God’s Hospitality

Last in the Easter 2017 series “That Same Power”

# Scripture: Luke 14:1-6; 12-24

# Key Question: How should we respond to a God who invites?

# Key idea: God's attribute of hospitality which is evidenced in the OT and in the ministry of Jesus culminates in the invitation to all of us to the wedding supper of the Lamb.

# Intro:

I have been impressed especially during this season with the theme that God is a person of hospitality. It is not like there is one verse that expresses this directly. Rather, it is a conclusion that is drawn from an accumulation of evidence. Beginning in the Old Testament, in one event after another, one divine prophetic invitation after another, God operates in such a way as to display the characteristics of a great host who is treating the people of God as his guests and showing immense hospitality. One writer who summarized all of this in an article for a Bible dictionary put his conclusion very directly:

Hospitality is an attribute of God. (from Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology. Article by Rodney K. Duke, Copyright © 1996 by Baker Books.)

This morning I invite you to look with me at some of the evidence concerning the hospitality of God. I invite you to discover with me the open invitation to a future event that God as the great host has extended to all of us in the human race. Let’s get started.

# God practices hospitality

For our purposes today, let’s begin looking at God’s hospitality by looking at the Exodus, the journey of the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the land of Canaan.

## Exodus

In a sense, the Exodus journey pictures God’s hospitality. God’s presence accompanied the Israelites in the cloud. God provided for the Israelites daily by sending manna and occasionally providing sustenance in other miraculous ways such as sending the quail so they could eat meat and providing water from the rock on two occasions.

In the sacrificial system, which God instructed Moses to institute during that journey, there is also an underlying sense of God as host over a table fellowship. For the fellowship or thanksgiving offering, some of the sacrifice was offered to God and the rest was eaten there at the house of God by the worshiper and his family (Leviticus 7:11-18; 23). It was as if God in his house was serving as host for the Thanksgiving meal of the worshiper and his family.

## Old Testament invitations

I also notice that several of God’s invitations to us in both the Old and New Testaments are in the language of hospitality. It this just a coincidence? Are the prophets simply using a metaphor that is familiar because we as humans like to eat? We might think so if the idea of God’s hospitality were not so pervasive in Scripture. But since it is so prevalent, and since it correlates with the actions of God as well, we must entertain the thought that the prophetic voices are deliberately using the language of hospitality, not just because their hearers liked to eat, but more fundamentally because such metaphors reflected the nature of God as host. Consider the famous words of Isaiah:

 “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat!
Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.
Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and you will delight in the richest of fare.
Isa 55:1-2 NIV

Or how about the invitation to wisdom given by Solomon?

Wisdom has built her house; she has set up its seven pillars.
 She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine; she has also set her table.
 She has sent out her servants, and she calls from the highest point of the city,
 “Let all who are simple come to my house!”
To those who have no sense she says,
 “Come, eat my food and drink the wine I have mixed.
 Leave your simple ways and you will live; walk in the way of insight.” Prov 9:1-6

One of the greatest Old Testament prophecies of the resurrection is given by Isaiah also in language that portrays God as host giving hospitality to the whole human race.

On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines.
On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples,
the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces;
he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.
 In that day they will say,
“Surely this is our God; we trusted in him, and he saved us.
This is the Lord, we trusted in him; let us rejoice and be glad in his salvation.”
Isa 25:6-9

## Jesus in his ministry

Let’s move into the New Testament and think about the picture of God that is given to us in the ministry of Jesus. Think of the numerous times that come immediately to mind when Jesus acted as the host. Again we have a subtle choice. Is this simply because he is the leader? Or is there more? Once again, it is the preponderance of evidence that leads us to quickly conclude that when Jesus acts as host, it is more than simply because he is leader of the group. It is part of his portrayal of the very nature of God. This becomes particularly evident when we see the lengths to which Jesus goes as a host to lovingly care for groups of people.

### Feeding of 5000 (Luke 9:10-17) Feeding of 4000 (Matt. 15:29-39)

I think first of the feeding of the 5000 described in Luke 9:10 – 17 and the very similar feeding of the 4000 described in Matthew 15:29 – 39. The incidents are similar in the fact that in both Jesus blessed small amounts of food and fed thousands of people. Both were precipitated by Jesus’ compassion upon the people who were hungry, and both were illustrations of the abundance of God’s divine supply.

Some critics have claimed that these are two different accounts of the same event but there are significant differences in the details in the two stories and in addition, at one point Jesus referred to both events when speaking with his disciples about faith and God’s ability to supply our needs(Mark 8:14-21). So they are separate instances and provide a double witness to the hospitality of God.

### Last Supper (Luke 22:1-38)

What about the Last Supper itself? Jesus certainly takes the role of the host. He leads the liturgy of the Passover. Even his taking the towel and washing the disciples feet is making sure that the job which the host’s servants usually would have performed was taken care of.

