

The Parable Of The Great Banquet

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There has been a lot in the news lately about sharks. We had shark week in July when the Discovery Channel was talking all about shark attacks and shark behavior.

There was the shark attack at South Africa of the pro surfer – who was in a surfing competition but escaped unharmed.

Then multiple attacks in Australia.

As a Mom of a daughter who is now a surf instructor and the wife of a guy who goes out in the water regularly to surf I sometimes worry when I hear these reports.

I know that really sharks are generally docile creatures despite all the hype and that often when they attack they think you are a seal. It's a case of mistaken identity.

But all this hype about sharks lately reminded me of probably the biggest banquet I ever became aware of in my young life, living in Princeton NJ – where high society rocked and rolled It was the banquet my parents went to at the home of Peter Benchley.

Peter Benchley, was that author of JAWS which later became a movie.

His home had 7 bedrooms and an indoor movie theatre. It was stunning, but I remember what freaked my parents out the most going there was all the pictures on the walls of sharks...with bloody mouths...coming up out of the deep...some taken from the movie... some from other sources.

Actually, Peter Benchley was a huge advocate for the protection of sharks and spent a lot of his life doing that.

However my parents came home almost in shock. They said if they ever got invited there again they would never go back. The whole experience had been too bizarre and gruesome for them.

Now I can understand that. That's a good reason NOT to go back to a party. I get it. My parents had a couple nightmares after that, if I am remembering correctly.

If they were ever invited again to a banquet at Peter Benchley's house a good excuse would have been "I can't come because I am still suffering trauma from the last time I was there." Pretty good excuse, right?

But the excuses that the guests had for not going to the Master's party in the parable in Luke are not good excuses at all.

In the First Century world the invitation to a party or a banquet was always two-fold:
(1) the initial invitation some time ahead, and
(2) the actual call to the meal when it was all ready,

This happened in both in Jewish and Roman settings.

Just like when you prepare for a wedding (I know nothing about that right now)...you send out the initial invitation...and then you plan for the number who say they are coming...who return the RSVP.

So the host in the parable has planned the feast based on the number of guests invited -- and those who have accepted already.

He has planned ahead based on them telling him...**We are coming! Count on us!**

I actually looked up Middle East banquets and someone – a Biblical scholar - had done an analysis (who has time to do these things?) of Middle East banquets...But anyway here it is...

**A chicken or two would suffice for 2 to 4 guests,
A duck for 5 to 8 guests
A kid for 10 to 15,
A sheep for 15 to 35 people,
And a fattened calf or an ox was for 35 to 75 people**

In our passage Jesus is referring to a large feast where the host had invited "many guests." So we can pretty well conclude that the Master of the house had taken great pains to prepare a huge meal...**In Matthews account of the same parable, that Master has prepared oxen and fattened calves.**

So again...let me just reiterate...

Not to come to a banquet where one had previously indicated acceptance was a grave breach of social etiquette – back then even more than it is now.

It was an insult to the host. Especially after such elaborate preparation

This was a society where one's social standing was determined by peer approval -- For a whole series of guests to reject the final summons appears to be a conspiracy to discredit the host completely.

And so the Master summons the invited guests, who originally RSVP'd that they could come...and Jesus explains that now, all the invitees who said they could make it, begin to make excuses.

All of them!

The Greek phrase used, "*apo mias pantes*", means "**from the first, down to the last**" **The rejection was unanimous.**

As I said, I think my parents had a good excuse not to go back to Peter Benchley's home for any more banquets.

But the excuses the people give to this Master are lame excuses!

The first excuse: Someone has just bought a field and must inspect it. But surely no one buys a field sight unseen!

The second excuse: Someone has just bought five pairs of oxen and must try them out. But no one buys five pairs of oxen without testing them first.

By the way, both of these excuses indicate men of wealth.

Purchasing property is a wealthy man's luxury. Five yoke of oxen are for a huge estate because one or two pairs of oxen would be adequate for a small farm.

And Jesus means for the excuses to be flimsy!
He wants his audience in telling this parable to be thinking...that's not a good excuse! How could they not go to the banquet for *that reason*?

The third excuse: The guest has just been married. Again, back to planning a wedding in our family.

You've got to have some lead time unless you elope. So, **When this guest accepted the invitation in the first place, he would have known of his wedding plans. That was the time to politely decline – not at the last minute.**

The last minute act of refusal is one of calculated rudeness.
So all these rich people have been invited to the Master's party. And they have lame excuses for why they can't attend.

They insult the Master of the house. They basically say "you are not worth my time!"

I think of this often in our rich Silicon Valley culture. How empty the streets are on Sunday morning...Less than 2% of the Bay Area attend church. Yet there seems to be time for everything else. But on Sunday mornings, the traditional time of worship, the streets are empty. Driving here from San Mateo, I never have to worry about traffic.

