

Holy Textures

Meeting Jesus in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
Short, easy to use, faith-provoking insights.



Luke 14:1, 7-14

This is what Jesus is teaching / proclaiming here. What does it look like for those with higher status / honour / privilege to live the year of the Lord's favour?



Year C

Pentecost 15

September 1, 2013

Sunday Between August 28 and September 3 Inclusive

Proper 17, Ordinary Time 22

Read the passage at the bottom of this post: [Luke 14:1, 7-14, The Message](#) or [Luke 14:1, 7-14, The New Revised Standard Version \(NRSV\)](#).

Click here, [Luke 14:1, 7-14](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this note.

Sermon by the [Rev. Dr. George Hermanson](#), "[Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?](#)"

As I noted in [last week's commentary](#) on [Luke 13:10-17](#), **Verses 2 to 6** which are omitted from this week's reading are the third and final healing on the Sabbath noted by Luke alone.

Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh (Pages 284-285, see footnote below.) offer helpful background of "dropsy" and its connection with the following verses:

in ancient literature "dropsy" was often used as a metaphor for greed. It was understood to be a disease in which the victim became thirsty, but drinking to assuage thirst only increased the victim's thirst all the more. ... Thus a man thirsty for money or status is never satisfied with gain; the more he gets, the more he wants.

Thus **Verses 2 to 6** serve not only as a heads up that Jesus will be confronting the lawyers and Pharisees about their rules for proper Sabbath behaviour, the upcoming meal will also serve as an opportunity for challenges about seeking after social status, and about concern for reciprocal hospitality - what I do for you now, you'll do for me later.

Personal aside. I had no idea what "dropsy" was - never heard of it except here. The term is a shortened form of "hydropsy" - "hydro" being the Greek for "water." Today it is called "edema" - swelling caused by excessive water retention. This can affect various parts of the body, but dropsy seems to be associated mostly with swollen legs.

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Verse 1. It is important to remember, as Luke has observed for us back in Luke 13:22, that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. And so this, and all reported encounters with religious authorities, are going to clarify and sharpen the division between Jesus' vision of right now, right here, being the time and the place for the realization of God's Kingdom, and the authorities' anxiety to keep social peace as defined and enforced by the Roman occupiers.

Thus Jesus is not being watched closely to see what they might learn from him. He is being watched closely to assess just how much of a threat he really might be.

The ploy of inviting Jesus to dinner would draw him out of public view into the private space of the Pharisee's home and allow them to test Jesus away from the gathering, admiring crowds.

Verse 7. Notice that Luke here reports on Jesus' inner thoughts / observations. As a low-to-no status person, Jesus would have a well-trained eye for seeing how high status people jockey to maintain their place in the pecking order.

Luke says that Jesus is going to tell them a parable. But what actually follows is a series of teachings / instructions and is not a parable. The parable doesn't come until Verses 16 to 24.

Verses 8 to 11. How to seat guests with various degrees of honour is still an etiquette nightmare for hosts.

Notice that Jesus is not teaching that such honouring be done away with all together - that all be treated equally. Rather, in this case, he advises a strategy of deliberately and consciously living beneath one's presumed status in order to receive even greater honouring later.

Some scholars speculate that this teaching would particularly apply to Luke and his first readers as they were higher status Gentiles, and the mixed-status Christian communities would require them to live beneath their comfort zone.

The assurance in this teaching is that **THE** Host of hosts - God - would later recognize and honour their accepting of lower social standing.

Verses 12 to 14. Jesus then ups the ante with this "put your money where your mouth is" teaching.

That is, not only must higher class people temporarily accept lower status for themselves, they should also pay to extend higher class privileges to the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind - knowing full well that they will never receive reciprocal treatment in this lifetime!

Notice here that the listing: the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind - reflect those listed in Jesus' initial declaration for his ministry way back in Luke 4:18:

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*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release
to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.*

That word, "proclaim," has lost its real impact in our modern ears. We kind of hear it as, "make an announcement," or "send out an email to everyone." It has been translated as "Gospel," and as "Good News."

But its fuller meaning is "royal decree." Jesus is not just announcing the year of the Lord's favour. He is declaring it; enacting it; making it real; bringing it into effect, into force.

Just as Caesar then, or a modern legislature today creates new realities simply by deciding and declaring (proclaiming) them, that is exactly what Jesus does. He proclaims the year of the Lord's favour and then sets out to live it and show what it means / looks like to others.

This is what Jesus is teaching / proclaiming here. What does it look like for those with higher status / honour / privilege to live the year of the Lord's favour?

There seems to be a spate of books and blogs and reality TV shows based on "My Year of Living ..."

I wonder what it would be like if we could get every single Christian congregation to spend a whole year following only these two small teachings?

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Note: Historical background information is primarily from Bruce Malina and Richard Rohrbaugh, Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels (see link below), pages 283-286.

* [Link to Amazon.com Bibliography for Bruce Malina, Richard Rohrbaugh, et. al.](#), Social Science Commentary on ... The Synoptic Gospels; The Gospel of John; The Book of Acts; The Letters of Paul; The Book of Revelation; and others.

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Luke 14:1, 7-14 (NRSV)

¹ 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.

⁷ When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸ "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹ and 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. ¹⁰ But 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 honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

¹² He 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 neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid.

¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

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Luke 14:1, 7-14 (The Message)

¹ One time when Jesus went for a Sabbath meal with one of the top leaders of the Pharisees, all the guests had their eyes on him, watching his every move.

⁷ He went on to tell a story to the guests around the table. Noticing how each had tried to elbow into the place of honor, he said, ⁸ "When someone invites you to dinner, don't take the place of honor. Somebody more important than you might have been invited by the host. ⁹ Then he'll come and call out in front of everybody, 'You're in the wrong place. The place of honor belongs to this man.' Red-faced, you'll have to make your way to the very last table, the only place left.

¹⁰ "When you're invited to dinner, go and sit at the last place. Then when the host comes he may very well say, 'Friend, come up to the front.' That will give the dinner guests something to talk about! ¹¹ What I'm saying is, If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face. But if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself."

¹² Then he turned to the host. "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. ¹³ Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. ¹⁴ You'll be—and experience—a blessing. They won't be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people."

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