

**12 Pentecost  
August 28, 2022**

**In the name of the God of all Creation,  
The God alive in each of us as God was alive in Jesus,  
And the power of God known in the Spirit.  
Amen.**

Well, Caren and I are back from our trip to Albuquerque to move our household goods. In a nutshell, moving has been a nightmare. We sold our house on Washington Street at the end of July, and closed on a house in Albuquerque in early August. The movers came in a few days after the closing on our house in St. Augustine, but then there was delay upon delay ... delay in loading ... delay in transportation ... and delay in delivery. What was supposed to have been delivered in Albuquerque on August 8 didn't show up until last Monday, August 22 ... and then it was just half of the furniture, the rest was still in a warehouse in Jacksonville. This second shipment has now arrived in Albuquerque and is scheduled to be delivered tomorrow, and our daughter Jamie, and her husband Neal, will take delivery for us. We left Albuquerque on Tuesday after the first part of the shipment was delivered, and after four days on the road we arrived back here in St. Augustine Friday evening.

I appreciate your forbearance and patience ... and your prayers ... during this transition. Caren and I ... and our two dogs, Micah and Karma ... are semi-homeless, but we are here for the next month. My hope and prayer are that we ... together ... can celebrate all that St. Cyprian's is over the next few weeks.

In this morning's reading from Luke's Gospel Jesus is invited for a Sabbath meal by a leader of the Pharisees. Arriving early, he sits and watches as his fellow guests scramble for places of honor around the table. These guests know the pecking order, and they relish it. If I'm imagining the scene correctly, they jostle and shove each other, feigning dignity while still fighting for prestigious spots near the host.

After observing their drama for a while, Jesus calls them out with an appeal to a different standard. Knowing full well the social rules of his day, he shuns those rules and calls instead for a revolution. Not a revolution of arms and bloodshed, but a revolution in table manners.

"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor," he exhorts his fellow guests. "Go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.'" "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." You see, in God's kingdom the world's values are turned upside down. This is a variation on the theme of "the first shall be last, and the last shall be first."

Interestingly, the world has distorted this saying for its own purposes. In our procession into church each Sunday ... when we have a procession ... the acolyte leads the way, followed by the

choir, then the chalice ... when we have one ... with the priest at the very end of the line. "The first ... in this case the highest ranking liturgical figure in the service, the priest ... [The first] shall be last, and the last ... the acolyte who is at the bottom of the liturgical hierarchy ... the last shall be first." This is true in many areas of our life ... academic processions with the youngest and least experienced faculty at the beginning of the procession and the deans and president at the end. Or a curtain call for a theatrical play ... the supporting cast take their bows first, and the starring characters take their bows last.

Now, I don't know about you, but I have a hard time imagining Jesus as the Martha Stewart of the first century. I don't think this story is about teaching etiquette ... or status seeking ... to his disciples or whoever Jesus was addressing. But then Jesus added a little snippet ... the whole reason for telling the story in the first place. As if all this isn't counter-cultural enough, Jesus turns to his host and continues: "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Then you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you."

You have often heard me ask the question, "How do I know this to be true in my life today?" I guess that leads to another question, "Why on earth would I want to do that?"

Why? Because Jesus insists on it. Because this is who God is, the great reverser of our priorities, our hierarchies, and our values. Because there is no end to the game of who is "in" and who is "out," and God ... in divine wisdom ... knows that our anxious scramble for greatness will lead to nothing but more anxiety, more suspicion, more loneliness, more hatred, and more devastation. Because God's kingdom is not a kingdom of scarcity ... it is one of abundance ... where all are already welcome, already loved, already cherished. Because the currency of that kingdom is humility, not arrogance ... generosity, not stinginess ... hospitality, not fear.

I believe that God calls us to always be aware of the needs of the poorest of the poor ... including those who are at the very bottom of any hierarchal strata. Jesus consistently aligned himself with the disenfranchised, the marginalized, and those who lived in poverty. And in this morning's reading from Luke the tidbit that Jesus adds is, "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed."

Now, we ... the people of St. Cyprian's ... are planning a banquet. The banquet ... celebration ... is because I am retiring, but it is really about a celebration of our life together. It is about dedicating the renovations to the Mission House. It is about the wonderful ministries we support with our time, talent, and treasure ... the Ecumenical Food Pantry, Dining With Dignity, the Wildflower Medical and Dental Clinic, St. Augustine's Habitat for Humanity, Operation New Hope's Ready4Work program, the resettlement of Afghan refugees, Episcopal Relief and Development, and much, much more. It is about this worshiping community and the care that is shown to all who cross our threshold. The celebration on September 25 maybe because I am retiring, but it is really about all this community has done and is doing.

So, if that is the case, how do we take seriously what Jesus took seriously? "When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed."

