

WELCOME 31st March 2019 – 4 Lent '19 C

Luke 14:1-24

Good morning! Welcome to worship today! We are so glad you are here doing what we were made to do...offer God all that we are among his people... Please stay with us through to morning tea & beyond...all sorts of good things...

"The dog ate my homework." An excuse so lame & so unbelievable no student dare use it on their teacher.

But humans are the masters of excuses. From *"It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, & I ate it..."* We have looked unceasingly for ways to shift responsibility, avoid accountability, or maintain control in our lives.

But...Today at the table, Jesus dismantles all human excuses for the sake of offering good news...God is hosting a feast – a banquet – a party to end all parties, & he wants you there.

No excuses...no power plays...no manipulation or quid pro quo...(eat your veggies or no dessert)

Just an offer of love & a table that is open to all who are willing to sit down at a place of humility.

We'll explore & experience that together today...as Jesus again speaks a hard word a word that takes aim at every excuse, dodge, diversion and distraction designed to keep Jesus at a safe distance.

And the question left hanging in the air...What's my excuse?

Let's pray...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Our Father, Lord and God, restrain our thoughts, so that we don't wander into the temporary worthless things of the world. Unite our hearts to your love. Remind us of the height & depth & breadth of your love for us & fill us to overflow. By your Spirit guide every thought word & deed today so that your will is accomplished in each of us. All that is for our good and the growth of your kingdom among us grant through Jesus Christ our Lord....Amen

4 LENT '19 C – AT THE TABLE: A PLACE OF HUMILITY

FAITH CHAT:

1. Have you ever made a “lame” excuse for something you didn’t want to do?
2. Why do you think people say “no” to God’s banquet?

He had me dead to rights. I was toast. Busted. Caught red handed. Even before he turned on his lights...And when I saw the 10-gallon hat approaching my window I started doing the math...how many 0s in my fine & how many nights would Leonie make me sleep on the sofa for getting such a huuge ticket. Tx Dept of Public Safety has a reputation for keeping the wide expansive Tx road network well-regulated & I had been speeding...alot.

So I had my license & proof of insurance at the ready. What I didn’t have prepared was an answer to his question: “Mr Guilfoyle, is there any reason for you to be going that fast?” So in between the math & trying to smile & speak politely when I was really mad at myself...the truth slipped out “No sir...just foolishness Beautiful day...open road...just foolishness.” He repeated that word as a question, “Foolishness?” “Yessir...foolishness.” He smiled & walked off to run me through his computer...I kept counting 000s...& nights on the sofa.

He wasn’t gone long & I really wasn’t prepared for what came next...“Mr Guilfoyle do you know you’ve never had a traffic citation?” Yes...I knew that. “Well...I’m not going to be the first...You’ll receive a warning today...” I didn’t hear what came next ...except that he patrolled that stretch of FM 323 & he wouldn’t be so lenient if there was a next time...I assured him there wouldn’t be...

Out of all the times in my life when I either had what I thought was a good excuse or created one out of thin air in the moment...When I had nothing...I didn’t need it.

Over the last 4 weeks we’ve gathered at the table with Jesus as folks have thrown all sorts of accusations at him trying to excuse the fact that they aren’t really interested in anything other than trying to trick/trap/entangle him in some sort of religious fistfight. Why does he eat with shady characters? Who does he think he is forgiving sins? Why does he let dirty people touch him? Why does he break the Sabbath? Why doesn’t he keep our traditions? Who does he think he is, God? But what we saw...was that not one of those was addressed straight to Jesus. Those are all internal or off-to-the-side questions...Again today: *One Sabbath day Jesus went to eat dinner in the home of a leader of the Pharisees, & the people were watching him closely. Watching. Him. Closely. Well...let’s watch with them...* **BIBLES**

There was a man there whose arms & legs were swollen. A guy with serious edema (swelling caused by retaining water) – a very sick man is there...By accident? No...they’re watching Jesus closely It’s a set-up. They drug some sick guy in there as a trap. It’s a sting. Jesus asked the Pharisees & experts in religious law, “Is it permitted in the law to heal people on the Sabbath or not?” Yes it is. There’s provision in the law to save life. You can do good to keep someone from dying even if it looks like work. The correct answer is “Yes.”

When they refused to answer, Jesus touched the sick man, healed him & sent him away. They refused to answer. They know he’s right. They’re watching closely, but they are NOT engaging with him...They’re NOT listening NOT taking what he says on board. So to make the point he touched the man (looks like work) & heals him & sends him back home restored. Then he turned to them & said, “Which of you doesn’t work on the Sabbath? If your son or your cow falls into a pit, don’t you rush to get him out?” Again they could not answer. Again. There is nothing they can say because they’re not really interested in engaging with Jesus...They already know what they know & are sure they don’t need to know any more...Even. When. They’re. Wrong. You know what that’s called? Pride.

Pride is a particularly dangerous sin. Every other sin leads me away from God. Pride tries to put me above God. Pride says to God & everyone else, “I know best. If I want your input...but I don’t.” “A proud man is always looking down on things & people; & of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.” - C.S. Lewis Pride will not let them see that Jesus speaks as God speaks...to the arrogance to the self-importance to the conceit that is killing them because it has deafened their ears & hardened their hearts...

