



# THE MISSION OF SAINT MARY MAGDALENE

## Father Alan's Blog

### For the Second Sunday After Trinity - June 13, 2021

*"Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.'"*

St. Luke 14:23 (NIV)

*"Why don't you go to church?"*

The priest asked the man with whom he had struck up a conversation in the grocery line. Looking down at his dusty jeans, muddy boots, and sweat-stained tee shirt, the man replied:

*"All I have are my work clothes - I can't possibly come to church looking like this."*

So, over the next few days, the priest collected some nice clothes from the men in his congregation and, the next time he encountered the man, happily presented him with quite an upgrade to his wardrobe. While walking down the sidewalk one sunny day several weeks later, the priest happened to bump into the man (who now sported a pair of khaki slacks, and penny loafers, and a white cotton, short-sleeved, button-down shirt) and asked him:

*"Why haven't I seen you at church?"*

Sheepishly, the man confessed:

*"Well, Father, it's like this - the past few Sundays I showered, and shaved, and put on some of the new clothes you gave me... well, I looked so darn good that I decided to go golfing instead."*



Jesus' "Parable of the Great Banquet" (today's Gospel Lesson from St. Luke 14:15-24), was told at a dinner that Jesus attended, as the "guest of honour," at a Pharisee's house. In the first few verses of chapter 14, St. Luke tells us that Jesus heals a man with dropsy (or severe abdominal swelling), and then He teaches a brief lesson on "serving others," promising in verse 14b (that is, the verse directly preceding today's Gospel Lesson) that those who do so:

*"...will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

At the mention of the resurrection, someone reclining at the table with Jesus responds (in verse 15b):

*"Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."*

In reply, Jesus tells the "Parable of the Great Banquet," wherein (as per verses 16 & 17), a certain man planned a large banquet and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, the man sent his servant to contact each of the invited guests, telling them that all was ready; but, according to verse 18a:

*"...they all WITH ONE ACCORD began to make excuses."*

Hence, not one, not two, or three, either – **but ALL of them**. One man explained (in verse 18b) that he'd just bought "a piece of ground" and that he needed to "go see it." Another man said (in verse 19a) that he'd just purchased "five yoke of oxen" (that is, ten animals in total) and that he was on the way to "test them." And yet another gave the excuse (in verse 20) that he "had married a wife, and therefore could not come." Now, all of them were quite **polite** in their refusal, saying, "PLEASE excuse me," yet, when all was said and done, they had all rejected the very gracious and generous offer of the host. When the master of the house heard these flimsy excuses, he was angry; hence, in verse 21b, he told his servant to forget the invited guest list and to:

*“Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in here THE poor and THE maimed and THE lame and THE blind.”*

(Please note: it was not into homes, but into the back alleys and the rundown places that the servant was sent to find these people and bring them into the banquet.) And so, the servant obediently brought in all the down-and-out townspeople he could find. Even so, in verse 22, he reported back that there was still more room in the banquet hall. At which point, the master told the servant (in verse 23b) to:

*“Go out into the highways and hedges, and COMPEL them to come in, that my house may be filled.”*

Jesus ended His parable by expressing to His hearers (in verse 24) the master’s determination:

*“For I say to you that none of those men who were invited shall taste my supper.”*

On the surface, it appears to be a very openhearted, compassionate, “warm-and-fuzzy” parable. But as we have seen before, Jesus’ parables aren’t necessarily known for being “warm and fuzzy;” rather, Jesus’ parables tend to have a bite to them! And this one is no exception – **in its utter rejection of the first-invited, who literally turned their backs on the master of the house.**

The statement that prompted the telling of the parable in the first place is key. The man who (in verse 15) looked forward to dining in the Messianic Kingdom of God no doubt subscribed to the then popular notion that only the Jews would be part of that kingdom. Thus, the parable Jesus told was aimed at debunking that misguided notion. So, bearing this in mind, let’s take the next few minutes to look at the parable on several different levels.



