**God’s Way is Different**

Proverbs 25:1-7; Hebrews 13:1-17; Luke 14: 1-14; Psalm 131 9.1.19

Summary: We sometimes read the Scriptures at its surface level. It isn’t until we dig in and study that we find the riches hidden there. The Scripture where the Pharisee invites Jesus to a Sabbath meal is rich in wisdom if we just search for it.

Ill. Once there was a dinner speaker who was in such a hurry to get to his engagement that when he arrived and sat down at the head table, he suddenly realized that he had forgotten his false teeth.

 Turning to the man next to him he said, ‘I forgot my teeth,’

 The man said, ‘No problem.’ With that he reached into his pocket and pulled out a pair of false teeth. ‘Try these’, he said. The speaker tried them…’Too loose’, he said.

 The man then said, ‘I have another pair – try these.’

 The speaker tried them and responded, ‘They don’t fit right.’

 The man didn’t skip a beat, but said, ‘I have one more pair – try them’.

 The speaker said, ‘Wow, these fit perfectly.’ With that he ate his meal and gave his address. After the dinner meeting was over, the speaker went over to thank the man who had helped him.

 ‘I want to thank you for coming to my aid. Where is your office? I’ve been looking for a good dentist.’

 The man replied, ‘I’m not a dentist. I’m the local undertaker.’

 This humorous story shows that there are sometimes TWO WAYS to look at things…TWO WAYS to understand what seems so obvious on the surface. And our Scripture this morning is somewhat like that.

 ON THE SURFACE, it seems so innocent…Jesus being invited to have a Sabbath meal with the Pharisee and in the Pharisee’s home, no less…and then, Jesus healing a sick man and then Jesus teaching. This seems to be a pleasant story about Jesus and his ministry.

 This morning, I want to help you understand a little better WHAT WAS REALLY TAKING PLACE and then also try to explain what Jesus was trying to tell the people there at the Sabbath meal and also what he is saying to us, today. Basically, **that His Way…God’s Way is clearly different.**

 I’ve come to find, that as I study the Scripture more thoroughly, it becomes not just some words on a page, but it becomes a three dimensional picture, a realistic, almost motion picture-like depiction of the life and times being described.

 I would like to be able to do that for you this morning. I want this story this morning, to become more realistic, so that you will understand some more of WHAT WAS REALLY TAKING PLACE, what were the undercurrents of the feelings and emotions of the people present in this little glimpse of Jesus’ life and ministry. Then, I want us to LEARN from it. I want us to take a little of Jesus and His teachings HOME with us today.

 So where do we start? Let’s set the stage and then get a little background on the **characters in the story**. So, first, let’s set the stage, the Pharisee’s home.

 What was a Pharisee, in the time of Jesus. The Pharisees constituted one of the largest and most important groups of religious leaders during Jesus’ time. They controlled the activities of the synagogues and exercised great control over much of the Jewish population. Their power also came from their good relations with the occupying Roman Empire. The term Pharisee means, ‘separated ones’. That means they separated themselves from the masses and were eventually considered as the progressives of their day, willing to adopt new ideas and adapt the religious law to new situations.

 Having control of the synagogues and then also having some political power with the Roman occupation, the Pharisees became wealthy and their homes were very nice. The outside walls of a Pharisee’s home might meet the street, but just inside those walls, would be an outside courtyard, which would possibly be decorated and very inviting. After leaving the courtyard, you would then enter the home. Most likely you would enter into a large room, one that would be able to hold many people, a room where a dinner party could be held.

 So with this image in your mind, let’s follow Jesus along the street and into the entrance of the courtyard. As Jesus, steps inside the court yard, I imagine that there are many guests standing about the area. The Pharisee himself is standing near the entrance, but also between Jesus and the Pharisee and the others, there is a man sitting on a mat, a man that is grossly swollen. It’s obvious that he has ‘dropsy’, that is, swelling caused by the accumulation of water in the tissues.