With all due respect to the Mission Board and those planning the celebration on September 25, I am taking the liberty to invite some of our neighbors that I have come to know over the years I have been Vicar of St. Cyprian's. I don't know whether they will actually show up, but I plan to invite them anyhow. People like Mickey who is sober after years of drug use. And Charles who was always hustling for any job he could do ... raking a yard, washing a car, trimming trees. Charles lived over on Kings Ferry not far from the Blue Hen. Some of you have given Charles jobs along the way ... and Charles has worked for me and helped out here at St. Cyprian's. However, a few years ago a neighbor ... a racist neighbor who has since passed away ... a neighbor accused Charles of stealing. There was a scuffle and Charles ended up in jail. Charles served his time, and he is out hustling for jobs again, but he is not the same person. He seems broken in spirit, and the last I saw him he had had his toes amputated after a fall on his motor scooter. Charles is one of those persons who is vulnerable to the economic hierarchy of our world, and he has fallen through the cracks.

He is not the only one. Before the pandemic, Eugene ... whose mother lives down the block on Lovett Street ... Eugene was attend worship services with us. Then Eugene got into an argument with Bill ... and shot Bill in the back. Eugene is still in prison, so he won't be able to attend the celebration, but Bill is still a neighbor, and I'll be extending an invitation to him.

Bill was a real bully ... which is why Eugene shot him ... but since that incident Bill is a changed man. Almost every day he can be found helping Mrs. Alexander ... who lives across the street from Pat Balanzatque. Mrs. Alexander fell and broke he hip, so Bill helps her with the heavy lifting and other chores.

And then there is Ford who has lived here his whole life with his mother on Cerro Street. Her house burned down in 2019 so they were both homeless for a while until a new house was built. Ford has a sense of entitlement to the fruits of HIS neighborhood. Seriously, he once liberated a dozen oranges off of George Sage's tree just because ...

And, the man who calls himself Biscuit used to live with Willy on Twine Street. Willy died a while ago, and I don't know where Biscuit now lives, but he is a regular at Dining With Dignity. And Willy ... Biscuit's housemate ... Willy had diabetes and would often catch the Sunshine Bus in front of the Mission House. One day, he got there late and missed the bus, so I offered him a ride. He wanted to go to Winn Dixie and when I got to the intersection of King Street and Route 1 ... ready to turn south to go to the Winn Dixie at the corner of Route 207 and Route 1 ... Willy said, "Oh, Father, I wanted to go to the Winn Dixie north of town." So, we turned north, and when I asked him why that Winn Dixie and not the other one, he said, "Oh, the Winn Dixie on the north end always has fresh shrimp from Mayport, but the other one doesn't." Good information.

There is Stebo, and Herb, and James, and a bunch of others ... each with their own story. Some have homes in the neighborhood, others are homeless living where they can. Yet they are an integral part of the fabric of this community, and they have been important to me in my ministry at St. Cyprian's. So, when I take seriously what Jesus took seriously, I plan to "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind." These neighbors have been a blessing to me, and they belong at this celebration.

This idea is echoed in the Letter to the Hebrews, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." It is a reminder of Abram ... before he was named Abraham ... being visited by three strangers who announce that Sarai ... before she was named Sarah ... would bear a child in her old age. The child, of course, was Isaac. The three strangers were indeed angels from God. And our Judeo-Christian-Muslim heritage is dependent upon Abram's hospitality to strangers.

The will of God is that we see the poor and homeless ... those at the bottom of the hierarchy of commerce and currency of the world ... and we make ourselves aware of their situation. We do not need to look very far to see the plight of the poor clearly. In the midst of one of the wealthiest counties in Florida we see the homeless at every turn. We need to go no farther than Hastings to see systemic poverty, exploitation of migrant workers, and even human trafficking. And regardless of how wealthy one may be in the currency of the world, when one experiences the loss of home, and livelihood, and possibly the loss of close loved ones, that person is, indeed, "poor."

I ... along with many others ... believe in radical hospitality. I believe the first response is to open our eyes, open our hearts, and open our spirits. I suggest that we also open our ears and listen. It is all too easy to assume we know what the other wants or needs from afar as if we were mind readers, and then to respond inappropriately. However, when we listen to another it does more than give us information about their situation, it communicates to them that they are more than just an object ... that we value and respect them as fellow human beings ... our brothers and sisters ... and not just as a "victim."

We are called to invite the "poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" to our table ... and Jesus says we will be blessed. And we are called to respond to the homeless, and broken, and sick wherever they are ... and whoever they are ... because they are our brothers and sisters as well ... and I believe we will be blessed and know many blessings. I know that when I have done so I certainly have been blessed.

In the world we live in those at the top of the hierarchy are at the end of the procession. But Jesus is talking about God's kingdom ... a world as it should be, not as it is. Our faith calls us to live as if God's kingdom is a reality here and now ... not in the future. And our faith calls us to live as if God's kingdom is a reality in this place ... not somewhere else. In God's kingdom those who are exalted by their own ego will be humbled, and those who are humbled by the values of the world will find themselves exalted. Indeed, those at the bottom of the world's hierarchy will find themselves at the top in God's kingdom.

As we take seriously what Jesus took seriously we must recognize that his exhortation to those at the Pharisee's dinner are also words to us. We are called to invite the "poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind" to our table ... and Jesus says we will be blessed. And we are called to respond to the homeless, and broken, and sick wherever they are ... and whoever they are ... because they are our brothers and sisters as well ... and I believe we will be blessed and know many blessings ... I know that I have surely been blessed.

Amen