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### Pentecost 14, Proper 17

*But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.*

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#### • *Lectionary Readings (Year C)*

##### *Revised Common Lectionary*

First Reading	Jeremiah 2:4-13 or Sirach 10:12-18
Second Reading	Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16
Gospel	<b>Luke 14:1, 7-14</b>
Psalm	81:1, 10-16 or 112

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

1 On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat  
2 a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

3 *Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. And Jesus asked the*  
4 *lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" But*  
5 *they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. Then he*  
6 *said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you*  
7 *not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" And they could not reply to this.*

8 When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.  
9 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place  
10 of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host;  
11 and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, 'Give this person your  
12 place,' and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are  
13 invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say  
14 to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will be honored in the presence of all who  
15 sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who  
16 humble themselves will be exalted."

17 He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner,  
18 do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case  
19 they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet,  
20 invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because  
21 they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

## *Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs*

1. As the story begins, what is Jesus doing?

Why might the *leader of the Pharisees* have invited Jesus to this Sabbath meal? Who may be the *they* who are *watching him closely*? Why do you imagine they are watching Jesus so carefully? What might they be saying behind their hands?

2. Meantime, whom is Jesus watching? Why may he be watching them? What are the guests doing?

*"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at a place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host that 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. 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."*

Imagine you are one of the guests trying to sort out your place at the meal. To whom might you think Jesus' instruction applies?

What might you actually hear of his words? What might you not hear?

What in you could cause selective hearing?

How might you react outwardly if you thought Jesus was talking about you? How might you respond inwardly to his admonition?

## At the Workbench: Pentecost 14, Proper 17

What within you might make you accept his parable and modify your behavior? What within you might encourage you to set it aside?

3. Now imagine you are the one who had invited Jesus, the leader of the Pharisees, being told: *“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 might invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

What might be your first, inner reaction? Suppose for a moment that you, the leader of the Pharisees, picture yourself giving a banquet for the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. You say to yourself, “If I did that, the banquet would be:

“ \_\_\_\_\_ ”

As a Pharisee, you remember the foundational Jewish laws about caring for the poor and the alien. How might your recollection affect your reaction to Jesus’ comment as you welcome your guests?

At this moment you must make some response to Jesus. What might that be? Remember, you and your other guests are watching him closely.

What information are you gathering about Jesus from this conversation? How might his statements at your party affect any evidence you might later present about him?

4. Where can you identify a “leader of the Pharisees” in the world around you? What characterizes a “leader of the Pharisees”? Where do they derive their authority? How do they behave? What expectations do they uphold, or do other people hold of them?

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## Exploring the Pattern: Themes and Motifs

Luke 14:1, 7-14 • August 29, 2010

Where might you see this leader in public life or in popular culture? When could you meet him or her in your health club, your office, your church, your home? Name some such leaders that you know or know of:

Whom might one of these leaders invite to a "Sabbath meal" in his or her home?

Whom would he or she not invite?

What do you suppose are the criteria your Pharisee would apply in inviting someone to their home?

Where and when, on TV, in the newspaper, at school or office, at church or home, have you seen people scrambling to gain or to hang onto some place of honor?

What seems to motivate them to strive so? What may victory offer them of good or ill? What may they have to give up in order to win?

What could losing out in the scramble to be in a place of honor cost them or offer them?

5. Where inside you may there be one who wants to win or keep a large or small place of honor? At what different times in your life story may you have competed for this spot? You might think of school, teams you've played on, board elections, the corporate ladder, your place in a social or family hierarchy.

## At the Workbench: Pentecost 14, Proper 17

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What might one such struggle you've entered have cost you? What was the reward?

What could be wonderful for you about being the guest in the place of honor? What might you lose by being that one? What could you risk by claiming or trying to keep that place?

Take a little time and some colors or Play-Dough to make a representation of that part of you who wants (or maybe expects) to be, not only invited, but the guest of honor.

What do you know about being the "uninvited, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind"? Where inside you may live the one who, far from being the guest of honor, does not make the invitation list at all?

Take some time to make a representation of the part of you that knows what it is to be that outsider.

Sitting for a while with these two parts of yourself, the one who would be the head of the table and the one who would likely not even be invited, let them engage in conversation with each other.

How might each perceive the other? How would each describe the other?

What does each appreciate about the other? What does each despise? What might each have to offer the other?

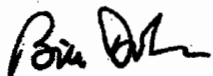
What could change if these two parts of yourself were able to help each other?