No wonder the Master gets angry! No wonder he fumes and commands his servants...go and get some other kinds of people other than the invited guests. ***Maybe they have time for me...***

The wealthy are consumed with their own lives. They spurn the Master's invitation. They make up flimsy excuses...this is an incredible banquet folks...put on by God himself! And they are turning up their noses...

By the way, Luke's gospel of all four gospels is the one that consistently holds up the rights and the value of the poor. If you want to choose a gospel that has social and political justice issues written all over it – it is the gospel of Luke.

So the Master commands his servants - "Go out into the streets and lanes of the town. Bring in the poor, the crippled the blind and the lame."

Actually, the response of the servant to this is kind of humorous. He says, "***What you have commanded has already been done...***" In other words, we have already anticipated what you would want...because we know what kind of Master you are...

Don't you love people who work for you or with you who can read your mind...who know what you want because they know you...
They are absolutely the best kind of workers...right?

And the servant was one of those kind..and

The servant says, "Yes Master. We know what kind of a God you are; that you want your table full...that you love all people and want them all to come to the banquet. So we've dragged the ones you didn't invite...we dragged in all the needy – because we have

anticipated that you would want this...all those ragamuffins are at the table...and there is still room."

Then the master told his servant, '**Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.**' " (14:22-23)

So I want you to understand the full meaning of this last command; and it is lost in translation. And this comes from Ken Bailey...Biblical scholar

The first sweep was in the town, and included "**broad, main streets or public squares**" (Greek *plateiai*) and "**narrow streets, lanes, alleys**" (Greek *rume*).

So these are street people, hanging out, but these are still inside the town.

But in verse [7] **The second sweep was outside the town in the rural areas, the, "road, highway" [9]**

Inside the town would be the poor, the beggars, the indigent, but probably still the Jew. *But outside the town* would be the strangers and sojourners, those who were shunned and unwelcome . – the ones from an unclean culture
The stranger. The Gentile.

And actually such people would have felt very uncomfortable at the feast of a rich man, socially very out of place. That is why they have to be compelled to go into the banquet...

Additionally, it was a custom to politely refuse to come until pressed to -- kind of like politely refusing to take a second helping at a meal until the host says, "Oh, but you must!" and then passing your plate happily to receive more.

The Greek word means 'strongly urge/invite, urge upon, press.' "

Now notice, the Master hasn't sent out soldiers to sweep the area, round up everyone, and march them to his house. It still has to be their choice.

But he has instructed his servants not to take "No" for an answer.

To encourage and strongly urge everyone they meet to accept this invitation; even if they felt awkward, or were from an "unclean" culture.

That's the kind of God we worship this morning. A God who goes out and looks, and searches and compels anyone who will choose him to come to his table.

This table here this morning is invitational. It says to you and to me that no matter how unworthy you feel you can come, and partake and have fellowship with the God of your salvation; this table has been prepared for you at a great price.

The very life of God himself was given so that you could come and partake today.

We are all ragamuffins as we approach this table, broken and full of sin. It doesn't matter... where you've been or what you've done, you are invited...God desires your presence here...

But there is something else in the parable, isn't there?.

It is a call to action...**our response to receiving God's hospitality must be then to give it back...to others.**

Opening our hearts and our homes and our tables and our lives to one another within our church community is so important...but then we have to look outward to others who are lonely or hurting or without families – there are so many people in this community who come from other countries who have no one here.

No connection. No one to talk to.

Are we as Christians reaching out to them? Supporting them? Inviting them into our lives? Changing **Hostility towards the stranger into Hospitality**? Making those who seem like strangers, our friends.

You know it is a virtual mission field in Cupertino.

You don't have to take an airplane to experience another culture. It's all right here. It's a melting pot!

What an amazing opportunity we have as a church in this place. So cool! We get free cultural awareness!

I would love for us to be a community of faith that actually represents the community around us in terms of its diversity in here; we've gotten a little better but we've got a long way to go.

The parable of the banquet reminds us that Jesus didn't hang out with *his kind*. If he had he would have been hobnobbing with religious leaders and rabbis.

No, Jesus spend a disproportional amount of time around the table with people who were not "his kind". People considered unclean and different/strangers from a strange land and also the poor and the weak...

So as you approach this table today, aware of God's great hospitality toward you, aware that we are all ragamuffins and strangers called in ourselves "exiles" from outside the city... before he brought us in...

I would ask that as you come forward at God's urging, at His call,...to the banquet here...that you also prayerfully in your minds eye see your neighborhood, the people living around you who you might consider different than yourself, and ask God to open your heart, your table, your life to them as he leads....So that they too can experience the hospitality of the Master Let's not make excuses...because we don't have time...because we are doing other things... lets invite all to the table (PRAY)