

Proper 17C
Luke 14:1, 7-14
August 31, 2025

“Rolling Out the Red Carpet”
The Rev. Dr. Brandon Perrine

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 and sisters 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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A family was hosting a dinner party and when all the guests arrived, Mother asked the little girl to say grace. She objected saying, “But Mommy, I don't know what to say?” Mother replied coolly, “You've heard

me pray. Just say what you've heard me say.” So the little girl bowed her head and folded her hands and began, “Jesus, what was I thinking inviting all these people over to my house?”¹

We’ve all had awkward moments at a dinner party—or sat with an awkward dinner guest. Maybe they drank too much, or wouldn’t stop talking, or revealed inconvenient food restrictions when the meal was already on the table. Whatever your experience, most of us know the discomfort of the guest who throws the dinner off-balance. In today’s reading from Luke, that guest was Jesus.

Jesus had been invited to Sabbath Dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee. Given the tension between him and the Pharisees in Luke’s gospel, we might wonder why he was invited. Was it curiosity? Suspicion? Social climbing? Whatever the reason for his inclusion, Jesus accepted. Jesus always accepted the invitation. He dined with “sinners,” prostitutes, and tax collectors—the social outcasts of his day. Why not dine in the home of this prominent Pharisee?

Contrary to the way Jesus is usually portrayed in art and film as a calm and even-tempered holy man, I think Jesus was likely a fun guy—maybe even the life of the party. People were attracted to him not because he had a halo, but because they could relate to him! He liked good food, good wine, and good conversation and was a social chameleon who could fit in with almost any crowd. And he did party tricks. It’s not hard to imagine why he received so many dinner invitations. But Jesus was also the kind of guest who spoke uncomfortable truths. At this dinner, Jesus wasn’t simply polite company—he was the guest who unsettled the room.

As the butler announced dinner, Jesus noticed the other guests scrambling for the best seat next to the host. “Sit down at the lowest place,” he told them, “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.”

¹ “Dinner Party Jokes,” Upjokes.com: <https://upjoke.com/dinner-party-jokes>.

After taking his fellow guests to task, Jesus turned his attention to his host. “When you give a luncheon or a dinner,” he said, “don’t roll out the red carpet for this sort, friends, siblings, relatives, or wealthy neighbors that can one day repay the favor. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then you’ll receive a blessing because *they* can’t pay you back.”

What Jesus suggested was more than generosity. It challenged the very honor system of the ancient world. Respectable people didn’t associate with “those kinds” of people. Jesus’ teaching was nothing short of scandalous. So despite illustrating for us what *not* to do when invited to a dinner party, what can we glean from this text for today?

For us as a church, this text serves as an excellent reminder of why we do things like National Night Out, Fall Festival, and Trunk-or-Treat. We invite our neighbors and members of the broader community to come here and enjoy food, fun, and fellowship for no other reason than we want to be a good neighbor and be a real part of our community. This text reminds us that rolling out the red carpet for guests on Sunday, looks like prioritizing their experience over our own comfort or preferences.

For us as individuals, Jesus’ words invite us to stop living tit for tat, this for that, quid pro quo lives. To stop expecting social benefits from dinner invitations, upward mobility from rubbing elbows with the right people, or repayment in kind for every kindness. Instead, we’re called to live from a sense of abundance and blessing in order to be a blessing to others. That, Jesus says, is real freedom.

May we too experience the freedom of not counting the costs and rewards of our actions and live from a sense of abundance and blessing in order to *be* a blessing to others. Let’s roll out the red carpet and glimpse the great heavenly banquet already in our midst! Amen.