Text: Luke 14:1-14

**Introduction**

Moving brings a lot of things into active contemplation that if you have lived somewhere for a long time can just be passive, or even more than passive, automatic, unconsidered.

Where you decide to live not only can have a big impact on your finances, but social ties as well. You can buy a house that is probably beyond your means, hoping to get into a better school district. You sign you kids up for expensive sports, or send them to private schools, to attempt to control the peer groups. Because once kids hit about 12, Dad becomes an absolute idiot, until as Twain said somewhere around 24, Dad might not be such an doofus after all. So controlling the peer group is important. Even more in a society at large that has gone off the rails. Where highly credentialed teachers and doctors could put your child on a path to self-mutilation.

When you move, you start actively making those choices again. Of course that might be the reflection of someone who is just a bit socially naïve. Maybe there are people who are making those choices actively all the time.

**Trouble in the Text**

In some ways that is the assumption of at least Luke if not Jesus, in our gospel text today. Jesus has been invited over to Sunday (well, Saturday) dinner at the home of the local congregational president. And this guy is somewhat connected. He’s invited a group of like-minded and like-situated people from around the area. And “they were watching Jesus carefully.” Is Jesus club-able? Is he one of us? Just what type of Rabbi is this miracle worker?

And somehow a man with dropsy just happens to have been invited to this dinner party. The trouble presented is that all the high-status people, the hosts, think that healing someone on the Sabbath is breaking the law of God. One does not work on the Sabbath. Now different Rabbis might have different regulations about what was work and what wasn’t, but at this time they were all of the opinion that Jesus’ miracles were on the wrong side of that line. Of course the people, the crowds the Jesus was healing, were on the other side. So this was the test. Jesus, we understand who you are out in public, but behind closed doors, with all the right people, whose side are you really on?

The scene is almost a word for word replay of Luke 13:14-17, but that took place in public. This is “in the room where is happened.” And Jesus gives exactly the same reply. “If you had a son or even an ox that was in distress, and you could help him, wouldn’t you do so?” He’s the same man, public and private.

**Gospel in the Text**

The answer is of course “yes.” Nobody is going to sacrifice a son over such a legalistic point. You might find a zealot who would lose an animal or a tool, but even then, even those who have plenty of money, such that what they are really chasing in status, would still save their own.

But what I want you to hear in this is the claim that Jesus is making. These people, the crowds, the bent over woman with a disabling spirit, the man with dropsy – these are the Children of God. These are the Children of the Heavenly Father. And that Father has sent his son explicitly to save them. They’ve fallen in a well on the Sabbath. That saving is dramatically acted out in the healings that Jesus is doing. The key to understanding these healings is the story of the man lowered through the ceiling. Jesus says to the paralyzed man lowered before him by his friends: “Your sins are forgiven.” Probably not exactly what his friends who brought him or the man himself was looking for. But it sets up the argument Jesus makes. “What’s easier, to say your sins are forgiven, or to say get up and walk?” That you might know that the Son of Man has authority to forgive sins, I tell you “rise, pick up your mat, and walk.”

Jesus has come to pull fallen humanity out of the well it fell into. That endless well of sin and conflict with God.

Now if we are real good at managing our peer groups. If we are good at making connections and building social ties. We might be tempted to think we are fine. We might even be tempted to think that we are peers of Jesus by all that we have done. We might shove ourselves forward in the places of honor. But Jesus is consistent about a warning. The prostitutes and the tax collectors will enter the kingdom before you. Who is deeper in the well, this man with dropsy who seems to be water laden? Or those gathered who are watching closely? The man with dropsy is a symbol for them, for us. We are all at the bottom of that well of sin.

And Jesus has come to pull us out.

**Trouble in the World**

And then it is Jesus’ turn to do some observing. “when he noticed how they chose the places of honor.” We have our various ways of ascribing honor. They are always some combination of work, money and family connections. Hard work can get you money which can buy connections. Connections can get you the work to keep you in the money. Money, however you got it, or even if you are just faking it, like Anna Delvey of the recent Netflix series Inventing Anna, money can get you connections and cause others to work for you. Luther would call this all civil righteousness. Some of it is the natural law of God, but some of it is our laws admixed.

And Civil righteousness isn’t all bad. That is a mistake that Christians in our day often make. We oppose law and gospel, put them in conflict, think that only the gospel is good, or do not rightly divide them. No, the law was given for our benefit. The magistrate is God’s instrument. Our social ties are often for the good. The law of God has those three uses and the very first is the curb or the civil use. It keeps the worst of our sinful nature from collapsing everything into chaos. The third use is that rule, it is a lamp for the Christian’s feet and a light for their path. When Jesus is observing how they choose the places of honor, he is making an argument about knowing what realm we are in.

**Gospel in the World**

The parable is about being invited to the wedding feast. When you come to this table. When you are invited to the wedding feast of the lamb in his kingdom. When the bridegroom walks amongst you…don’t force yourself to the places of honor. Don’t put forward a claim that you belong here. None of us belongs here.

All of our striving in that civil realm should remind us of this. This is the second use of the law. The mirror. We strive and yet there is always more to do. There is always someone we failed. There is always something we can’t set right. Unless we are like the man in another parable who said “I’ve got enough, let me build bigger barns, and then eat, drink and be merry” who God calls a fool – we should be able to look in the mirror of our civil righteousness, and even if other can’t see it, we can see the picture of Dorian Gray staring back at us.

If we confuse where we are, if we think our civil righteousness earns us a high place in the wedding feast, we will be humiliated. But blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom. When you take the lowest place, the bridegroom exalts you.

I am a poor miserable sinner. But the Father has pulled me out of that well, given me the wedding clothes and invited me to the banquet.

**Application**

At the end of the parable, which Jesus addressed to all of them, Jesus gives a final word to the man who had invited him. That man who was on the top of the civil righteousness pyramid.

We are confronted in this life with a choice. We can use our civil righteousness to accrue more of it. That’s what we typically do. Work, to money, to connections to more work or some combination of those things. Managing the peer groups. And in this world we can’t escape some of that, unless you want to be Saint Francis.

But if our entire lives are dedicated to that, you can’t take it with you. As the teacher of Ecclesiastes laments: a lifetime of work gets left to some fool.

Jesus tells the man next time you have a party, invite some different people. Invite those who can’t pay you back. Who can’t help your status. “You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” When you extend grace, yes, you lose in this rough world. Grace…Love…is always costly. But you will have treasure is heaven. And God is nobody’s debtor. He always pays.

We have all been the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and the Father has invited us through Jesus to the feast. We should likewise remember to live by that grace…by His love…in our lives. Amen.