

Guess who's coming to dinner. A sermon preached at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George on March 6, 2016 by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Lessons: MATTHEW 26:26-30

I CORINTHIANS 11:23-26

In 1967, a ground breaking movie directed by Stanley Kramer, starred Spencer Tracy (it was the last film he made before his death 17 days following the completion of the film's shooting) Katherine Hepburn who won the best actress Oscar for her performance

A relatively new actor called Sidney Poitier who had already won an academy award

And a new actress Katherine Houghton, who played in the film the daughter of Spencer Tracy and Katherine Hepburn

The daughter has invited her fiancée – a successful doctor played by Poitier – to meet her parents before she plans to fly to Switzerland, marry him and join him in his medical practice.

The movie's name comes from a key line delivered by the household's maid and cook...*Guess who's coming to dinner.*

To watch the movie today, it is hard to remember that in 1967, interracial marriage was not just frowned upon, but illegal in many American states.

It is said that during the movie's first run, the movie played a significant role in overturning laws in 17 states in which interracial marriages were to that point illegal.

We have certainly come far since 1967 but we have a long way yet to travel in terms of attitudes on race and culture.

So, the "dinner" of this 1967 had an important impact beyond that of Oscars and theatres

However, it comes nowhere close to the importance of the meal in which we shall participate in a short time.

The portion from Paul's letter Faith read undergirds the origins and the proper behavior that is to undergird the "dinner", the meal

It is says Paul to be a time of commemoration

This is not some spur of the moment barbeque and salads.

This meal has its origins in the events of the Exodus out of Egypt.

Passover – when God brought the people out of slavery to liberty,

From sorrow to joy,

From darkness to great light

From servitude to redemption.

Jesus, says Paul, puts an added spin on this

Through broken bread, and shared wine, Jesus proclaims himself to be the Lamb of God
 Jesus “plays forward” God’s actions for the Israelites in Egypt.

The blood of lambs on door posts to ward off the angel of death

Becomes Jesus’ blood which will protect us from eternal separation from God.

So says Paul, when you come to this meal, this dinner, this supper, you are *commemorating a meal of long ago*,

You are also *proclaiming* what God has done for each one of us for all time.

You are saying by your participation and action – this meal is temporary.

Someday the person of Jesus himself will stand before us

The symbols will pass away and Jesus will be physically present with us

We know the story of the setting of the first Lord’s Supper.

We know as readers of the story that this would be Jesus’ final meal not only with his closest friends but also his final meal before his death.

I have therefore always found a special poignancy with verse 30

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Let us imagine for the next few moments, we are there at that Last Supper.

For it is quite probable that the families of the disciples were also gathered for the “dinner”
See yourself as one of the disciples’ second cousins.

The focus though is on the 12 and Jesus
I wonder what each of the 12 are thinking
I wonder what Jesus is thinking
I wonder each’s body language and facial expressions are conveying to another.

Who is coming to this dinner?

Over there – you hear him, you know the voice long before you see him.

PETER – bold and outspoken

Loud, eager and aggressive.

A big man with huge hands – the hands of a fisherman.

It is often said that Peter is just too much in a small room.

Gosh, he is already stridently commenting – revving his mouth, while his brain is still in neutral.

JOHN – he must be one of those sitting right next to Jesus.

John is quieter – Still waters run deep you have been told.

What’s the name of the one, who looks as if he is on high alert – waiting for something to happen?

...Simon...Simon the Zealot he is called
Well, if he is, then the Romans believe he is
nothing more than a terrorist – why has Jesus
chosen him, you wonder.

It's clear that he looks as if he can handle himself
if there is trouble.

Is that a knife you see as his cloak moves open for
a moment?

Neat – concealed weapons at a Passover feast....

THOMAS – he is sitting right in front of
your field of vision – his back is toward you.
Some have told you that he is the group's
worrywart. "how can I be sure" is his middle
name.

He is the first to suggest what could go wrong
with everything Jesus suggests.

A pessimist –

There is no good news –just hard work to follow
Jesus.

No wine, no special food, no being together is
going to loosen Thomas up.

MATTHEW –so he is the tax collector you
have heard about who is part of the inner circle of
Jesus' followers.

You wonder – why has Jesus chosen one such as
Matthew – society's unprincipled scoundrels.

JUDAS----so that is what the group's banker
looks like

You wonder, is he like Simon the Zealot carrying a concealed weapon.

You have been told that he is really cheap with the group's purse – fearing to share it with others, even though it is not HIS money.