Everything else is an excuse...an evasion a dodge a diversion & a distraction because everything else comes from that pride...all of those accusations about his friends & dinner companions about the people he allowed close to him about forgiving sin about traditions...ultimately here at the table about positions of honour & jockeying for social position & inviting someone hoping to get a return invitation from someone who can do you some good...All of those are excuses to keep me/myself/I at the center of my universe. All of those are excuses designed to keep Jesus from getting too close...So Jesus tells a story about excuses...

“A man prepared a great feast & sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, ‘Come, the banquet is ready.’ But they all began making excuses. One said, ‘I have just bought a field & must inspect it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five pairs of oxen, & I want to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ Every excuse is “the dog ate my homework.” No one buys land or animals on eBay...you always

look before you buy. And there was always provision for wives at parties & if your wedding was scheduled for the same time as this feast you would not have RSVPd “yes” in the first place

So what’s Jesus saying... I think 2 things... 1st - Jesus knows that at the heart of that excuse-making behavior is the assumption that “me” is at the center of the universe. Too busy – other plans – other priorities – too much – too hard – change The Bible calls that “me-at-the-center-of-the-universe-I-know-best” business, “sin.” Jesus won’t have that, says it has to go because in every arrangement of this life God is the host – God is the provider. This life – every moment of it - is God’s party & no matter what we have in this life, it’s from God. This life right here & right now is God’s gift – it’s our living opportunity to celebrate all that God is & does & to rejoice in God’s presence & love & goodness toward us. And in every moment of this life I am fully dependent on God to provide... I live right now in grace because I cannot pay God in return for what I have not earned or deserved.

And because God is host at every table – because this life is God’s party, the human conditions of your life are not enough to get you excluded... the job you hold or lose, the money you make or waste, the car, the home, the family, the mistakes, the outright disasters... all fade in the light of God’s love for you. The very natural human social pecking orders disappear in the embrace of God’s friendship with us in Jesus Christ. They’re washed away in the grace of right now & the promise of eternity spent at God’s greater feast – around God’s table. Jesus declares that God invites all into His presence: the injured & the outcast, the disillusioned & the distraught, the misfits & looked down upon...

That’s precisely how God steps into our world in Jesus to embrace & honour, with his saving love & transforming grace, a whole host of the unworthy & undeserving so that we ALL might enjoy the riches of his generous redeeming loving-kindness. Not one of us can make a claim & say we deserve to be here. Not one of us... no one in fact can say I have a right to my seat in God’s house. None of us deserve to be here. None of us have earned anything from God. We have no fundamental right to anything here.

And Jesus says His Kingdom is in fact a party for the undeserving – for those who know they have no right to insist they belong – for those who are most clearly aware of their own unworthiness – for who have no checklist of reasons why they should be on the guest list. *“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”*

In fact Jesus is even more explicit... frighteningly so... *“Those who exalt themselves will be humbled.”* If you spend your time making noise about what a great guy you are... If you keep your ‘I’m entitled’ checklist near to hand... If you try to use your honours or your sorrows like a passkey to the VIP suite... you’re in for a big surprise & it won’t be one you enjoy.

2nd - Jesus seeks those with nothing to offer. Jesus loves those who will not love in return Jesus dies for a world that will reject him. And our role is to imitate the master To go out into the streets & alleys & country lanes & behind the hedges & to the far corners to round up the poor, the blind, the crippled & the lame... so that the house may be full of the absolutely underserving... so that God’s banquet table might be crowded with those who have nothing to give in return. Our role is to find those who have nothing to commend themselves... nothing that proves their worthiness... just like us & pull up a chair at the banquet table for them...

Jesus offers the kingdom, a perpetual feast of peace, of help, guidance, friendship, rest, victory over self, triumph in all circumstances - a feast of joy, tranquillity, deathlessness, Heaven opened, immeasurable hope—salvation. Yet, people turn their backs on this feast, preferring a visit with their possessions & affections. *Dog ate my homework excuses*

God is hosting a feast – a banquet – a party to end all parties, & he wants you there. No excuses... no power plays... no manipulation or quid pro quo... Just an offer of love & a table that is open to all who are willing to sit down at a place of humility.

God’s table menu is nothing but grace... God loves you just because. Humility is to live knowing that you are simply loved by God & you don’t have to give to him to get something back. Jesus invites you to not only eat with him at the table but to live with him in his life... for it’s there that his gracious presence will totally transform you.

And the question left hanging in the air... What’s my excuse? I got nothing because I don’t need an excuse... Over & over again Jesus made a point of finding those who were always getting left out (children, women, the sick, the outcast, the riffraff & other battlers) & brought them in... close enough to touch... close enough to bless. Jesus made the littlest & the least & the last & the lost the point – the focus of his ministry... because that’s all of us... each one of us. Jesus made sure there was always room on his lap for one more - room in his arms for one more - room in his heart for one more – room at the table for one more - room for all of us when he stretched out his arms to die. You see there’s already a place for you & for me in Jesus’ love at Jesus’ table.

Let’s pray with that in mind...

Heavenly Father, your table is always open to receive and your heart always open in love. Strip away every excuse and distraction so that every day you have your way in me. By your Spirit draw me closer so that Jesus is made real in my life and his love made real through it. Now and forever, we pray in Jesus’ Name. Amen.