 Jesus stops in front of the man, looks at him compassionately and then looks up at the others that have gathered around. They have heard of Jesus. They know of his great healing works, but this is the Sabbath. NO WORK is allowed on the Sabbath by Jewish Law.

 So Jesus says to the Pharisees and the legal experts there, ***‘Well,*** ***is it within the Law to heal a man on the Sabbath day, or not?****’*(all quotes from **The Message**)

 Let’s stop right here for a moment, because we need to get more of the context of what is going on at this moment. What makes this moment so heart thumping, such a hold-your-breath type scene?

 It’s because, this invitation from the Pharisee to have a Sabbath meal was NOT A GENUINE AND SINCERE GESTURE OF HOSPITALITY, no, but rather an attempt on the part of the religious leaders to FIND FAULT with the Son of God.

 If we look at a timeline of the ministry of Jesus, this dinner occasion was but a few weeks before his arrest and crucifixion.

 And so, it came into my mind, WHY would the Pharisees plan this. WHY would they want to find fault with Jesus so badly, that they would invite him to a dinner in order to find fault with him?

 The truth is that talk of a Messiah alarmed and frustrated the temple authorities. They feared that a popular hero like Jesus might arouse another revolt against the Roman government, yet they were hesitant to arrest him for fear of provoking a riot among the people because he had become so popular.

 A man like Jesus presented a real danger. Anyone who aroused talk of a Messiah undermined the peoples’ allegiance to the established religious and political order. Moreover, He endangered the relationship of the religious leaders with the Roman government and with the populace. Such a man must be SILENCED, they reasoned, before He sparked an UPRISING, which the Romans would crush with characteristic brutality.

 This fear of Jesus, brought together an unusual alliance between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who were normally rivals.

 On the one hand, Jesus had pointedly attacked the teachings of the Pharisees and He had openly broken the Sabbath Laws and questioned the validity of many other laws established by the Sadducees. He was undermining the authority of the established Jewish religion.

 The Sadducees, like the Pharisees concluded that Jesus must be SILENCED.

 And so, as Jesus waited for an answer to his question there in the courtyard…**‘Well, *is it within the Law to heal a man on the Sabbath day*, or not?**’ He heard NO answer.

 He turned toward the sick man and healed him and sent him away.

 He then turned back to the others and said:

 *"Is there anyone here who, if a child or animal fell down a well or in a pit, wouldn’t rush to pull him out immediately, not asking whether or not it was the Sabbath?"*

 They were stumped. There was nothing they could say to that, and so, frustrated, they turned and went to enter the house.

 It wasn’t that Jesus was trying purposely to rebel against the Jewish Law. It was because He so desperately wanted to show these people, these religious leaders of the Jews, that **the way of God is clearly DIFFERENT than what they were living and believing and teaching.** He wanted to show them that they should act compassionately and lovingly and righteously according to God’s Law, not their stiff ritualistic Jewish Law.

 So, as they entered the house, Jesus followed. And as He entered, He noticed how the guests were scrambling for places of honor. And Jesus taught them again by saying: (all quotes from **The Message** translation):

 *"When someone invites you to dinner, don’t take the place of honor. Somebody more important than you might have been invited by the host. Then he’ll come and call out in front of everybody, ’You’re in the wrong place. The place of honor belongs to this man.’ Red-faced, you’ll have to make your way to the very last table, the only place left.”*

 *"When you’re invited to dinner, go and sit at the last place. Then when the host comes he may very well say, ’Friend, come up to the front.’* *That will give the dinner guests something to talk about! What I’m saying is, If you walk around with your nose in the air, you’re going to end up flat on your face. But if you’re content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself.”*

 You see, what Jesus was telling these people around the table was that, **a believer in Christ has a completely DIFFERENT idea of self-worth**. Most of the world finds self-worth in what one does or has done, being a doctor, parent, athlete, president, hero or the like. Or, they find their worth in how they are honored by other people, how much money they make, their position, privilege, their awards or their influence, imagined or real.

