

Guess Who's Coming To Dinner?

Year C

Season of Pentecost

Sunday Between August 28 and September 3 Inclusive

August 29, 2010, Fourteenth Sunday After Pentecost

Read the Bible passage: [Jeremiah 2:4-13](#), The Message; or [Jeremiah 2:4-13](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Read the Bible passage: [Luke 14:1, 7-14](#), The Message; or [Luke 14:1, 7-14](#), The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).

Faith-provoking, historical insights into the lesson by [David Ewart](#), [Luke 14:1, 7-14](#).

Click here: [George Hermanson's sermon](#), for an easy to print or email Adobe PDF version of this sermon.

The Rev. Dr. George Hermanson

One of rock songs chez plays continuously is "Rules, Rules, Everywhere Rules." I checked Goggle to get the words for rules and found Goggle has over 3 million sites referring to rules, everywhere rules. So life has more than its share of rules We just can't seem to get away from them. Some of the rules protect and some are used to repress.

To navigate in our world we need to get a fix on the rules, spoken and hidden. Move into a new situation we have to figure out how to act - it is like a foreign language and we have make our way through the tricks and snares of that social order. This is why beginning a new job, moving to a new community, going to a new church is so difficult. Just think of those going from elementary school to high school - remember both the terror and the anticipation - would I fit in? Think of those going to new places and demands this fall. Think of those who turn here up for the first time - what are our hidden rules?

The problem is "they" have set the rules before we got there. Who this "they" are is never clear - for sometimes we are the "they". However. we know that their agenda is a mine field. For each generation, each culture, each historical reality has its own tradition.

While knowing the rules helps us to move into strange territory some rules are a hidden agenda. There are there to maintain control and domination. In such a situation this can cause distrust and set friends against friends. And the stranger, the rules can be used to make them feel less and in their place.

Every human organism has rules and protocols, even the church. They can be hidden. They can be open. How we navigate this situation will help determine the future. The Who have a great song about this:

George Hermanson

May the Lure be with you

And the world looks just the same
And history ain't changed
'Cause the banners,
they all flown in the last war

I'll tip my hat to the new constitution
Take a bow for the new revolution
Smile and grin at the change all around
Pick up my guitar and play
Just like yesterday
Then I'll get on my knees and pray
We don't get fooled again

When we are unsure of the rules, and when we are struggling to find our place in a social order it is hard to create the will or the perspective to help us decide which rules deserve to be followed. Organizational transformation is hard. Knowing what to care about and what not to care about is hard. So there you are, scrambling.

Remember the movie *Guess Who Is Coming To Dinner?* It was timely in that it lifted all the tensions of the times and sent the viewer off in finding a new way of doing hospitality. Through gentle humor the racism of our age is exposed. It is very much in keeping with Luke's story.

What a great story Luke tells. A dinner and everyone is jockeying for a place at the table. Where do we fit? What are the best seats? If the people eat at the wrong place, then there is no telling what else will fall apart. Remember the civil rights lunch counter sit-ins of the 1960's. Worlds changed when the seating order changed.

Jesus suggests another model. But can we trust Jesus? After all he is known to have terrible taste in dinner companions. He hangs out with those people who don't even have place cards. He sits with the low and the left out and - what is worse - he seems to have a ball.

Now there is another dance of hospitality going on here. It is one that rejects our "you scratch my back and I will scratch your back." "Don't ask to the dinner anyone who can do you favors" is what Luke has Jesus say. It is a rejection of a transactional reality where you only reward those you owe or will do you a favor or improve your position or oppress you. It is even a rejection of doing good so you are rewarded by others and even God.

When we think about it this very radical stuff because we often teach that we should do good to be rewarded. In fact, there is a whole tradition about getting to heaven if we are good. This is based on the idea of doing something to get a favor. This banquet scene rejects all of those moralistic concepts. It is about a way of being, an attitude that good is its own reward - you do it because that is who you are, no rewards or rules.

The Jeremiah passage focuses on hosting as a way of life. The people had placed their trust in things that perish - things that crumble. They were out of touch with their inner sense of God. They needed to be reminded that God hosts them so they could risk - let go and jump into the making of life that is tasteful for all.

Hebrews adds that hosting is the foundation of the Christian community. The passage ends with "Show hospitality, for in doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it."

Our biblical passages are about the resources we need to develop in order to challenge the old order, so we don't have the same old boss in a new version.

The stories are about being centered in the kingdom of God so we can create an interior world of confidence that leads us to create an exterior world of mutuality, of acceptance and fixable rules. The mark of deep spirituality is having God at the center of hearts and the needs of others as our agenda. It is a radical trust that God's love is there and given before we act, we act out of trust in the compassion of God. We do not need to earn it.

How do we fit this in with the commandment to love others? To do so seems to be an incredibly overwhelming task and at times feels like a rule. We also seem to be conditioned to expect some outcomes, results that reward us. To be able to love our neighbor without expecting an return begins in the knowledge that we are profoundly loved by God. It is to know deep in our being that the true nature of reality is that from God's perspective the earth and all within it is the holiest object present to God.

When we live out of God we know that love is the highest standard of human relationships. This moves us not just to respect but to appreciation of another's uniqueness. When we see from God's perspective, we take the other seriously, respecting more than the otherness of our neighbor, we become aware that our neighbor is, in the deepest sense, the 'holiest object to our senses.' Living out of God's love we move beyond judging, applying rules, expected something from them, thinking of our own needs. For it is God's love that enables us to love those we don't naturally love. We are able to love this way when we allow the divine love to enter our hearts and actions, and lives can be changed as a result.

When we let God all the way in, trust in the love of God we are reminded to see the dignity God has bestowed on the world. Its an act of consideration. Consideration is the pondering of the other, and the accounting for the needs/feelings of others. When we live out such consideration it expresses a consciousness of the mystery of being and the dignity of every person. Faith suggests that consideration should be part of our conscious deeds. Out of meditation we end in action - living boldly the act of love and letting it loose in reality, letting it do its work, not expecting thanks but doing good for that is who we are. As a child God we live out of the knowledge that the aim of God is toward healing and we join that ride, doing our part because that is who we are.

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