

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections based on this week's lectionary readings

September 1, 2019
Proper 17C / Ordinary 22C / Pentecost +12

The readings this week:

- Jeremiah 2:4-13
- Psalm 81:1, 10-16
- Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
- Luke 14:1, 7-14



[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Invited and Inviting

When was the last time you threw a party and invited anybody and everybody who wanted to come? Most of the time party planning involves a guest list, or at the very least, a sign-up sheet if there's a covered dish or potluck involved. Much thought is given and effort put into seating arrangements, menus, entertainment, and other important details. We want our friends and family to have a good time; we want our carefully planned event to be successful.



My spouse's congregation hosts a Fiesta every year and invites the entire community. They plan all year long for this one Saturday in August, and it

is quite an undertaking—food, games, displays, entertainment—all free and all for anybody who wants to show up. This year some 300 people came to eat hamburgers, tamales, tinga, nachos, and sno-cones. Cake walks, a bounce house and miniature train, games and prizes galore, and three musical groups ensured something to interest everyone. It was a lovely event that was once again well-received.

It was also an event that required a lot of planning, investment of time, energy, and money, and an element of risk. When you invite everyone you can't exactly guarantee the results. This rural Pennsylvania Lutheran congregation has a vision to serve their neighbors, and they are willing to take some risks to do so. The Fiesta, now in its fifth year, hasn't resulted in a huge influx of new members, and the coffers of the congregation are not fuller because of this event. But what it has done is created a lot of goodwill. It signals welcome and a willingness to do something without expectation of specific returns on the investment.

Maybe that's part of what Jesus is getting at this week. When we open our doors and throw a party, when we reach out in ministry and mission, we have to be willing to

take some risks. Results aren't the point of our hospitality. Success by the world's standards isn't the proper measure. This whole discipleship thing isn't about honor, glory, reward, or prestige. And it's not a competition.

Serving God and neighbor is more like a community potluck than a gourmet meal in the finest restaurant. It's less about perfection and more about improvisation. It's less about form and more about function. It's less about looks and much, much more about love. It's has something potluckto do with rubbing elbows with strangers and kin alike; after all, both can present challenges. Instead of a guest list carefully crafted to reflect our wishes and wiles, Jesus crafts a "grace list" that is an open invitation to the party. The point is this: At Jesus' banquet table there is room for everyone. Great Aunt Mabel's lime Jello salad can exist peacefully with vegan Valerie's fresh green bean vinaigrette. Homemade mac and cheese can sit side-by-side with a bag of store-bought potato chips. Hamburgers and tamales and sno-cones co-exist and complement one another in delightful ways. When everyone brings his or her best offering, when we all show up, the banquet table groans with the goodness of God.

Showing up, sitting down, and sharing our abundant blessings is the kind of banquet Jesus is talking about. Every place is a place of honor in God's economy. Humbling oneself in our 21st century culture might mean trying ministry in new ways or allowing new folks to bring their best "dishes" to the congregational table. Take some risks, explore new tastes and talents, and most of all celebrate that our God has a heart for every last rag-tag, bumped, bruised, dented, broken, and tired one of us. We're all included on the "grace list," and that, dear friends, is good news indeed!

~ Sharron R Blezard,
[Stewardship of Life](#)



Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Jeremiah 2:4-13](#)

What is the meaning of verse 6, and how does God answer? What did Israel do when the Lord brought them into the land? For what did God's people change their glory? What two evils did God's people commit? Once in the Promised Land, what did the people and eventually the priesthood do? What is the results of their having departed from seeking God? What's a "cistern"? What is the image/message being conveyed? Verse 14 is a rhetorical question, what is the point of the question?

[Walk with the Word](#), [Doing Good](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 81:1, 10-16](#)

The psalmist invited God's people to "sing for joy." What reasons do believers have to sing for joy? What does the fact that God schedules times of joy (there are many more feast days than fast days) tell you about God and the kind of life he wants you to live? What does God promise if Israel will listen to him? [Bible Gateway](#), [This Day With God](#)



Jesus takes it further: go out of your way, into the streets and alleyways to find the poor, the blind, the lame, the unwanted, the unclean, and bring them to the feast you've prepared just for them, and for no other reward for you than the privilege of offering hospitality and sharing God's good gifts....

"Since we ourselves are human beings, we must set before others the meal of kindness no matter why they need it – whether because they are widows, orphans, or exiles; or because they are brutalized by masters, crushed by rulers, dehumanized by tax-collectors, bloodied by robbers, or victimized by the insatiable greed of thieves, be it through confiscation of property or ship-wreck. All such people are equally deserving of mercy, and they look to us for their needs just as we look to God for ours."

~ Gregory of Nazianzus, via Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16](#)

What things do you think of when you sing or read the words "sacrifice of praise" and why? Why does the kind of empathy encouraged by this passage allow us to better care for those in difficulty? In what ways are the words on marriage in this passage an extension of the love and care for each other urged in this passage? What does the writer say about our relationship to money and material things and in what ways might that relate to our times? What does it mean for us to go "outside the camp" in terms of the kinds of places where we spend our time? Given your understanding of faith, and based on your own relationship with God, by what do you think God is "pleased," and why? Why do you think people spend so much time focusing on their own faith relationship with God instead of simply doing as Jesus said and loving God's people? What can we do in order to better serve God in our community? [Faith Element](#)

___ 4th Reading: [Luke 14:1, 7-14](#)

What does hospitality mean to you? To your church? What makes hospitality "strategic"? Why did the guests at this dinner party try to get to the best seats before the others? What does that reveal about them? In what ways do we try to garner public approval by our actions? How does verse 11 apply to our lives and actions? What was the host's probable motive for inviting Jesus to dinner? What dinner invitation strategy does Jesus recommend? Why? How can you be a blessing in your everyday life? Who is missing from the table of your church? From whom do we "avert our eyes"? How do you imagine the Great Feast will look and feel? [Weekly Seeds](#), [Jesus Walk](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

Jesus, though you were of one age,
you spoke to the ages.
Jesus, though you lived long ago,
you spoke words that continue to move, motivate,
mature, and transfigured us.
Jesus, though you were of Palestinian color and
culture,
you spoke to all cultures and colors.
We thank you for your timeliness and timelessness.
May the church that bears your name
continue to reach out with love and compassion
toward other members of the human family,
no matter what age, culture, color, or context.

~ Leonard Sweet, [Preach the Story](#)