

Luke 14:1-24 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. ² Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" ⁴ But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. ⁵ Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" ⁶ And they could not reply to this. 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 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." ¹⁵ One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" ¹⁶ Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. ¹⁷ At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.' ¹⁸ 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.' ¹⁹ Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' ²⁰ Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.' ²¹ 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.' ²² And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' ²³ 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. ²⁴ For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

"Party Jesus' Way"

This past Tuesday on her twenty-seventh birthday Perdita Felicien of Pickering, Ontario won the silver medal in the women's 100 meter hurdles at the World Track and Field Championships in Osaka, Japan. When later interviewed she commented, "I knew in my heart of hearts I had won a medal because I had to on my birthday. I kept saying, 'God please. I have been working so hard and

if anyone needs to be rewarded, it is probably me.’ I am so happy. This medal is as good as gold to me.” She went on further to say, “I haven’t had a bad year. I have been truly blessed. If someone had predicted in June the top three, the top five, I don’t think they would have said Perdita. It’s not about what other people think. It’s about what you have in you.”

Now please don’t take what I’m going to say as a judgment on Ms. Felicien’s character. She has all the right stuff...for an athlete, particularly hurdling. If I were a motivational speaker I would hold her up as a prime example of someone who has found what she’s gifted to do and gone after it 100 percent. She’s a winner. But...umm...this is hurdling we are talking about. I don’t see in the grand scheme of things how this world is any better because athletes devote their lives to the pursuit of standing on a podium to have a medal placed around their necks. The same is true when we devote our whole lives to something we’re good at for the sake or reaping the rewards. This is simply idolatry of the self. It gets even worse when we say God has blessed us with wealth and success because we worked hard and deserved it. This false gospel of find what you’re gifted at, do your best, and if you’ve got the right stuff on the inside you will be rewarded is the predominant value we were all taught growing up and is still the predominant value the young people in our culture have impressed upon them. But it is little more than idolatry of self and utterly at odds with the core value of humility in the Kingdom of God.

Let me use this passage from Luke to make the case. Jesus is invited to a Sabbath meal at the home of a very important Pharisee. The Pharisees believed that the Messiah would soon be coming and in order not to suffer judgment one had to be the best Jew one could possibly be. Ethnically speaking, they believed they had all the right stuff on the inside. They were children of Abraham, God’s chosen. They had the Law of Moses straight from the mouth of God. All they had to do was be the best at observing it. Indeed, they found loopholes that made being obedient quite profitable. Unfortunately, they began to compete with one another and look down their noses at those who were not Pharisees. They had this arrogance, “Look at me God. I spent 1,000 shekels on this fine robe for standing in the temple praying.”

Well, Jesus comes to the man’s house and all eyes are upon him, watching him closely. The first thing he does is heal a man with dropsy. Dropsy is edema, a disease where the body has an excessive build up of fluid and appears extremely swollen. One could shake the belly of someone with dropsy and hear the water slosh. We should take note that Jesus’ healing of the swollen man on the Sabbath serves to address the swollen pride of the Pharisees. If they really understood Sabbath then their swollen pride would be healed. Instead they used the Sabbath as an opportunity to dress nice and look important.

Next, Jesus, the one heavily scrutinized just happens to notice the guests were choosing the places of honor at the table. So he teaches from the Book of Proverbs, “Do not put yourself forward in the king’s presence or stand in the place of the great; for it is better to be told, ‘Come up here,’ than to be put lower in the presence of a noble” (25:6-7). Obviously, if they were serious about

obeying the Law they would know that it is to be obeyed in humility rather than this show of working hard to put oneself in the winners circle before others. The king is the most honored person and people serve the king whole-heartedly because of who the king is not for the reward they think they have earned. In actuality, Jesus the scrutinized was the most honorable person at that dinner and should have been invited by the host to sit in the most honored place. Instead, it was the guests who started jockeying for seats of honor. That’s kind of ludicrous. Then Jesus instructs the host that he should rather invite the blind, poor, and lame; those who could never repay him his kindness for the Lord will repay those who are kind to the poor (Pr. 19:17). Besides they would make better guests than these buffoons who think themselves deserving of honor (Pr. 14:20).

Next, a man stands up and having picked up on the clue that Jesus was really talking about the Kingdom of God, he says, “Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God!” That was probably a sort of catch phrase for the Pharisees who strove so hard to earn a place at the feast table in the kingdom of God. They would have been all sitting around there saying, “That’s me. That’s me. I’m going be sitting at the table in glory land.” Then Jesus tells a parable of a feast where those who had been invited kept making excuses not to come so the host sent his servants out onto the highways and byways to find guests and he fills his feast tables with the underbelly of society; the losers, not the winners; the people who didn’t have the right stuff on the inside; the people who weren’t gifted at anything and really didn’t try hard enough to succeed.

The way one gets into the kingdom is by invitation. We are not put in this creation to figure out what we are good at, give it our all and if we’ve got the right stuff we’ll succeed. We are here to say yes to the invitation to come to the feast where Jesus Christ is Lord. To party Jesus’ way is to live under his Lordship, to be his slave. Just in the past two chapters that we have read in Luke Jesus has given us some instruction in this area. He says to beware of hypocrisy. Beware of greed in all its forms. Give all your possessions to the poor and don’t worry about what you will wear and eat and drink. The Father in heaven will take care of you. Lastly, to always be watching for that opportunity to serve and always expecting Christ to return at any moment. I don’t know about you, but to me these teachings of Jesus about the lifestyle of his disciples stand completely opposed to our winner’s circle way of life. Moreover, If Jesus we to take notice of things hear at our party we would soon discover that we are those who have been invited to the feast but are making excuses not to go so that we can justify our lifestyle. Saying I believe and coming to church on Sunday and working hard to be good and successful people isn’t the kingdom party. To get into the party we have to come to grips that we all are blind with respect to knowing God, lame and crippled when it comes to obeying, poor when it comes to giving of ourselves. Not a one of us deserves a place of honor at the table. Oddly, these are the kind of people Jesus has decided he wants at his party not a bunch of showy success stories. He wants to party with people who actually live according to the faith in the Father that he has freely given us and a lifestyle that’s modeled after him. He’s chosen us to be his disciples not for us to show how successful we can be at whatever we do. He’s chosen us because he

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wants to have a feast. Be wary of the excuses you make. Be wary of the trappings of our lifestyle that make us bow and bend in service to the idol of self. How goes it with each of you and the Lord. Truly, how high is his invitation to the Kingdom feast on your list? What needs to change? Amen.