hospitality.

We have talked about how we might be a beacon of light in this community from those seeking a spiritual home. To become a vibrant, fruitful, growing congregation requires a change in attitudes, practices, and values. Good intentions are not enough. Too many churches want:

More young people as long as they act like old people;

More newcomers as long as they act like old timers;

More children as long as they are as quiet as adults;

More ethnic families as long as they act like the majority in the congregation!

All churches offer some form of hospitality, however, Radical Hospitality describes churches that strive without ceasing to exceed expectations to accommodate and include others. According to Mother Teresa, "The point is to do something, however small, and show you care through your actions."

To offer the welcome of Christ stretches us, challenges us, and pulls out of us our utmost creativity and hard work. Jesus' challenge reaches across boundaries of place and time, calling us to be more aware of those from whom we are inclined to avert our eyes, and to follow him rather than those who accept common prejudices as virtues. We who have been baptized into Christ Jesus are called to conform to Jesus and to his ways. To live into our baptism is to be ever mindful of those who are typically left out. Jesus wants us to understand that our all-too-human drive to seek the best seat in the house or at the party will not mark genuine participation in God's mercy or love.

Today we will gather at tables, partake of the bread and cup of our Lord, and feast on the generous bounty God has provided. As you do, I invite you to think on this passage of scripture and consider who is missing? Who is left out? Who do we need to invite to join us in the ministry of Jesus Christ at First Presbyterian Church? How can we extend Radical Hospitality in the name of Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior? Amen.