But beyond the Last Supper itself, think of the sacrament of communion which Jesus instituted at that meal. The sacrament of Communion is itself a picture of God’s hospitality. Under the figure of earthly food and drink, bread and grape juice, God provides spiritual sustenance for us as we obey him and remember Jesus. In the Methodist tradition we declare that communion is a means of grace and through participating in it God mystically strengthens us with his grace. Each group that we serve here at Copper Hill is called the table. The terms are deliberately chosen from the hospitality setting. When we take communion we are at God’s table. I relate the Sacrament of Communion to Jesus’ words in John 6. The Jewish leaders begin the conversation.

Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" Then Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." They said to him, "Sir, give us this bread always." Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. John 6:31-35 NRSV

### Fish on the fire by the lake after the resurrection (Jn. 21:9)

After his resurrection, we again see Jesus acting as the host. He met some of his disciples by the Sea of Galilee, a very familiar place to them. They had gone fishing overnight. When they came in in the morning, having caught no fish, a man on the shore called out to them and told them to cast their net on the right side of the boat. When they did the net was so full that they couldn’t haul it in. John immediately recognized that the person who called out to them was Jesus. The Bible records that when they reached the shore there was a fire there already kindled with fish and bread already there for them to eat. Jesus encouraged them also to bring some of the fish they had caught. He said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” And once again Jesus took the bread and the fish and served his disciples. (John 21:1-14) They recognized him as he offered them again the hospitality of God.

# God has extended a great invitation

As I studied about God’s hospitality and thought about it more, I remembered the passage in Revelation that refers to a time yet to be when God intends to show hospitality to all his ransomed people in his heaven. This amazing event, a culmination of the hospitality of God for all Christ followers, is called in the book of Revelation “The wedding supper of the Lamb.”

## Wedding supper in Revelation

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting:
“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.
Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory!
For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready.
Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.”
(Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of God’s holy people.)
Then the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”
Rev 19:6-9 NIV

We are given few details as is often the case in Revelation. But fortunately for us, this picture fits in with much in the teaching of Jesus. So we can put the pieces together.

## Wedding Supper in Jesus' teaching

Jesus frequently used stories of people giving hospitality in his teaching. Then he would explain them in such a way that we would learn more about God as the host. More than once he compared the idea of an invitation to a meal from a great leader to the spiritual invitation that God extends to us to be a part of the kingdom of God. Consider the following stories and parables.

### Great banquet where the guests made excuses (Luke 14:15-24)

The first parable is the one that is in our text today. Jesus had been generally teaching on the subject of hospitality and on the subject of humility. A guest at the dinner at which Jesus was teaching interjects, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” The teaching about the narrow door and the host who closes the door given in Luke 13:24 – 30 indicates that Jesus may have taught about this at other times, thus prompting such an interjection. But surprisingly here, Jesus does not directly respond to this lead line, either to affirm or deny the suggestion of the feast in the kingdom of God. Instead he tells a parable, which uses such a feast as its assumed background and focuses on other details.

Since the story is found in the context of Jesus teaching about the kingdom, in our interpretation of the story, it is not hard to think of the person preparing the banquet as God himself. Perhaps Jesus is referring to himself as the servant who has been sent to give the invitation. But as always when interpreting the parables of Jesus, look for the surprise. What is the surprising thing in the story? It is the fact that the invitation was refused –politely so-- but still refused. Jesus said those who are invited began to make excuses and the owner of the great house, who is God, became angry that those invited would not come to the dinner. So he sent his servant to invite others not originally invited in order that his dinner might be filled with guests. The first people invited likely stand for the Jewish people, especially the Jewish leaders to whom Jesus was speaking, who were continually making excuses for not becoming his followers. So Jesus spoke to the poor and common people who, the Bible says, heard him gladly. Eventually his message would also spread via other servants to Gentiles who would accept the invitation so that God’s house would be filled.

### The wedding banquet where the servants were mistreated and one came without the right clothes (Matt. 22:1-14)

Jesus apparently told similar stories so that the point was emphasized. A very similar version occurs in Matthew chapter 22. In this version, the banquet is described as that of the king for the wedding of his son. Does that sound somewhat like “The wedding supper of the Lamb?” In this parable, again those invited refuse to come. In addition, in this version, those invited mistreated the servants who were sent to invite them. The king responds in anger and sends an army to burn the city. Then more servants are sent to find other people in more remote places who will come to the dinner. Finally the wedding guests are seated. But one person is discovered at the dinner who is not wearing the proper wedding attire. That person is thrown out of the dinner. The story in Matthew is much more complicated and is much more of an allegory rather than a simple parable. The mistreatment of the first group of servants refers to how the Jewish kings and leaders in Israel’s history had often mistreated the prophets whom God had sent. God’s anger upon the Jewish nation for their rebellion had resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem by fire at the hands of the Babylonian army. Then God sent more prophets and finally his own son in order that he might find faithful followers – that his banquet hall might be filled with guests.

