

SERMON: "SO THAT MY HOUSE WILL BE FULL" – LUKE 14: 15 - 23

Disability Awareness Sunday is taking place on 25 August 2019, such a worthy and treasured dedication and truly a highlight on our calendar annually. Disability awareness needs to be a priority in every Christian faith community and Disability Awareness Sunday is therefore a wonderful platform to ensure that our people with a disability are and feel at home in our churches always.

PRACTICAL CONCEPTS TO FACILITATE AN UNDERSTANDING AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY

- Invite people with different types of disabilities to attend the service at your church on 25/08/19 (Please ensure that your facility is accessible and user friendly for this visit);
- Invite persons with a disability (or their families), to share their story or testimony;
- Invite people with a disability to facilitate parts of the sermon;
- Invite choirs, musicians, poets etc. to perform at the service
- Invite congregants to "experience" something of the world of a person with a disability, for example attending the service blindfolded to experience not being able to see, attend the service in a wheelchair, put a hand in a glove and do not use this hand for a specific time, etc.



DISABILITY AWARENESS SUNDAY 2019: "... SO THAT MY HOUSE WILL BE FULL." (LUKE 14:15-23)

The Parable of the Great Banquet

¹⁵When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."

¹⁶Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

¹⁸"But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

¹⁹ “Another said, ‘I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.’

²⁰ “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’

²¹ “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

²² “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

²³ “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, **so that my house will be full.** ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

The well-known Parable of the Great Banquet... This is the third periscope in Luke where Jesus is conversing with a group of Pharisees. And the interaction between Jesus and the Pharisees is quite entertaining, as the Pharisees were keeping a close eye on Jesus, watching His every step to hopefully witness Him being out of line or acting against their Jewish laws and regulations.

However, Jesus was clever and knew exactly how to speak to the Pharisees in order for them to actually listen to Him. In fact, Jesus’ approach to the Pharisees and the way in which He presented Himself cultured a surprisingly receptive and teachable spirit among the Pharisees at that time. Without them even realizing it themselves, their antagonistic attitude and confronting intentions towards the Messiahs made way for curiosity, interest and even respect for His wisdom and insights. This approach of Jesus is integral to the meaning of these parables, since what He had to say was definitely not a message the Pharisees would want to hear.

In the first periscope (Luke 14:1-6), Jesus cures a man from his illness on the Sabbath. With their strict laws about the Sabbath, the Pharisees might not have agreed with the man’s healing on this holy day. However, being confronted with what they were going to do if a child or cattle of theirs had fallen into a well on the Sabbath, the Pharisees have no foot to stand on and accept Jesus’ miracle on the Sabbath as ethically and religiously correct. In its own way, the Sabbath became a day of exclusion, limiting the expression of compassion to the rules and regulations of the Jewish society. God however, shows through Jesus that He desires compassion always.

In the second periscope (Luke 14:7-14) Jesus teaches the Pharisees about being humble and doing things for other people without expecting favours in return. Whereas it would be humiliating to be requested by the host to stand off your honourable position to someone more important than yourself, it will be extremely rewarding to be invited by the host to join him at a more honourable, reserved space allocated by the master himself. Jesus tells His audience to select the guests at their functions carefully: inviting less privileged people will ensure sincere intentions of the host, rather than hidden agendas, motives and expectations to receive something in return.

Jesus ensures them that such people, doing good deeds for others on earth, will be rewarded by God in their eternal life. This text is nothing less than an obvious call to humility – a characteristic that God desires from His children. In verses 13 and 14 Jesus indicates the kind of people that we need to invite in our parties or feasts. These two verses can be read in contrast with verses 7 “Jesus noticed how some of the guests were choosing best places...

The Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24) provokes different emotions. On the one side it is the sad reality of a selected group of people (the Israelites) who missed the opportunity of God's blessing, because they did not recognize the importance of God's invitation to them. On the other hand, it is the celebratory truth of the extension of God's invitation to all of society. Almost understandable to the Jews at that time, Jesus' invitation includes even the most vulnerable, needy and humble people one could find. The poor, lame and blind – certainly the exact people no well-off Jew would choose to be identified with. God's grace and mercy was not exclusively meant for the Jewish people anymore and this parable clearly indicates just how vast and extended God's invitation had become.

See, how Jesus' work in these three periscopes contradicts the beliefs of the Pharisees radically:

- The inclusion in God's Kingdom is not dependent on strict rules and regulations. It's not about being legalistic; it's about being compassionate (Luke 14:1-6);
- The inclusion in God's Kingdom is not status-bound. Who you are and what you have does not qualify you for sharing in His grace. It's not about being important, rather, it is about being humble (Luke 14:7-14);
- The inclusion in God's Kingdom does not even rely on you being a chosen Israelite anymore. It is not about being chosen, it is about accepting God's invitation (Luke 14:15-24).

Some might argue that the people who were invited later or last were clearly not His first choice. Those same people still do not understand God's Kingdom and grace – it was never about WHEN you are invited, but about ACCEPTING God's invitation. It is this same gift of free will that God blessed us with that will be used by some as an excuse to decline the invitation; yet others will thankfully grab on to this blessed opportunity of becoming part of God's eternal Kingdom. God values the humble and needy. People who recognize their dependence on Him and who know their position are the ones He brings to Himself.

God wants His house to be filled by people who accepted His invitation – not by guests who are forced to attend or have excuses to decline His invitation. His invitation was extended, not because of it being rejected by the original invitees, but because of God's ungraspable love, grace and mercy for the people He has created perfectly. Compassion and humbleness – two remarkable characteristics of people who choose to accept God's invitation. And in my opinion, not coincidentally two of the most valuable faith lessons I have learned from people living with a disability. All glory to our greatest God – may we joyously celebrate God's love and the importance of inclusivity in the church; let His house be full !!

Written by: Dr Anine Fischer, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church and manager of a home for adults with autism in Pretoria.