Whom might one of these leaders invite to a Sabbath meal in his or her home? Whom would he or she not invite? What do you suppose are the criteria your inner Pharisee applies to inviting people home?

## Reading Between the Lines

In *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography*, John Dominic Crossan writes that “table fellowship [is] a map of economic discrimination, social hierarchy, and political differentiation.” He quotes Farb and Armelagos: “In all societies, both simple and complex, eating is the primary way of initiating and maintaining human relationships. . . . Once the anthropologist finds out where, when, and with whom the food is eaten, just about everything else can be inferred about the relations among the society’s members. . . . To know what, where, how, when, and with whom people eat is to know the character of their society.” (See Crossan, New York: HarperCollins 1989, pg. 68).


Make a list of the people with whom you regularly eat. Now make a list of those with whom you never eat. Prepare another list of the people you invite to eat at your dining room table and then those whom you know but never invite there. What do the lists tell you about the world you have created and seek to maintain? What do the lists reveal about the theology you claim and the one you live?



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In *The Social World of Luke-Acts*, Jerome Neyrey remarks that “[a]lthough everybody eats meals daily, meals and table-fellowship are highly complex social events. . . . Meals tell us about patterns of social relations, about social ranking, about group solidarity, and about economic transactions.” (Peabody, MA: Hendricksen, 1991, p. 362).

In our day of fast food and TV dinners, it has perhaps become more difficult to discern the social interactions that accompany daily meals. Still, take a few minutes to recall some dinner gathering where you have hosted or been a guest and look at it through the eyes of an anthropologist. As guests were seated at the table, what values or expectations were implied by the seating chart? Was there a “place of honor”? Who was entitled to that place? Were there less desirable places to sit? If so, who expected to be seated there? What rituals took place—lighting candles, waiting for a particular moment to begin eating, formal serving of the food, going to a buffet? What do the rituals around the dining table say about who is valued, how we are to relate to one another, economic status?



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## *Parallel Readings*

### **From *Century Readings in English Literature***

#### *The Canterbury Tales*

##### Prologue

A good Wyf was ther of bisyde Bathe,  
But she was som-del deaf, and that was scathe,  
Of cloth-making she had swiche an haunt,  
She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.  
In al the parisshe wyf ne was ther noon  
That to the offring bifore hir sholde goon;  
And if ther dide, certeyn, so wrooth was she,  
That she was out of alle charitee.  
Hir coverchiefs ful fyne were of ground;  
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound  
That on a Sondag were upon hir heed.  
Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,  
Ful streite y-teyed, and shoos ful moiste and newe.  
Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.  
She was a worthy womman al her lyve . . . .

Geoffrey Chaucer

Or, in more modern English:

A good wife was there from near Bath. She was a little deaf, and that was unfortunate. She had such skill at making cloth that she even surpassed the weavers of Ypres and Ghent. In all her parish no woman dared go before her to make her offering at Mass; and if one did, she was so furious that she was out of all charity. The kerchiefs she wore on Sunday were of such fine texture, I dare swear they weighed ten pounds. Her leggings were bright scarlet and tied plenty tight; her shoes, very soft and new. Bold was her face, and fair, and ruddy. She was a worthy woman all her life . . . .

Geoffrey Chaucer, "Prologue," *The Canterbury Tales*, in John W. Cunliffe, Karl Young, Mark van Doren, (Eds.), *Century Readings in English Literature*, (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, Inc., 1940), p. 87.

Anne Lamott, *All New People*, (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 1989), p.36-37.

### **From *All New People***

We played our game and listened to the patter on the roof of the porch, and the frogs kept singing but the night birds hushed. All of a sudden a car pulled up outside our house and stopped. After a moment the engine and lights were turned

off, and the car door opened, and a man got out; under the streetlight he looked like a cowboy. He began to walk toward our porch, and my mother got to her feet and said, "You two go inside," but we disobeyed and hunkered in the front doorway. You could tell that the hair on the back of my mother's neck was standing up; we listened to the heavy wet footsteps coming toward us, and to the rain on the roof. Finally, when he got to the screen door, she noticed we hadn't gone in and hissed at us to do so, and we did, leaving the door open just a crack. I went to get Wayne, our gassy dying basset hound, who was asleep on my brother's bed. I pushed the crown of his head, trying to get him to jump down and run to the front door and be Rin Tin Tin, but pushing on his head just made the baggy skin go down over his eyes like a watch cap. By the time I gave up and went back outside the front door, Casey was outside with our mother, and the cowboy's car lights were on, and then so was his engine, and after a moment he drove away.