In the first place, there are the “players.” We can see God the Father, as the Master of the house, preparing the world and all eternity for the appreciation and enjoyment of all His children. Moreover, Almighty God, as the Master, chooses to make a covenant – not only with the Jewish people, but also with all who would become believers (that is, all TRUE Christians). And that ALL are invited into His glorious banquet (better known as “The Kingdom of God” or, more simply, heaven). And then there is the faithful servant who goes out (who initially is Jesus Himself), and is later to be emulated by those who call themselves disciples of Jesus Christ (again, that would be all TRUE Christians) who are called to take the Word of God (the “invitation,” if you will) out into the world and to share it with others. And just like the “Parable of the Sower” (St. Matthew 13:1-23), wherein Jesus tells of four different kinds of soil, there are, similarly, several different types of people who accept (or deny) the Master’s gracious invitation.



Secondly, there are the “excuses.” (Man, oh man, are there ever excuses!) The first excuse is about **possessions**: “I have purchased some land,” the second is about **work**: “I have purchased ten oxen to help me work harder,” and the third is about **relationships**: “I have gotten married.” To say the least, the excuses for skipping the banquet are **laughably BAD**, as no one buys land (or oxen) without seeing it (or them) first; moreover, what, exactly, would keep a newly married couple from attending a social event? In any event, all three excuses in the parable reveal **insincerity on the part of those invited**.

To be sure, the Jews of Jesus’ day had no valid excuse for spurning Jesus’ message, either; in fact, they had every reason to accept Him as their Messiah. Nevertheless, before we are too quick to judge first century Jews, I need to ask how many times have those kinds of excuses “prevented” any of us from:

- † Coming to church?
- † Or having a quiet time of prayer - *with just God*?
- † Or reading the Holy Bible?
- † Or reaching out to someone else with the “Good News” of Jesus Christ?
- † Or supporting the church - either financially, or in terms of our God-given spiritual gifts of service?

**Possessions, work, relationships:** these are the timeless, built-in excuses, aren't they? In fact, they are **THE** ways through which we have come to explain our lives. Let me repeat that: **they are THE ways through which we have come to explain our lives.** In other words: “We're too (**fill in the blank**) to respond to God's call, so it's okay that we don't - because we all have these timeless, built-in **excuses** handy.”

- † **Family in town?**
  - ✓ Better skip church.
- † **Work too hard at the office last week?**
  - ✓ Must play golf on Sunday morning.
- † **Did too many house (or yard) chores?**
  - ✓ Best to hit the couch and binge-watch Netflix, rather than spend time reading the Bible, or praying, or worshipping.
- † **Deserving of that new foreign car, or large mansion, or expensive jewelry, or southern vacation, etc.?**
  - ✓ Don't worry about giving to the life and the work of the church.

We continually excuse ourselves and, pretty soon, we come to believe that the excuses are more important than the thing we once knew with certainty **WAS** important. Consequently, we end up devaluing the “banquet” and focusing instead on the effort of making our excuses.



Thirdly, the master of the banquet tells his servant to, "...COMPEL them to come in." Or, to put it another way, **God doesn't give up just because the initial invitees all have their excuses.** Almighty God isn't about to say:

*"Well, okay, I didn't get their attention, so I guess I'll just let this one slide."*

No – God keeps on relentlessly seeking and inviting. Accordingly, God is still very much in the business of proactively searching for "the least, and the last, and the lost." And, in so doing, He models what He expects ALL His true followers to do. You see, God fully expects that those who have been ostracized and left alone (and, therefore, count themselves among "the never invited camp") will need to be somehow **convinced**; thus, God sends out His faithful servants to make that happen.



