

Luke 14:7-14
August 31, 2025

Friendships

Each Sunday when gathered for worship, we read from at least a couple biblical texts, usually selections from either one of the Old Testament books, or a psalm; or from the New Testament, a one of the gospels or the letters.

There are also songs to be sung and prayers offered, words spoken, all of which are governed by the bible's message, and the lived faith of the many Christian people who have come before us. Sometimes it seems appropriate to sum up what it is all about in one or two words. Today's word is friendships.

Often the readings offer a general overview of broader themes. In that regard, one might think of texts about a doctrine like Creation, such as:

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth," and its companion from the first chapter of Genesis, "let us make human beings in our own image."

And Creation is not only an Old Testament concern, it is also found in the great prologue to the Gospel of John:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. *In*

him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it."

Or Redemption, also from John;

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Or again from Paul, "I passed on what I received, that Christ died for the forgiveness of Sin, was buried, and on the third day raised in accordance with the scriptures."

There are many passages about the theme of justice from the prophets of the Old Testament, such as Micah;

"And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."

And the hope of Eternity;

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘now the dwelling of God is with people, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them, *and be their God*. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

In such readings the grand drama of scripture is recited, and we are given an understanding of life that has meaning. They help us to understand God’s mercy and desire for justice and compel us to think of life and salvation as reconciliation and forgiveness, and healing and liberation.

In other readings we find more specific considerations. For instance, in the gospel of Luke today, we find Jesus concerned about people attending banquets; and whether or not they end up embarrassing or commending themselves based on where they are seated at the meal.

He speaks of a great reversal, “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

In this case, Jesus uses a specific example from a certain part of culture to speak of a larger truth. I suspect that Jesus is not actually very concerned about the relative status of believers at banquets.

He is concerned about humility, he teaching his disciples (and us) about what kind of people we are

meant to be and by what values we are meant to live from day-to-day, and to what purpose. The stress in this case is on humility, but not for its own sake.

If we are inauthentic in our humility, which is another way of saying that we are clandestinely arrogant; if we think we can feign humility intending some sort of selfish gain by its appearance, sooner or later our efforts will fail. We will be found out.

Thus the second instruction. When people who have the means to host a banquet, invite people who have little standing or who lack the means to cover their share of the cost by way of a return, it means that no earthly reward should be gained from hospitality, except maybe, genuine friendship, between people in the world who may not have common ground; or even beyond that, towards the idea of *koinonia*, Christian fellowship. These stories and themes serve to point us in the direction of the supremacy of relationships, but not ordinary relationships.

Let me suggest that humility, and also gratitude and compassion; and confession of sin and repentance, mercy and forgiveness, Creation and Resurrection, and all the rest are meant to enhance and enrich our lives through relationship in Christ.

So much of what we do is adversarial and competitive and judgmental, or economic, all of which work against community . . . We are starving for the kind of relationships that are encompassed in that expression, “Christian Fellowship.”

The idea implies a relationship based not on worldly terms; common ground regarding vocational ties or recreational interests, or political affiliation, around which friendships are often built, and those friendships can be lifelong and meaningful, but what we learn from the bible is about relationships based solely *upon faith in Christ*, which is the only source of relationship capable of cutting across all the lines that divide and distinguish us one from another.

One can see why, given these concerns, the Letter to the Hebrews sends such instructions as it does: “Keep loving each other as brothers and sisters. Entertain strangers. Remember those who are in prison. Remember those who are mistreated. Honor marriage. Be content, liberated from the love of money.

I think of the statement in the 2nd chapter of Acts that explains the early devotions of life among Christ followers: “to the apostle’s teaching, to the *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.”

Even in the context of Luke 14, the comments of Jesus are inspired by a disapproved Sabbath healing, in which a person’s health was subordinated to religious formality. In Christ’s realm, relationships are superior to religious formality. On the contrary, in the life of the world, and sometimes unfortunately even in the life of the church, they are not always held in such high honor.

We live in an imperfect world and are caught up in its life. When we allow ourselves to be immersed in it, instead of in Christ Jesus, one of the dangers we face is a temptation to consider other things more important than these relationships, with God, then with our friends in Christ. But we desire the fellowship indicated by Jesus’ actions and teachings as we have read them in these texts.

I hope I am not too far out on a limb to say that it is these relationships that are what the Gospel, what the Bible, what church, is all about.

Grace be with you all. And may friendship with God be full and complete, and may it be found also in relations in this life, with each other, and with neighbors near and far. Amen

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