"He wanted to use our phone," said my mother. "And you know what I said, I said no. Because I didn't want him to come in." My mother sounded about to cry, her voice was higher than usual, quavery, blue. Casey and I did not know what was going on. But when my father got home, early in the morning, we were asleep in bed with her, one on each side of her, and we listened to them talk and pretended to be asleep, until my father carried Casey and my mother carried me to our beds.

She said, Five years ago she would have let him in to use the phone. My father said, Times had changed. My mother said she didn't want us growing up to be afraid of strangers in the rain who came looking for help. She wanted us to love our fellow man. Otherwise, she wondered, what was the point? What was the sound of one hand clapping? My father didn't know what to say. The Japanese answer the riddle by asking "And what is the sound of the rain?" Which is to say, Silence, until the drops hit against something, an umbrella, or a roof, or the sea.

Anne Lamott

### From the *Anchorage Daily News*

#### *Beck's Bible ignores those in need*

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness . . ." Matthew 5:6

Ultimately, I suppose, what we're talking about is a clash between the sweet by and by and the fierce urgency of now.

The former is the refrain from a venerable gospel song that meditates on the bliss of life after death. The latter is a

Leonard Pitts, "Beck's Bible ignores those in need" *The Miami Herald*, copyright © Sunday, March 21, 2010, p. B-6. The Miami Herald Media Co. Reprinted with permission.

phrase from Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream," a passionate demand for justice, equality, and freedom, "now."

Into the tension between these two disparate views of Christian mission stumbles one Glenn Beck. The Fox News showman recently ignited an uproar in the world of Christian ministry by attacking churches that preach a gospel of social and economic justice, i.e., a gospel that doesn't just promise relief in the sweet by and by, but seeks to effect change in the hard here and now. If your church preaches that, Beck told his radio audience, "run as fast as you can." Social and economic justice, he said, are "code words" for communism and Nazism.

*If your church preaches that, Beck told his radio audience, "run as fast as you can."*

In response, the Rev. Jim Wallis, a preacher of the social gospel and president and CEO of the liberal religious activist group Sojourners, suggested on his blog that what Christians should run from is Beck himself. Beck, he wrote, attacks the very heart of their faith.

"When I was in seminary, he says, "we made study of the Bible and we found 2,000 verses in the Bible about the poor, about God's concern for the left out, the left behind, the vulnerable and God's call for justice. If I were ever to talk to Glenn Beck, I would hand him that old Bible from seminary where we cut out of the Bible every single reference to the poor, to social justice, to economic justice, and when we were done, the Bible was just in shreds. And I would hand it to him and put a sticker on front, and say, "This is the Glenn Beck Bible."

I ran Beck's comments by two other preachers of my acquaintance, and they seconded Wallis. But Beck, says the Rev. Joaquin Willis of Miami's Church of the Open Door, is not alone. Many others, he said, "would like to see many of us as pastors just come to church and deal with the spiritual needs of the people and not address those difficult day-to-day issues that make life so hard."

Beck, adds Willis, "speaks from the perspective of the entitled and the relatively well off and they don't see a need for social improvement. Anybody that's trying to improve the society is a communist to him."

"It's hard," says the Rev. Tony Lee of Community of Hope in Temple Hills, Md., "for a church to sit and talk to somebody about how to change their lives and how to turn things around when the institutions around that person are broken. It's hard for me to talk to young people about how God can make a way and how they can move forward and be all they can be "through" God—but their educational system is in pieces. What Glenn Beck is saying is, "Don't have a role in the shaping of the educational system."

For the record, Martin Luther King preached social gospel. Even the preachers in the anti-abortion movement preach a social gospel.

And the idea that such people are enemies of the state is as visceral a reminder as you're likely to get of the paranoia and intellectual discontinuity that afflicts extremist conservatism. Fifty years ago, they saw communists behind every movie marquee and schoolhouse door. Now, Beck sees them in pulpits too.

And I suppose the way not to be a communist in his eyes is to embrace a gospel that promises uplift in the sweet by and by—and only then. But that's a lazy, complacent gospel, a gospel of self-satisfaction and I got mine, of egocentricity and look out for No. 1—and it doesn't square with the gospel of feed my sheep and love your neighbor as yourself.

He thinks we should flee the church that preaches social and economic justice? I think you should flee the one that does not.

