

Sept 1 Sermon: Righteous Reservations

We have always dreamed of seeing violinist Itzhak Perlman. He finally came to the music center in Sonoma. There was one really excellent restaurant in short walking distance, and we hoped to eat before the performance. But when we came in they were all booked up, However my brother law had mentioned a trick, if you use Open Table they sometimes list openings, when the front desk doesn't. I walked right out the door, used open table and reserved some excellent seats. That is how Jesus in the the gospel of Luke works. Jesus is always giving seat to anyone and everyone. Jesus is always providing an "Open Table" for all. He is accused of eating sinners and tax collectors, and being a drunkard and glutton he enjoys a party so much. In fact Plummer the British scholar says with some irony, "We do not know of any case in which Jesus declined an invitation". Here as our gospel opens he has not been given just any invitation but an "A" List invitation with a chief Pharisee. While there, a man with dropsy walks in, and right in the middle of this, Jesus, instead of quietly healing the man, says out loud, is it lawful to heal a man on the Sabbath? The crowd is stunned, or enraged, and says nothing. It as if I went to Shadow Brook interrupted a dinner of lawyers, and said, "I just bought a dinner for a fellow who just walked in off the street with a criminal case pending, instead of just doing eating with him let's discuss a pardon for him Or, since it is labor day, in the middle of a corporate executive pow wow, I invite in a noted union organizer and say, "Hey look who I am buying a dinner for, and don't you think it is right to discuss the injustice of wages in the Silicon Valley?" It is an uncomfortable silence. In response Jesus doubles down. He notices the tight social network as each person jockeyes for the seat nearest the host, who is a top religious and political leader. Jesus tells them to not go for the best seats, lest someone come in more important than you. There is a text variant that says, an "uninvited guest" may drop in and move you from your seat, so someone who has such status that they don't need an invitation, and Jesus says then you will be shamed, if you sit down low you will be brought up and the work for glory is actually used. If you want glory be quiet about your story.

Jesus then sticks one more pin in their outlook. He says if you host a feast, and this room was full of movers and shakers, who would be hosting networking status events, you should not invite your neighbors or your friends or rich people. But instead invite the poor, lame, those of halting steps and the blind. Because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just, the final banquet in heaven. The word for invited friends, relatives and rich, is "to voice", while to another word "to invite" is used of the cast offs. You see your friends in the same social circle are in hearing distance, while you have seek cast offs out. This is all consistent with Luke's gospel which starts with the magnificent voiced by Mary who says, "He has fed the hungry but turned the rich empty away, and ends with the Emmaeus Road story in which Jesus sits down at Table with his disciples and they recognize him, in the breaking of bread. In the last chapter of Acts, Paul breaks bread with the prison guards on a sinking ship- come to Bible study if you want to hear more about that!

Jesus always provides the best seat in the house, and he invites people who you would not expect into that seat. There is surprise shock, and real wonder at what God can do.

At my last church there was a woman who had grown up in our youth group. I had known her for decades. She went away to school in New York, became engaged to a man from Austria. She was

charming and warm from a successful and talented and family. Before the wedding a tragedy happened, a lift failed in a factory she was inspecting and she fell sixty feet and broke her back. At first the Doctor's said she would die, then at least lose one of her legs, Then she would never walk again. She was confined to a wheelchair The father talked to the fiancé saying, "I will understand if you call the wedding off." His reply, "I love her."

The wedding went on and she flew out to meet me in California.

I was seated at a little cafe by the church when her car came up, she got out, her leg and ankle was in a boot and she hobbled from the car to the table where I was sitting, and said, "That is the first time I have walked that far, I have been practicing for this for months for this walk", as she sat down.

We planned the wedding, complicated because her in laws were coming from Austria and complicated because she still had trouble walking and standing. At the wedding she walked down the Aisle and sat in a chair the we had placed up front during the ceremony. I then understood where the best seat in the house is, It is seat where the Lord brings you after you have been through the fire, It is the seat you sit down in when you thought that you could never sit again. In that seat a broken past is healed and a hopeful can be seen. It is the seat where anyone who has been through anything is welcome to dine on the bread of heaven. It is a seat at the open table that table of our Lord.