Fourthly, the people who are eventually brought into the banquet are "the least, and the last, and the lost;" in short, they're the "uninvited." As I alluded to above, at the beginning of chapter 14 of St. Luke's Gospel, we read that Jesus was invited to a banquet in a Pharisee's house. (Now, the Pharisees, in effect, liked to partake in big back-rubbing sessions, where they glad-handed each other and talked about how wonderful they all were – and they **loved** to argue about which one of them was the most important; hence, this parable was Jesus' reframing of what a true banquet, in God's eyes, should really look like.) Basically, Jesus told the host of this particular party to invite in people **who couldn't possibly return the favour.** We're all familiar with the attitude:

*"You invited me to your party, so I'll invite you to mine."*

Well, Jesus held that they should invite the people who would never get to experience a party without their generous invitation. Thus, Jesus was telling His listeners (**and He is telling us!**) that God expects a different kind of hospitality to be offered to others by His people: **Because that was the kind of hospitality that God offered to ALL.**

- † **God, Who created a world and made it good *for ALL of His children to enjoy.***
- † **God, Who made a covenant with His own creation *when He didn't need anything in return from them.***
- † **And God, Who surrendered His own Son to death on the cross *in order to redeem that same creation after it had fallen.***

In a word, God GETS hospitality, and He wants us to get it, too. You see, God wants each of us to understand that we don't need to stay outcast, or misfit, or on the outside, anymore. In short, then, God wants to invite us – ALL OF US – into His banquet (for God is always working to make “outsiders” into “insiders”) and then, He wants His followers to take over the crucial mission of inviting.



So, what happens if, somehow, we get it?

- † **What happens if we recognize that it means going one level past our comfort zone to share God's invitation?**
- † **What happens if it means sharing our story with a family member who has been “burned” by the Church in the past?**
- † **What happens if it means having that same conversation with some random person, just because they look like, maybe, they need to hear some good news?**
- † **And what happens if it means inviting someone who has never been to church (or, even, to a church fellowship function such as: a picnic; or a luncheon; or a Yard Sale; and so on) before?**

In St. John 14:2 Jesus assures His listeners:

*“In my Father’s house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you.”*

So, what, exactly, can we ascertain about heaven from that one verse? What “pearls” can we discover about this **heavenly banquet** that is already underway and lasts forever?

Well, how about these:

- ✠ **First, we are all part of God’s family; thus, we are all *first-place finishers*;**
- ✠ **Second, there is plenty of room and we don’t have to worry about overcrowding or “never having enough;”**
- ✠ **Third, there is familiarity and hospitality *for all of Jesus’ followers*;**
- ✠ **Fourth, being invited to participate means that there’s a front row seat to the eternal festivities *for each of us*; and**
- ✠ **Fifth, we can all be real, active participants in helping to create the heavenly banquet in the “here-and-now.”**

You know, at one time Gentiles were “the least, and the last, and the lost” or the uninvited.” If people weren’t 100% Jewish (that is, one of the “chosen people,” or the “covenanted,” or the “invited”), then they, by definition, were on the outside looking in. Nonetheless, Jesus of Nazareth made God’s salvation an open invitation to everyone – Jew and Gentile alike. To be sure, then, the banquet is open – **to all of us**.

Yet how we respond to God’s generosity says a lot about us. For instance (COVID-19 restrictions aside), why is our Mission of Saint Mary Magdalene, or the Anglican Catholic Church of Canada (**or so many other churches for that matter!**) not bringing in new people every week? I mean, how can we say that “we REALLY get it” and not be about the business of actively doing something about it? For through our words – and our actions, especially – **we are supposed to**

**invite (COMPEL?) others:** to talk about God; to come to Christian events; and to come to church.

(I remember once seeing a video wherein a young atheist woman asked:

*“How much do you have to HATE people – to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them about it?”*

The blunt truth is this: we can't say we love (or even like) someone:

- ✠ **If we're not even bothering to pass on God's loving and most gracious invitation; and**
- ✠ **If we're not calling them from the hustle and bustle of “the world, the flesh, and the devil” to come into the banquet.)**

I often wonder what our Mission – even our **“One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church”** – would look like if we all were honestly willing to say to others:

*“This is my church – and here's why it should be your church, too.”*

Would more people be here next week?

The simple truth is: **we need to tell others:**

- ✠ **That the invitation to God's banquet is wide-open;**
- ✠ **That everyone is welcome;**
- ✠ **That “all is ready NOW” – so, *time is of the essence*; and**
- ✠ **That all they need to do is to forget the excuses, and to “RSVP” by actually attending.**

No “upgraded wardrobe” or “green fees” required.



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