

14th Sunday after Pentecost
August 29, 2010
"Go Spread the Feast"
St. 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, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." St. Luke 14:13-14

Tracy Heilman, UCC pastor, who serves as the head of Children's Ministry at Our Savior's Lutheran Church here in Rockford, sent me from her 'Facebook' to Christopher Grundy – a song writer whose lyrics you have on your insert.

Come to the Feast – it is a song that helps us reflect on today's Gospel. Cassie Henwood, our new choir director has learned the song and will sing portions of the song as I comment on how it relates to Christ's message today.

Cassie sings:

Come to the Feast – Christopher Grundy

They've got bars on the stained glass
to keep all the blessings inside
locks and chains on the doors
to guard those gold crosses they hide
but there's a man in the doorway
who lives on the street
he touches the chains and they fall at his feet
and he says:

**Come to the feast
there's always room for one more
and there's all you can eat
you can take some to go,
gather all you can hold and then go,
go spread the feast.**

Jesus was invited to a banquet by a leader of the Pharisees. He accepted the invitation. When he arrived he noticed all the rather well-to-do guests and how they sought the higher seats.

Metaphorically speaking there were bars on the door to the banquet hall – that kept all the blessings inside. Jesus notices the locks on the hearts of the religious leaders –

chains on the doors to their hearts – the locks and chains kept out the poor, the lame, and the blind. There was no place at the table for them.

The status of each guest was well established and would remain that way. And Jesus notices just who was invited. It is a closed table, an exclusive banquet – given to establish status and shared with those who would be obliged to re-pay in kind.

We are a Word and Sacrament church. God's table of grace is the center of our worship each Sunday. Holy Communion is God's banquet and God's table. Yet, how often have God's people, the Church put bars on the stained glass windows to keep all the blessings inside?

Age has been a barrier to this table – you have to be old enough and smart enough to be a worthy recipient of the Sacrament. Now the age of receiving the Sacrament has gone down to grade 5 and here at Gloria Dei – parents, in consultation with the pastor, may have their children partake of the Sacrament even sooner!

Baptized card carrying Christians are welcome to God's banquet of grace. Yet, is Christ pointing out to us that even that, too, is just another way to put 'bars on the stained glass and keep all the blessings inside'? Is any obstacle that we put up to God's grace just a way to guard our gold crosses?

Jesus notices who and who is not invited to the banquet!

Cassie sings:

She thought she was so big
she'd go without eating for days
all her bones got so frail
and her heart was just wasting away
but now she stands strong and whole
at the table of grace
tears fill the cup as they fall from her face,
and she says:

**Come to the feast
there's always room for one more
and there's all you can eat
you can take some to go,
gather all you can hold and then go
go spread the feast.**

It is not a matter of manners:

“Dear Abby or Dear Jesus,

What are the rules for hospitality and who should be invited to the banquet?”

Jesus is not answering a ‘Dear Abby’ letter, or simply telling us to be nice to strangers.

No! Jesus is talking about the all too human need for a pecking order. He is pointing out our need to compare ourselves with other and establish our power and our place.

Christ is talking about honor and shame, social and political standing – our need to know where we stand, how we are doing, and how we measure up. We all are involved in a variety of social pecking orders – whether it is in our families, at work, or at church.

Just look at society, or your own life - the dynamics of any group includes a pecking order and “You’d better figure out your place and remain in it so your do not rock the boat.”

The girl in the poem is dealing with body image and shame. She is ashamed of her body and thinks she is fat. And in such shame she has become anorexic. She questions her worth – her status in the pecking order of what is good and acceptable.

But at the table of grace Jesus teaches her and us something new: God’s unequivocal acceptance.

*“...but now she stands strong and whole
at the table of grace
tears fill the cup as they fall from her face...”*

At this banquet of grace, not only does God forgive and accept us, but also at this banquet of grace, we learn what Jesus teaches. Here Christ teaches us that our pecking orders – our status guidelines are not worth squat!

Jesus notices people seeking the higher seats and climbing their way up the status ladder and he says, “This is not of God.” Throughout Luke’s gospel Jesus proclaims that in the Kingdom of God there are no pecking orders.

Christ lays claim to us and accepts us as God's dear children. Jesus says,

"Set aside your status seeking, set aside your shame and join in the banquet celebration – but it will bring an end to the greatest and the least!"

And that is what got Jesus killed.

Cassie sings:

The candles are burning,
the table is spread
a voice rings out clear like one back from the dead
out across the battlefields,
up from the slums
over borders and color lines
the same message comes
and it says:

**Come to the feast
there's always room for one more
and there's all you can eat
you can take some to go,
gather all you can hold and then go,
go spread the feast
there's always room for one more
and there's all you can eat
you can take some to go,
gather all you can hold and then go,
go spread the feast.**

"...a voice rings out clear like one back from the dead..."

Pr. David Lose, preaching professor at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN, states:

"...those invested in the pecking order – which, of course, includes all of us, will put him [Jesus] to death. But this is Jesus, God's Son, and he will come back, lifting his scarred hands in eternal blessing and benediction, inviting us to a new vision and way of being where there is no first or last, no honor or shame, only each other, bound to one another in God's abundant love and grace."

[Source: "More Than Good Advice or Why Jesus God Killed, Pt. 2 – www.workingpreacher.org – Posted 8.22.10]

But the Good News does not stop here. We are to carry the vision into our everyday lives and our world. It is a subversive vision that will turn lives upside down.

The world will try to convince us that the pecking order is the way. That is why we meet here every Sunday to partake of this radical banquet of Holy Communion. We are not simply to come to the feast but we are also called to go spread the feast:

*Come to the feast
there's always room for one more
and there's all you can eat
you can take some to go,
gather all you can hold and then go,
go spread the feast...go spread the feast.*

Amen