

**September 1, 2019 Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost**  
**Pastor Carolyn Albert Donovan**  
**Peace Lutheran Church – Austin, Texas**

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 14:1, 7-14**

The holy gospel according to Saint Luke, the fourteenth chapter.

**Glory to you, O Lord.**

<sup>1</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup>“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; <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

<sup>12</sup>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 or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup>And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

The gospel of the Lord.

**Praise to you, O Christ.**

Today the prophet Jeremiah reminds us to always ask where the Lord is in our midst...Jesus tells us a parable about good party manners...And the writer of Hebrews reminds us of our call to extend our attention beyond our own

comfort...to care for the stranger...and not to forget the imprisoned and tortured.

Jesus wants us to realize that we can stop being so concerned about claiming our place at the banquet table...as if life were a game of musical chairs...and if we don't get a spot first there won't be room.

God's banquet just doesn't work the same way ours do...and we have so...so...so much to learn...and unlearn.

We play this sick game of musical chairs all over the place. Sometimes we win...and sometimes we lose...but it's a strange game to play when there's actually no shortage of places to sit...and no one needs to lose at all.

Some of you already know that I was able to join 80 other religious leaders in the Rio Grande Valley this past week...to listen and learn...to see and hear for myself what is happening there in these days.

I'm not sure I have the words yet...or if I ever will...

I'm not sure I can illuminate even a sliver of the complex policy and legal issues that surround the question of who gets an invitation to the banquet called the United States and who doesn't. But I can tell you this. There is a mother with her 14-month-old daughter...sleeping in a tent on a sidewalk beside the bridge over the Rio Grande River...trying to get to her husband in Houston...who hasn't yet held his baby girl. There is no running water or plumbing where she has to wait. Standing there in the afternoon sun for just an hour drenched me in sweat. Her daughter has no clothes, and has blisters on her feet. Like many others, she walked from Honduras...where the gangs threaten the lives of the people who can't pay bribes. She has a court date just to ask if she might be granted asylum. On October 3<sup>rd</sup>. And until then, she has nowhere to go...and the cartels that run in Montomoros are there...watching...sometimes kidnapping the people in the tent city so they can ask for ransom. Hope is a thin thread to hold in those punishing conditions...but she is trying. Some lose

hope. A young man died by suicide not too long ago in the river...the same river where they get water to bathe.

Why do we want to play musical chairs when we could all have a place instead?

But you know what...God's banquet breaks in at these edges... There are women... every day... who go across... who bring food and water. They call themselves the Angry Tias and Abuelas. They are the Angry Aunts and Grandmas...who won't consent to living in a world where people aren't loved and fed. They know that there are angels in those tents...that there are messengers from God bathing in that river. And they are bringing every bit of the feast of God they can to those places. They know there is enough...and they know the list at that checkpoint isn't the guest list Jesus has in mind.

I heard another story this week that brought Jesus' message to mind... It was another of those moments when the invitation lists we make don't seem to match with the party Jesus is throwing. Many of you may know that the Boy Scout organization has refocused its mission and is now called Scouting BSA. They don't only admit boys anymore...because it seems they realized that tying knots and lighting fires and learning to live by the scout oath didn't have a single gender-specific thing about it. So, I heard a story about a troop of young women here in Texas...some of the first young women in Scouting BSA...Recently they were at a camp with other troops. And for some reason, somebody decided they shouldn't really be on the invitation list...and they were harassed by some of the young male scouts while they were at the shower house. They were threatened. The ones guilty of the harassment never confessed...and instead took advantage of the cover of darkness to escape accountability. Authorities had to step in to demand that all the scouts present do better to live up to their oath...Some young men had to learn that week one of the ways in which the world often feels very dangerous to young women...They learned that threatening that safety is not a joke or a game...and is not acceptable...ever. I imagine those girls felt like their invitation into that organization had been pulled out from under them in that moment. Why would anyone feel the need to make someone else feel unwelcome...as if this world belongs to them more if it belongs to others less?

But something else happened at that camp that week. And God's banquet broke in at these new edges, too. The brother troop of those young women was so appalled at what had happened...wanted so much to undo the harm...to make their sister troop members feel safe...that they offered to stand outside the shower houses when the girls were there...a sort of guard...to bear witness and create a hedge of protection for their sisters. They knew that the party is better when everyone is given a place.

There is a definition of 'ethics' that I enjoy from a sassy little theological dictionary called "Crazy Talk." Ethics, the book says is "what we do with the leftovers after the banquet of salvation has been served."

But I've been inspired by this parable and by the glimpses of the banquet of the kin-dom of God that I've been privileged to see this week...so, I'm going to be old enough to suggest an amendment that definition. I would say that 'ethics' is what we do with the extra chairs at the banquet of salvation once we realize that we really do have an invitation, and there is still plenty to share.

We don't have to rush for our seat. The music isn't going to stop. Look around. There are so many people here that we have never even met yet...so many beloved children of God with different stories and gifts and needs and joys and sorrows than we have. And we get to share them all. And when we do, we will find that there are angels in our midst – messengers from God – in a tent city beside the river...bringing tacos and water across a bridge day after day...joining the ranks of generations of citizens with fresh perspectives...standing to fend off darkness and fear by the shower house...

You don't have to worry about your place at the table. Enjoy the party. Share the invitation.

Thanks be to God. Amen.