

The Great Reversal

Luke 13:22-30

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I don't know about you, but over the past couple of weeks I have come to realize that there are a lot of things that I have taken for granted. Things like meeting a friend for coffee. Going to the movies. Sunday lunches with my parents. Going to church.

There are a lot of things I miss a lot of things about worshipping together at Oakdale.

-I miss that time when we greet one another at the start of a service, time that goes way too long but is one of the best parts of our gathering.

-I miss worshipping together in song as the praise team leads us.

-I miss watching the kids go up for the before Kingdom Kids, seeing a sister tug on her brother to sit down or another kid shout out responses to Pastor James' questions.

Those moments make our worship together precious, and I know I am not the only one missing them right now.

In this morning's text, Jesus points out that people are taking their relationship with God for granted. They are taking the fact that they were born into a community of faith or living in a community of faith to mean that they themselves had faith. And because they don't have much faith, or much of a relationship with God, Jesus points out, people are concerned about the wrong things.

We may not know everything that was going on in this morning's passage, but I think we can be fairly certain that Jesus' disciples were taking his presence with them for granted. His followers didn't know it at the time, but as they journeyed to Jerusalem, Jesus was walking to his death. And this conversation between Jesus and his disciples happens in the context of discussions they were having about the kingdom of God. Those following Jesus were wondering what it will be like, who will be there, and who won't.

So someone asks Jesus, "Are only a few people going to be saved?" Now we don't know who asked this question or what their motives were, but we see Jesus that doesn't give a direct response. Instead of answering the question, Jesus flips the script. Jesus says, rather than worrying about how many people will be in the kingdom of God, you should be concerned about whether or not *you* will be there. They're harsh words. But Jesus is, in effect, saying to them, Stop thinking that

because you have religion that somehow means that you have faith. Stop taking your relationship with God for granted. Jesus is asking those following him, "Are you with me?"

And to illustrate what the kingdom of God is like, Jesus draws an image, the image of a house. And because the image of this house communicates a variety of things, so Jesus hones in on a couple of parts of a house to get at the nature of the kingdom of God.

First, Jesus offers the image of a door. Just a regular door. Like most doors, it's narrow. It opens and closes. And it can only let a certain number of people in at a time. It's a door that the owner of the house has the power to open to others. And this door, no one can carry you or drag you through. You are the only one who can choose to walk through it or not. And like any door, the owner of the house can close it when they deem appropriate.

And here Jesus employs a second image from a house, the image of a table. Jesus uses this image, the image of people gathered around a table for a feast, to point out that no one is born into the kingdom of God. Don't think that you belong in this house, around this table, because of the family you were born into. Don't think that you belong here because of the relationship you have with other people who know me. Notice that the owner of the house doesn't just say, "I don't know you". The owner of the house says, "I don't know you like that. I don't know where you've been. You were never with me. So get away from me."

The English translation of this passage that we heard this morning says "Away from me, all you evildoers." In the original Greek text, it literally reads, "Get away from me all you workers of unrighteousness." He's talking about people who, rather than seeking justice, create injustice. People who pursue selfish ambition and vain conceit ahead of the needs of others. And Jesus once again flips the script. In the kingdom of God, those who are last in line will come first. Those who are first will be last. And Jesus illustrates, in this image of a banquet in a house with people watching from the outside, that the distance between heaven and hell is not so far.

There are three things we need to consider in the image that Jesus paints here for his disciples.

First, we need to consider the things that concern us. In this interaction with those closest to him, Jesus points out that the people hanging out with him may not be concerned with the things that concern God. These are the people who have seen and heard Jesus ministry in ways we can only imagine. And the fact that he pointed out to them that they were worried about the wrong things, should strike us. Are we concerned with the wrong things? Are we caught up in our concerns, or are we concerning ourselves with the things that God is concerned with? And when it comes to God's kingdom, are we in or out?

Second, we need to consider whether we are taking for granted what it means to have a relationship with God. Because in relationships, we check in with one another. We listen to each other. We do life together. So Jesus is asking us, all of us, to consider, are we in a real relationship with God?

Or are we relying on a relationship we used to have with God? Or someone else's relationship with God? We need to check ourselves. Because in good relationships our first concern is the best interests of those we love. Our relationship with God is the same way. God has purposes for this world. And God is inviting us to join in the work of achieving those purposes. Purposes of restoration and healing that demonstrate God's love for the world. Are we really living in a way that reflects our love for God?

And third, we need to consider what Jesus is saying here about the kingdom of God. Some of us might read this story and wonder, is this really good news? For some of us, hearing Jesus' words might make us think that the kingdom of God is like an exclusive club, where only a select few may enter and by invitation only, with a bouncer at the door and a secret password needed to enter. Is the kingdom of God really a place with a line of people outside the door, trying their hardest to get into only to find out that they are not welcome there?

