

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Luke 14:1-14

Year C - Proper 17, Text: Luke 14:1-14
Year C - Proper 17, Text: Luke 14:1, 7-14

Luke 14:1–24 describes the inclusive nature of Jesus’ Messianic Banquet and continues to focus on the spirit of opposition that surfaces in the closing section of Chapter 13. In 14:24, Jesus refers to Himself as the Host of God’s eschatological banquet to which all — both the elect and the non-elect — are invited.

Verse 14:1: The incident reported in 14:1–6 is unique to Luke. It triggers Jesus’ wisdom discourses in verses 7–24. Verse 1 makes reference to Jesus going to the house of a leading Pharisee to share a meal with him on a Sabbath. Others who have been invited to participate in the meal keep a close watch on Jesus.

As the meal gets under way, a man suffering from dropsy enters the banquet room (14:2). Jesus, the chief guest, confronts others who are present with a question, “Is it lawful to cure people on the Sabbath, or not?” (14:3). Although the response to Jesus’ question is silence from all present, Jesus heals the man and sends him away (14:4). Jesus then poses a question designed to make His host and the other guests aware of their hypocrisy (14:5). Once again, the response is silence (14:6).

Verses 14:7–11: Jesus notices how the guests seek a place of high honor for themselves at the banquet and responds by sharing what Luke refers to as “a parable” (v. 7). Its message is this: Those invited to a wedding celebration should not claim a place of high honor for themselves in the banquet hall. After all, what will they do if someone more distinguished than they appears and they are shamed when the host asks them to move down lower so that the more distinguished person might be seated up higher?

Verses 14:12–14: God will never be fooled by a person’s self-promotion! The Pharisees should have invited people like the man afflicted with dropsy to their feast. However, rather than do that, they debated what attitude they should adopt toward the unclean (see 7:36–50), and just what renders a person unclean (11:37–54).

The early Christian community also had to decide who should be invited to Christian meals (14:1–24). Luke has Jesus give radical answers to all these questions in the context of a meal. Throughout, Jesus declares and shows Himself to be “Lord of the Sabbath” (6:5) and One who champions doing works of compassion on that day — and every day.

The Messianic Banquet

There were some very specific assumptions that prevailed in Jesus’ day concerning who would participate in the final messianic banquet:

Some believed that when the Messianic Age broke in, God would host a great banquet. The following passages list who will, and who will not, participate in that banquet.

YHWH (Yahweh) of hosts will make for all the peoples in this mountain a meal. And although they supposed it to be an honor, it will be a shame for them and by great plagues — they will be unable to escape, plagues whereby they will come to their end. So these terrible things are going to come upon the Gentiles. (Aramaic Targum, a paraphrase)

A Jewish writing, written in the period between the Testaments, reflects the thinking of the time. It also provides a picture of the great banquet in which the Gentiles will be included. But the angel of death will be present. And this angel will use his sword to destroy those Gentiles! The place will run with blood, and the (Jewish) believers will wade through this blood and then sit down with the messiah! (Book of Enoch, 62:1–11)

The Qumran community (Essenes), where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, believed that no Gentile and no Samaritan would be present at this banquet. And only the Jews who kept the law in the very precise, narrow fashion that these Essenes prescribed would

eat at this table. Furthermore, no one with any physical imperfection or impediment would be welcome. The text reads:

Then the Messiah of Israel shall come and the chiefs of the clan of Israel shall sit before him, each in the order of his dignity, according to his place in their camp and marches... And no one is going to be allowed in who is smitten in his flesh, or paralyzed in his feet or hands, or lame, or blind, or deaf, or dumb, or smitten in his flesh with a visible blemish. (Messianic Rule, IQSA, 2:11–22, tr. G. Vermes)

Obviously, Jesus' fellow guests had not done their homework on Isaiah 35:5–6. Their attitude reflected their endorsement of the three points listed above.

Implications for Today

Still today it happens that some church members look on themselves as belonging to the Christian “upper class,” are more than happy to be noticed and applauded, and prefer to see the “lower class,” the physically, mentally, and economically challenged worship at some other congregation.

We do well to give thought to the nature of Jesus' servant ministry, and — among other things — to the implications of becoming a member of His messianic community.

Remember that on the night before He was put to death, Jesus shared a meal with His disciples! And He did the same after He returned to life (e.g., John 21:9–14). After the father of the prodigal son welcomed his wayward son who had brought shame upon his father, family, and entire home village; the father organized a “village meal.” Those who shared in the meal were never again to refer to the son's previous activities.

Still today in many parts of Africa, a “community meal” has great significance. When trouble surfaces in a village, the village elders meet (in a special N'daba hut) to deal with and resolve the problem. When they have achieved this, they arrange for a village meal to be held — which all residents are to attend. After the meal is completed, no village resident may ever again refer to the past village problem. Still today in some African countries, if you invite someone to share a meal with you, you commit yourself to defend that person with your life!

In the same way, as we give thought to the implications of eating together in Jesus' day, it helps us see what it means to live together as members of Jesus' community today. We are brothers and sisters of Jesus, and members of His eternal family. We commit ourselves to serving each other as He has served us, and defending each other with our lives.