Hi,

Happy Friday. Today’s updates:

* My Sunday class will be first in a new series, *Living Hope*. We’ll be talking about the nature of the Christian hope and how we can live that hope every day, how such hope can change how we see ourselves and how we understand the world around us. It will be on [my new Facebook page: “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC”](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour) at 11am CDT Sunday.
* My 3pm Monday class on Matthew and my noon Tuesday class on Genesis will meet next week, both on [my new Facebook page](https://www.facebook.com/Scott-Engle-St-Andrew-UMC-110365790736617/?modal=admin_todo_tour).
* The links to my on-line classes, the video recordings of the classes, the class audio podcasts, and the archive of these daily emails can all be found at [www.scottengle.org](http://scottengle.org/scotts-weekly-classes/). All the postings are up-to-date.
* The Weekly Bible Study is attached.

By now, we’ve all probably heard about the “covid 15” and some of us are living it. So in keeping with a food theme, today’s parable is about a grand banquet. Remember those?

***Luke 14:15-24 (NRSV)***

**One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” Then Jesus said to him, “Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’ But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’ Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’ So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’ Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’ ”**

As with most of Jesus’ parables, understanding the literary context is essential to grasping Jesus’ meaning.

In the lead-up today’s parable, Jesus is invited to the home of a leading Pharisee for a Sabbath meal with other guests. As he is entering the house, Jesus sees an ill man and asks the gathered lawyers and Pharisees if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They stand there in stupefied silence as Jesus leads the man away, heals him, and then returns to the dinner. Once inside, Jesus sees how much care everyone is taking in finding their seats, for such meals had more to do with social jockeying than nutrition. He then urges them to take the lowest place at such an occasion, for “all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (14:11). Jesus then turns to his host and tells him that he shouldn’t be giving such dinners for the benefit of the rich and powerful for they can repay him. Rather, the Pharisee should invite the poor and crippled, for they could never repay him, and instead, he would be repaid on the Day of the Lord. You have to wonder if by now the Pharisee is regretting his decision to invite Jesus!

Hearing the exchange between Jesus and the Pharisee, one of the dinner guests says to Jesus, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of heaven!” In reply, Jesus tells today’s parable. It is a simple story:

*A host plans to throw a big dinner and invites many guests. But at the last minute, one guest after another offers some flimsy excuse for bailing out of the party. Understandably angered by the many rude snubs, the host sends out his household to round up a whole new batch of guests, starting with all the “wrong” sorts of people and then looking high and low to make sure that the dinner party is filled so that none of the banquet goes to waste. Finally, the host issues one final instruction – none of the no-shows are to be let into the dinner.*

Now, when it comes to things that I should be doing but don’t do (a long list at times!), I’m really good at making excuses. And each one seems perfectly understandable and quite reasonable. Who, I say to myself, could fail to see that I was way too busy to take the time to listen to someone who needed to talk or reach out a helping hand? But deep down, I know that my excuses are just as lame as those offered by the rude oh-so-busy guests in the parable.

Notice that the guests failed to tell the host in advance that they couldn’t come. No, they waited until the doors were about to be thrown open to inform the host that they couldn’t make it. One simply must go out and look at a piece of land, like it is going to go somewhere. A second actually says that he must go try out some new oxen. That would be like me telling someone that I couldn’t come to their party because I had a new lawnmower I wanted to take for a spin. The third says he is newly married. I guess that marriage just snuck up on him. He couldn’t see that coming? It’s not the specifics of each excuse that matters in this parable, merely that they are all lame . . . lame . . . lame. Indeed, any excuse would be lame.

*God’s guests*

As lame as the excuses are, they are not the main point of the parable, the surprising twist to the story. When the host needs replacement guests, where does he go? To the poor and the crippled and the blind – all those who the “right” sort of people would have assumed would never been invited to God’s banquet. Why? Because in the ancient world, and no less among the Jews, being poor or lame or blind was a sign that the person had done something awful to offend God and was being punished. To the typical Jew, such people were believed to have been cursed not blessed.

And yet they are the very people that the host (God) specifically seats at the table. And if that is not enough, the host goes out looking around the countryside for people to bring to the dinner, even if they have to be persuaded that the offer is real. Some commentators see here a reference to the seating of Gentiles at the great banquet.

For our purposes it is enough to see that this is yet another story of the Great Reversal, wherein the mighty are brought low and the oppressed lifted up. It is an oft-repeated theme of Jesus as he strives to help his disciples understand the true nature of God’s reign: a world turned upside down. In that way, this parable, like so many, is a vivid imagining of the Sermon on the Mount and a world where the meek inherit the earth.

*A bit more: Dinner with Jesus*

This parable is set during a dinner at which Jesus is a guest. He has been invited to the home of a leading Pharisee to share a Sabbath meal.

In the Gospels, a lot happens around the dinner table. Jesus teaches. He performs miracles. He sparks controversy in merely choosing his dinner companions. What’s going on?

Throughout the New Testament, meals play a pivotal role. This isn’t too surprising given the importance of meals in the Greco-Roman (and Jewish) world of the first century. Meals were a means of creating and solidifying social bonds in a culture driven by social status. Typically, 10-15 diners would gather in a square or rectangular room. The diners would recline on benches that lined the walls so that each diner faced inward toward the others. (We can forget our mental pictures of tables and chairs!) Diners would be arranged by social rank and good hosts were adept at making such distinctions.

The controversies that swirled around Jesus’ meals were centered on who would eat with whom? By eating with assorted “sinners,” such as tax collectors and prostitutes, Jesus deeply offended the sensibilities of the “right-minded” Pharisees. They understood the symbolic significance of Jesus’ dinner partners.

By coupling his choice of dinner companions with his kingdom announcement, Jesus was enacting his proclamation that all would be welcome at God’s great banquet.

‘til Monday, grace and peace,

Scott