 But the Christ follower knows God’s law, and realizes that he has a sinful nature, which always wants to go the opposite direction from what God wants. And the believer knows that they always fall short of God’s standards and are forever in need of forgiveness. They realize that they are absolutely unable to save themselves.

 Anyone who follows the way of grace and righteousness understands that we do not deserve any honor from God, because our sin and rebellion merit us only death and hell, and that by understanding and accepting these things, it humbles us. But, we also understand that through our broken and contrite spirits, and by God’s Grace, we know that God loves us and wants to save us. In fact, we meant so much to Him that He sacrificed His own Son, sending him to suffer and die on the cross to pay our sin debt.

 So how do Christ followers treat themselves? We know that without God’s Grace, we are nothing, and so we, who have been given Christ’s perfection, we humble ourselves and put others first, the same way Jesus did when he healed the man of dropsy.

 **God’s way is different.**

 Let’s return now to the dinner, because Jesus has more to teach us. Jesus says in our Scripture (all quotes from **The Message** translation):

 *Then He turned to the host. "The next time you put on a dinner, don’t just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors, the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks*.

 What Jesus is seeing at this dinner is selfishness, opportunistic manipulation, and hoped for favors. What He saw was not right. What He saw was unrighteous thoughts, words and deeds. And so, Jesus taught again showing them that by the Grace of God, your thoughts, your words, and your deeds become different. By doing good without expecting anything in return, your life becomes unselfish, giving and truly righteous in God’s sight.

 So how does a Christ Follower treat others? Jesus encourages us to do good for those who cannot repay us in kind, whether it’s feeding the hungry, clothing the poor, or helping the handicapped.

 Living righteously is not easy, it is DIFFERENT from what we are taught in this world. Our world has us conditioned to not do anything for nothing. Our sinful nature doesn’t like the ‘wasted effort’ of helping people who can’t help us.

 But you see, **God’s Way is DIFFERENT,** isn’t it.

 Oh, there’s one last thing Jesus has to say at this dinner with the Pharisee. So let’s return to the dinner party. In my mind’s eye, I see those sitting around the table there in the Pharisee’s house, each thinking their own thoughts about what Jesus has already said. They listen to his last words before he gets up from the table to leave (from **The Message** translation):

 He says…*if you will do what I have taught you…You’ll be—and experience—a blessing. Those you help won’t be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God’s people."*

 Jesus here is telling the dinner guests…and He is telling us, too, that **we will be blessed for the love we show and give to others**. We will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. He is telling us that GOD NOTICES our righteous living and He tells us that our reward and our treasure is in heaven.

 As Jesus stands, and walks from the Pharisee’s home that day, 2000 years ago, as the dinner guests watch him leave, what do you think they were thinking?

 Oh, there might have been some in that group of Jewish leaders and legal experts that might have really heard what He was saying. They might have seen a glimpse of God’s way that day, but we all know how most of them saw Jesus. To them, He was speaking REBELLIOUSLY. To them He was speaking FOOLISHLY, to them, He was someone who needed to be SILENCED.

 Jesus says to us as believers today: accept the fact that we are sinners, become humble, do good for others, live righteously in accordance with God’s will and then Jesus promised, He promised that we would be rewarded for our Righteousness.

 Just as there are two explanations for a man to carry three sets of false teeth, we find today in our Scripture that there are two ways to live:

 The way of the world

 Or a **different way… a righteous way…God’s Way**.

**Let us pray:** Gracious Lord, thank You for Your faithfulness in providing for those who follow Your way righteously. We know that we will face difficult times sooner or later. Even the strong may weaken, but You are faithful to meet our every need. When You bless us so abundantly, remind us to share those blessings with those less fortunate, so they too can experience Your power in their lives. Father, we continue to do Your work expecting no material reward. Our reward comes from You, for You are quick to bless us. Help us to live righteously in Your sight, Lord. In Jesus name. Amen.