To say it succinctly, no. The feast that Jesus describes here is one that the consistent message of Scripture and the life and sacrifice of Jesus demonstrate that *all* are invited to be part of. But not everyone accepts the invitation. Because accepting the invitation is more than merely saying, I'm in. Because not everyone is in. Not everyone is concerned with the kingdom of God because the things of the kingdom of God frankly don't *concern* them.

The kingdom of God is a place where God's purposes come first. And what Jesus is pointing out here is that the people outside are not there because they have been left behind. They are there because they never really wanted to be there in the first place. Their lack of interest in the concerns of God, their lack of a relationship with God, show that. These are the people who might say to God, "Wait, didn't you get my RSVP?" But who Jesus knows never sent it. Does God exclude people? No. Do we choose other things ahead of God and then wonder why we aren't in the right place at the right time? Yes.

In this morning's text, Jesus uses this opportunity to point out that the kingdom of God might not look like what his followers had been imagining. Instead, he points out, it is going to be so much bigger. And the calling of those in God's kingdom is to be disciples. And being disciples means making disciples. That's what makes the kingdom of God so much bigger.

We see here and throughout the gospels that Jesus' concern was for people. For their well-being. For their salvation from the things that were destroying them. For their full restoration to the wholeness that God had created them for. *That* is why he was on that road to Jerusalem.

Luke is the one gospel writer, among Matthew, Mark and John, that speaks of Jesus as a Savior. With one exception--the story of Jesus and the woman at the well in John. And the salvation that Luke points to, the salvation that Jesus offers is not that of a God who cared so much about us that God descended to live among us, as one of us. To feel the pain of rejection. To know the sorrow of grief. To know the loneliness of waking up alone. Who walked with his disciples. Who cared for them. Who patiently responded to their questions with stories. And who experienced the most violent and humiliating of deaths so that death would never, ever be the end of the story for us.

The kingdom of God that Jesus ushered in is so much bigger than you or I can imagine. It was definitely bigger than Jesus' disciples could imagine. In this morning's text we read that Jesus offers his disciples a glimpse of who is going to be around that table at the feast at the kingdom of God. There are the usual suspects, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets. And there are also those who the disciples probably hadn't suspected, people from the north south east and west, every corner of the earth, because Jesus wanted to make sure that they knew that God doesn't play favorites. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and the prophets all experienced that being chosen by God is never about us. Being chosen by God is always about God's purpose to save and restore those who desperately need saving and restoring.

If we look ahead to the stories after this one in the book of Luke, we see Jesus elaborate in several more parables about the kingdom of God. One of them really drives this point home. It is the parable of the lost son. You might remember that story in Luke 15. It is the story of two sons. One son who rejects his father's love, walks away, loses everything, and in his humiliation, comes crawling home for acceptance.

The other son is the one who remains in his father's home, who continues to faithfully serve his father, and who is taken back by his father's unconditional acceptance of his brother when he returns.

Commentators invite us to consider, who is the prodigal son here--is it the one who ran away and returned to receive his father's salvation. Or is it the one who took his father's love and provision for granted. Who thought he somehow earned his father's love or deserved more love than his brother. As if a father could play favorites, as if a parent could love one child more than another.

Again, we see that the distance between heaven and hell is not so far.

God chooses us that we might choose God. God's providence is real.

So if we are not supposed to concern ourselves with who is in and who is out, but with whether we are in or out, how do we know?

In his *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, Louis Berkhof, the late president of Calvin Seminary and one-time pastor of Oakdale Park Church, clearly explains what the consistent message of Scripture is regarding salvation.

"The promises to us, God's covenant of grace, is not a covenant of works; it requires no work for the purpose of reward. However, God's covenant with us does make requirements of us. We earn nothing by meeting the demands of this covenant, but by participating in it, we put ourselves in the way for God to bless us as God has promised to. I love how Berkoh describes that. We put ourselves in the way. Berkof continues, It should be kept in mind that even the things that this covenant requires of us are covered by the promises of God: God gives us all that God requires of us. The two things that God demands of those who are part of this covenant relationship are a) that we accept the covenant and covenant promises by faith, and thus enter the life of the covenant; and b) that as a new creation in Christ, we seek God's way by pursuing God in ways that are obedient to God because God's mercies are new every single morning."

Friends, as we enter another week filled with many uncertainties, may we never take God's presence with us for granted. May we never take the salvation we have in Jesus Christ for granted. May we never take our relationship with God for granted. We may be isolated from one another physically, but our calling remains the same. We are called to BE disciples. We are called to MAKE disciples. Because God IS good, all the time. So let's keep putting ourselves in the way of God's mercy and grace. Amen.