As you look around and listen, a couple of things stand out.

This inner circle of Jesus' followers *is actually quite ordinary. There is nothing outwardly special about any of them.*

Not one of them is a renowned scholar – actually quite the opposite

They are all Galileans – foreigners – and as such seem to be a bit uncouth. Bible time hayseeds!

You have heard as well that this group can be extremely slow witted and somewhat spiritually thick.

From what you know about the disciples of Jesus, you know they are prone to mistakes, mis-statements, wrong attitudes, lapses of faith and bitter failure

They struggle with pride and arrogance.

Hey, they are a lot like anyone here in the gathering in the upper room.

We are not so different – they and you.

Actually, they are quite ordinary.

The same is true today – the disciples in that upper room,

The generations of believers since are made up more of ordinary people than bright shining stars.

The superstars are there,
 But they are the exception not the norm!
 The norm for believers remain people who wrestle with fears, doubts, uncertainties;
 People who are prone to mistakes and lapses in faith.

They are not perfect – they are human – very human and earthy most of them!

Like them, we too often struggle with pride and arrogance, me first, being in self.

Ordinary people through whom God would accomplish extraordinary things!!

The other truth about those in the Upper Room immediately around Jesus is that each has been chosen by the Lord to follow him.

You did not choose me, but I chose you says

Jesus in John's gospel (John 15:16)

We are responding to what God in Christ has already done for us first – chosen us!

Jesus' words in John 15 remind us that the Christian faith is not primarily about us DOING something for Jesus.

Rather the Christian faith is saying, God has done all this first, how then shall we live and respond

Guess who is coming to dinner,
 then, this meal as recorded in Matthew – a
 pessimist,
 Frady cats who ran away when things got
 difficult for Jesus
 A self-important, boaster who always had to
 speak first, even if he had little or nothing to say;
 A suspected terrorist who saw in Jesus a way to
 overthrow the Roman army of occupation.
 A hated tax collector,
 More than one hypocrite
 A betrayer
 A pragmatist and sometimes defeatist.

Guess who is coming to this meal this morning?

Those who wrestle with doubts about the Risen
 Christ.
 Faithful, but struggling wet-blankets
 Those who major in minors in the faith and in life
 in general and never seem to be able to follow
 through for very long!
 Those like Philip who are unable to grasp the big
 picture of Jesus;’ power, person and grace –
 because the minutiae of life is so burdensome to
 them.
 Those who are angry at a system that continues
 to oppress them
 Those who feel marginalized because of the jobs
 they do

Those who are disillusioned with Jesus – the promises he makes seem too good to be true. Those whose arrogance and pride prevent them from hearing another’s opinion and view. Their ears are closing and their hearts have already begun to harden.

But they are here at the table for this meal, this dinner

And let’s not forget about the hypocrites – they are here at the table as well.

Guess who is coming to this dinner then – WE ARE

We are here because we have been invited.

We come, not because we have to fulfill some test of membership

We come because like Jesus’ followers of generations of believers before us, we NEED TO BE HERE AT THIS MEAL.

For we are broken in some way, shape or form

We all carry wounds and hurts in this life

Wounds caused by pride and arrogance,

\ wounds from old hurts and unhealed memories

Wounds that fester because we continually pick

at them – refusing to let them go into Jesus’ hands and care

Wounds because we cannot accept that we are

part of the **all in all have fallen short of the glory of God.**

Wounds caused by compromising and denying
our commitment to the Lord

Wounds caused by rationalizing mistakes and
bad behavior

Wounds and hurts caused by worry and angst.

We have come to the dinner this morning
because we are wounded and hurting;

We have come also because the supper reminds
us of the extent of God's care and love to each of
us

We are never treated by the Lord in ways that we
think we deserve.

Yes, there is a time of reckoning and a time of
judgement.

But there is grace, forgiveness, love and
compassion – witness and read those post
resurrection stories of how Jesus works to bring
the disciples back,

Not so he can get even – but so that he can
personally and powerfully remind them that they
are loved and forgiven. That is lavish generosity
to those first disciples

Such lavish generosity is still given today when
we return to him

But we need to hear and respond to the invitation
Jesus offers,

So guess who Jesus has invited to this meal this
morning

Guess who Jesus invites to every such meal, you,
me – all of us

*Come,
You who have much faith
And you who have little faith
You who have been here often
And you who have not been for a long time.
You who have failed.
Come, not because it is I who invite you:
It is our Lord.
It is his will that those who want him
Should meet him here.*

Thanks be to God