Leonard Pitts

## Critical Background

### From *From Literal to Literary*

**parable, noun.** The English word parable comes directly from the Greek *parabole*, formed from *para*, alongside of + *ballo*, to throw. This formation is quite similar to the Greek for devil, *diabolos*, from *dia*, across + *ballo*. The image of a parable is something thrown alongside rather than something thrown across the path that will cause a person to stumble. In other words, a parable gets at an idea indirectly. Instead of dealing with a concept head on, a speaker throws out a story that is somewhat parallel to the issue at hand. A parable is an extended metaphor and can be a fairly complex story or a simple statement. . . .

According to tradition, Jesus frequently employed parables in his teaching. . . .

In first-century Palestine, the parable was a familiar form of teaching, but as Christianity moved into the Greek and Roman world, the purpose of the parable was lost. Christians tried to turn them into allegories, in which every character in a story was assigned a place in real life. In more recent times, when Bible scholars realized that parables were not allegories, some thought that each parable had a single point, but even that approach has been challenged. Brandon Scott, author of *Re-Imagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus*, has said, "Parables are not simple, and they don't make simple points." Scott has also said, "Parables don't have anything to do with religion. They're about life."

Through many parables, Jesus challenged conventional ways of thinking. Listening to a parable with an open mind, his hearers were often bewildered—an appropriate response for today as well. A memory of that bewilderment may well be represented in the gospels as we have received them.

The reason I speak in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand. With them indeed is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah that says: "You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive." [Matthew 13: 13-14]

James Rowe Adams, *From Literal to Literary*, (Bend, Oregon, Rising Star Press, 2005), pp. 181-182.

Although it seems improbable that Jesus told parables with the intention of proving that his hearers were dull witted so that he could fulfill a prophecy, the episode suggests that many of Jesus' hearers were confused by his parables. All anyone can honestly say on first hearing a parable is, "Huh?"

or “What?” Within Jesus’ original audiences, however, some people reacted with suspicion or anger. Jesus often told parables about the kingdom, which made them think that he was trying to undermine the current regime. This was a dangerous business. Charles W. F. Smith began his book *The Jesus of the Parables* with the words, “Jesus used parables and Jesus was put to death. The two facts are related and it is necessary to understand the connection.”

James Rowe Adams

**From *The Anchor Bible***

In these sayings, loosely connected to the topic of festive dining of the preceding episode (vv. 1-6), the Lucan Jesus offers indirect counsel to his disciples about modes of conduct toward other human beings. He does this by commenting, first of all, on the maneuvering of his fellow guests, which he has observed, as they sought out for themselves the best places. He castigates them for seeking out positions of prestige. Specifically, they are places of honor at a banquet. He lets it be known that real honor will come not from one’s self-seeking choices, but from what is bestowed on one by another. Honor before one’s peers comes not from what one does on one’s own behalf, but depends on the estimate others have of one. Jesus’ main point is expressed at the end of v. 10, “Then you will enjoy honor before all who are at table with you.” The added wisdom-saying introduces a further dimension: Its theological pass. expresses God’s judgment as the source of the honor (*doxa*). God will humble the one who exalts himself and exalt the one who humbles himself. Hence the attitude of Christian disciples should be humility, not status-seeking. (Maybe the addition of the wisdom-saying in v. 11 is the reason why this otherwise prudential saying appears to Luke as a “parable.”)

In the second saying Luke moves from self-seeking ambition to selfish recompense and tries to counteract this as well. He counsels this time, not his fellow guests, but his host. He suggests that the kind of people one should invite to dinners is not one’s friends, brothers, relatives, or rich neighbors, but the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Four affluent types of human beings, able to recompense, are contrasted with four unfortunate types, unable to do so. Real love never reckons with recompense; and because this is so, generosity will find its reward at the resurrection. The reciprocity expected must give way to a return in another, unexpected form—a return, not from the unfortunates who have not the wherewithal to reciprocate the host’s kindness and graciousness, but from God himself. The host who invites such unfortunates will find himself among the “upright” at the resurrection.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer, translator and commentator, *The Anchor Bible: The Gospel According to Luke XXXIV*, (New York: Doubleday, 1985), p. 1085.

## **At the Workbench: Pentecost 14, Proper 17**

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The sayings of the Lucan Jesus in vv. 12-14 fit into the general Lucan theme of the use of material possessions and of the concern for the poor and unfortunate of this world.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer