

Sermon for the Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost, Year C
01.ix.2007, 08:30, Spoken Eucharist; 10:00 *ELW* Service of the Word
Proverbs 25:6-7; Psalm 112; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1,7-14
Saint James the Apostle Evangelical Lutheran Church / Brogue, Pennsylvania

J. J. !

Grace to you and peace from Him Who is and Who was
and Who is to come. ✍ Amen.

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a 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. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

--Luke 14:12-14

Apart from the prestige, fame or at least notoriety His presence at the fancy society banquet remembered in today's Gospel might have brought His host, Jesus could have been speaking of Himself when He suggested a revised guest list for the next Pharisee feed. After all, Jesus and His band of followers were not and would not be in a position to reciprocate the hospitality that had been

extended to them. Except for the feeding of the five thousand men plus unnumbered women and children, the Evangelists tell us of only one meal that Our Lord hosts, and it was to be His last.

He was one of the poor Himself. Having invited one poor guest, Jesus challenges His Rabbinical host to make a habit of opening his house and his heart to those marginalized by their poverty or their disability. And—who knows?—maybe His host that day *did* begin to feed the needy as his own sons and daughters, as his own brothers and sisters and to have joy in so doing. Anything would be better than wasting good food on a bunch of prosperous, social-climbing guests! Rabbinical lore is full of stories of holy Rabbis down through history who did just that, the Jewish equivalents of our Saint Francis of Assisi

and so many other Saints who carried out the injunction of today's Gospel both in spirit and to the letter.

What is it like to be the recipient of hospitality one can never pay back? As a Pastor of the Church, I have experienced such hospitality time and again. I think especially of the last three months of my pastorate in Germany. Separated from my family, trying to organize a trans-Atlantic move by myself, and still with all the duties of a large parish to perform, so many members stepped up in small ways and large to show me kindness, often connected with food. One would bring me a supply of homemade soup every few days. Others would organize my Sunday luncheons so that I never spent a Sunday afternoon alone. A nobleman from a neighboring parish invited me to preach and preside at my last Sunday morning service in his family's castle chapel, where I

baptized the infant son of a forester whose family had served the nobleman's family for most of their 700-year reign in that village, and afterward I was brought into the family's private dining quarters where I was served a delicious hot meal on a cold December day with good company and conversation through the afternoon. Can I ever repay such kindness in kind? Hardly! But I always have had an eye peeled for strangers in a strange land, such as I was, such as our dear brother, Pastor Mechizedek Mbilinyi was when he studied among us and preached the Gospel among us during a sojourn away from his family much longer than I ever had to endure. Where there is love, the one who is today a beggar, who today sits in 'the lowest place,' as Our Lord says in the first part of today's Gospel, can at another moment experience the royalty, the majesty of the Kingdom of God by giving to others as we

have first received. And so the gift keeps growing and finding its way by twists and unexpected turns around the world, from Germany, for example, to Pennsylvania, to Tanzania and beyond.

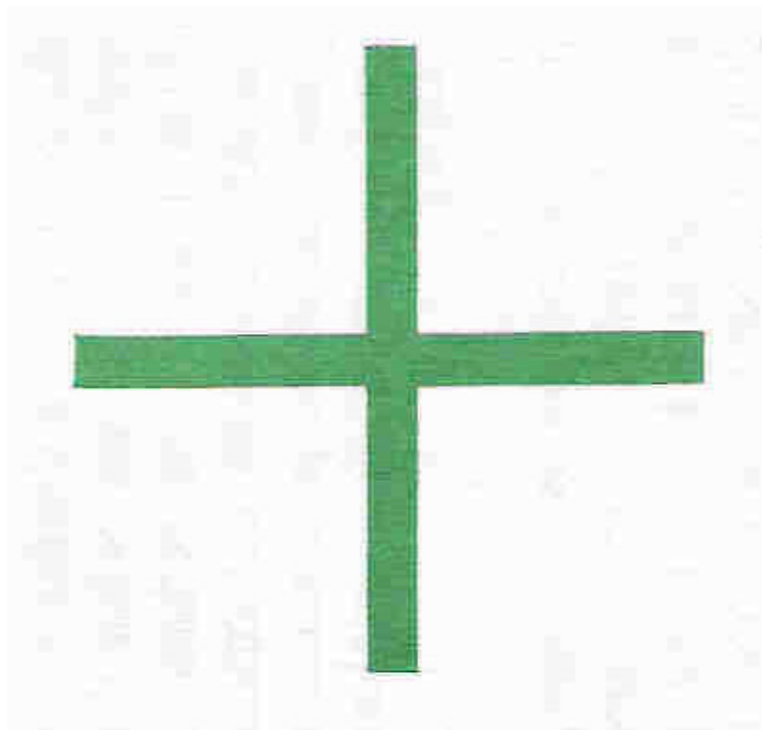
I wonder whether the Rabbi that gave that banquet in today's Gospel realized the royalty of his Guest. Perhaps He did. Perhaps he saw past the homespun tunic and sunburned features and recognized in those words Jesus had to say to him the Ruler and Host of all. *We* certainly should recognize our Host, the One Who invites us to this banquet, *we* the halt and lame and blind of both body and spirit, *we* who can never, ever repay Him for the cost at which He feeds us with His very own broken Body and His very own innocent blood.

The very fact of His royal gift and the very fact of His royal invitation should lead us to realize the equally

true nobility of our calling as Christians, for it *is* noble, to open our doors of generosity to precisely those who *cannot* repay us, but who are also those who can and who by the power of the Holy Spirit *will*, in some way and at some time, give to someone else out of that same nobility of heart. There is a family in our parish, and by ‘parish’ I mean not our congregation but the community in which we are called to serve. Our Council President and other lectors have brought this family’s needs to our attention before, a family facing a surgical emergency and the almost daily challenge of simply providing for the bare necessities. Some of you have responded out of that kindness Christ first showed you, some with canned food or fresh produce from the garden, some with household dry goods, some by purchasing fresh meat and milk to take to this family’s home. Much, much more is needed. I invite you to give

for them, precisely because they cannot repay, just as *you* have received so richly from the compassionate heart of God and will forevermore. ✍️ Amen.

Now to Him Who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made of us a kingdom, priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever! ✍️ Amen.



S. D. G. !