### Parable of the ten virgins going to a wedding banquet (Matt. 25:1-13)

Another interesting parable, again a wedding banquet parable, is the parable of the 10 virgins. You can read it in the first part of Matthew chapter 25. I will not explain it in detail. But we will note that Jesus explicitly says that the parable is about the kingdom of heaven. The parable is about waiting for the bridegroom. The conclusion of the parable is, “Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” This conclusion indicates to us that the event spoken of remains future and that we as disciples need to be prepared for it. And for the purpose of our message this morning, we cannot help but note that the main metaphor of the parable is again one of divine hospitality for the people of God, hospitality that is still to come.

## NT Invitations with hospitality metaphors

The end of the book of Revelation also contains two key invitations which are deliberately phrased in language of hospitality.

He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give water without cost from the spring of the water of life. Those who are victorious will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my children.

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let the one who hears say, “Come!” Let the one who is thirsty come; and let the one who wishes take the free gift of the water of life. Rev 21:6-8, 17 NIV

So our conclusion in all of this is that God is inviting us to great feast in the heavenly manifestation of the kingdom of God.

One of my favorite images depicting this is of an endless table. There is an unseen host at the end of the table and the table is prepared and fully laden with food as at a great Thanksgiving feast the guests have yet to arrive but there are places set on both sides. And the seats extend on both sides of the table as far as the eye can see. The table has no other end. It is the artist’s attempt to picture the feast of God that is prepared for those who love him. All of us are invited! The question is which group where we in?

# Two groups

Let’s go back to the parable that is our text this morning in Luke chapter 14. One thing that is crucial for us as we interpret this parable is to look at the two groups of people who are described as having been invited.

## Those who make excuse

For sure, it is not just the Jewish people to whom this parable applies. Through God’s servants today, God’s invitation to the great feast is still being extended. But surprisingly, still today, most people make excuses. Note with me that the excuses being made were not vicious, angry, or rebellious. Rather, they simply involved other priorities, as we might describe it today. People were simply too busy. They were preoccupied with other events in their lives. Two of them made excuses related to business purchases. They were too occupied with work. The third person just got married. Now this was a nearly sacred excuse in Israel as men did not even have to serve in the military for a year after being married. But however innocent excuses, the persons giving them all had one thing in common, they were all excluded from the great meal.

Think about that sobering thought. There are many people today who are making very innocent excuses for not responding to God’s invitation in their lives. Many are too busy. Sometimes it’s with business. Sometimes it’s in order to pursue pleasure. Sometimes family responsibilities seem to perpetually keep us distracted. But if we allow all the business and busyness of this world to be an excuse that keeps us from responding to God’s invitation, then the same thing will happen to us, we will miss the meal. We will miss what God has planned for us. We will not be seated at God’s table.

For if there’s one thing that is clear in Jesus parables, it is that this is not a universalism situation. Despite the wishful thinking of modern pluralism, it does matter how you respond to Jesus invitation. In all these parables, Jesus clearly teaches that there is discrimination going on. Some people are getting in to the dinner and some are not. In this particular parable the host says at the end of the parable, “I tell you not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet” (Luke 14:24). Who is it that won’t get a taste? Those who made excuses!

This is frightening to me. How many people do we know, some in our own families, who continually make an excuse not to be in the house of God? It wouldn’t be so bad, if they were only making an excuse not to be in the house of God, but one is quite sure that if they have no time to be in the house of God, it is unlikely they are giving time or attention to God in other ways either. They are making excuses. And however innocent those excuses are, there is real danger that they will miss the meal! Let us pray for them. And let us not give up inviting them to God and to the house of God.

## Those who accept

Perhaps they will yet stop making excuse, by the grace of God, and join the second group described in the parable. This group consists of those from the streets and alleys, the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, those from the roads and country lanes who said yes and filled the house of the divine host with guests. These are those who acknowledge their need and accept the divine invitation.

You know there’s an interesting thing that happens a couple different times in the New Testament. The image of hosts and guests gets reversed in a couple places. The analogy gets changed so that the Scripture is written in such a way that it seems like Jesus is our guest and we have the opportunity to give hospitality to him. Consider the following two famous Scriptures. These are important at this point because they will help us to see the response that was made by those who no longer made excuses but open their hearts and said yes to the divine invitations.

He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. John 1:11-12

In this passage, the word “receive” is a hospitality metaphor. But it reverses the roles that we’ve been talking about so far. Jesus humbled himself to become one of the human race but we rejected him. But John says that those who do not reject him, those who open their hearts and give hospitality to him, those who receive him, to them God gives the right to become children of God!

In John’s vision in the book of Revelation, the risen Christ says to us;

Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me. Rev 3:19-20

Jesus places himself at our heart’s door, waiting for us to open and let him in. It is once again the hospitality metaphor reversed. He is asking if we will show him hospitality in our lives. But it has a promise with it. If we will show him hospitality then he will come in and eat with us. He will come in and we will enjoy table fellowship together. It will be a first installment of that table fellowship which will one day come, “The wedding supper of the Lamb.”

As we wait for that great day, which Paul called the “blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13), we can enjoy the friendship of God day by day and watch for Jesus’ return, anticipating more of God’s hospitality. Jesus himself said,

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. Luke 12:37

Have you accepted the divine invitation?