

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost August 28, 2022

Luke 14:6-14

*On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.*

*7When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honour, he told them a parable. 8“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honour, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. 10But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honoured in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” 12He said also 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 neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

High school might be far removed from a sabbath dinner in Palestine. The social games being played bear striking resemblance to the party Jesus is attending. Our school featured a long brick bench running along a corridor that was dedicated with the hope of fostering socialization and community. It sort of worked. Jock rock illustrated and reinforced the school’s social hierarchy. The jocks and jock-adjacent and the popular and popular-adjacent kids earned seats on the bench. Tiers of people formed semi circles, like rings of a tree with the climbers and strivers occupying the

inner rings. Wannabes and would-be's stand at the margins of the crowds surrounding the rock.

Average, but good kids diffidently pushed through to get to class hugging the opposite wall. I knew this by observing; from quite a distance, having learned to enter and exit the building through a side door and bypassing Jock rock; I knew my place. I tell you that story to tell you this one.

Once upon a time at a sabbath meal, a social climbing game's afoot and Jesus is watching the game and the players as intently as they are watching him.

Reputations rise and fall depending on with whom you eat...and where you sit at the table. Seating arrangements at dinners and banquets let you know who the big players are—these are people you want to be seen associating with and it just might turn into help from high places when you need it.

Hosting parties could ingratiate you to people up the ladder and cultivate loyalty to you from the folk a few rungs down. You might even climb a rung or two yourself.

This game is for keeps and everybody is ensnared whether they know it or not. The most toxic part of the game is that it impoverishes those not even playing it; especially the poor.

Jock rock is a trifle compared to what races of people face in segregated societies. Some radio talk programs from Buffalo New York since the shootings at Tops grocery store are addressing the lingering effects of segregation when it was law— and the modern versions still strongly in place. Else where in the US, a couple's house was appraised well below market until they asked a white couple to show the house and they took out any photos or other tells that the homeowners are black. The so called white washing raised the value of the house by several hundred thousand dollars.

Jock rock is a walk in the park compared to barriers people with disabilities face in just getting through a day of school, work, or running errands.

The games people play at banquet dinners are not even fun for the winners. As comedian Lily Tomlin observes, “You might win the rat race, but you’re still a rat. Jesus observes, then he teaches...and he disrupts.

Jesus doesn’t change HOW the game’s played. He changes WHAT game is being played. Jesus own end game is liberation and Shalom.

Think back the song Jesus’ mother Mary sings- her magnificat celebrates poor being lifted up and the high and mighty brought back to earth. Mary’s song rings true today too.

Jesus announces good news for the poor and then says that very day God’s loving design is being fulfilled even as the words ring in our ears says-those words can be for us too. When Jesus pronounces blessing are those who are poor, his words could be trending and viral now.

God’s liberating impulse crashes a party where established pecking orders rule the day. Jesus knows that everyone is free when you tear up the score card—When you’re not sizing up others in your life...or those you seek to help, maybe you don’t have to compare yourself to others either.

A few weeks back we talked about manna societies where everyone has enough; communities thrive. The pastor and writer of Manna and Mercy, Dan Erlander, also drew and penned a little book titled Pointless people. Pointless is a pun...pointless people are not insignificant...they just don’t accumulate or assign points. They play another game called...*let’s see what we can do so everyone thrives*.

Jesus’ end game is shalom for everyone and everything. Jesus’ mission in life can be described with an ancient Hebrew phrase *Tikkun Olam*; literally repairing the world. Jesus’ life, and his death and resurrection liberate us

all so we are free from status seeking and free for Tikkun Olam; free for being formed into people of Shalom. May it be among us.