

Radical Christian Hospitality: God’s Invitation and Our Response

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I've always been concerned about following proper protocols at parties hosted by others. My daughter often reminds me to observe meal etiquette and avoid giving discomfort to the host. However, my challenge is understanding the cultural etiquette differences. In my tradition, eating with hands and not using knives is the norm. What are these forks and knives for? And when do I use them? I am not sure when or how to use them in order. Neither do I understand the placement of utensils, and I want to learn some key rules for attending parties. Instead of enjoying the company of other people, I most often felt uncomfortable and unconfident when attending parties. Although there are banquet norms in my tradition, I am now in a different setting. I have found out that I shouldn't unfold my napkin until the host does, should start using utensils from the outside in, and shouldn't push my plate away when finished. I learned to place my knife and fork at ten and four o'clock angles to show I'm done, not to leave a used spoon in a cup, and to wait until dinner is over before laying down my napkin. Despite memorizing these rules, I rarely follow them—either out of nervousness or because adapting to a new culture is a gradual process to me. The worst part is that I often spill food or smudge my shirt. My children tease

me, saying, “Dad’s shirt never misses a bite at a party.” I asked myself why I should bother about seeing myself as a belittling person and looking at me as an excluded one in a crowd that includes people having commonalities among themselves? What are those commonalities that include people with etiquette, and the fear of uncommonalities that exclude me? Why should I be concerned about the in-group and out-group dynamics involved in a given social relationship? The answer is clear: I want to maintain a status that would make me ineligible if I don’t stick to the in-group dynamics of a social gathering. I am asking myself again whether my adherence to the hospitality etiquette would elevate me to a higher social status, and whether I intended to have one. Why should I bother about the social perception of my existence, and if so, why should I not think otherwise, namely, humbling myself and being content with what I am equipped with socially, politically, and culturally? My concern is how well I will be included when my social perception of myself compels me to emulate a higher social status, no matter whether I have the privilege or not.

A parallel thought process is now going on in my mind. I wonder how Jesus would have felt when the leader of the Pharisees invited him. Did he also care about adhering to the dining etiquette? First, we have to find an answer to the question of whether the leader of the Pharisees extended an invitation to the person suffering from dropsy. Most likely not, because he would have been considered unclean and

would have been excluded from the list of invitees. If that is the case, then it was Jesus, one of the guests, who brought the sick person with him to the banquet. Second, was it an occasion to bring healing to a sick person when a banquet is hosted? Certainly not, because the leader of the Pharisees might have hosted a dinner to demonstrate his wealth, prestige, and community support to Jesus. On the other hand, Jesus saw the banquet as an opportunity to teach the leader the meaning of the heavenly banquet, where the protocols favor the outsiders, the strangers, the outcasts, and the vulnerable. His definition of the kingdom banquet is all about extending an open invitation to all, where the protocols are subverted. His invitation is not to the privileged, and hence not an invitation to occupy the high seats, but to the one to occupy the low seats in the banquet. I now wonder how absurd I must seem when I become nervous attending parties. My concern then is primarily to elevate myself to the level of the special guests and to merge with the common aspects of the status groups by strictly following the table etiquette. My primary concern seems to be being seated in a special row and being perceived as a special person, and hence, I am worried about the protocols. We listen to the Gospel reading in which Jesus was not only confident but also subverted the protocols that were to be followed by both hosts and guests. By subverting the usual practices and behavior patterns followed by the powerful and aristocrats, Jesus redefined the meaning of hospitality, radically altering everything associated with it. Now, I try to keep myself

low at a banquet, unmindful of the etiquette, after I come to know how and why Jesus broke all protocols when attending a party hosted by the leader of the Pharisees.

I tried to reconstruct the banquet scene in today's standard. The table must have been a magnificent one, centered in a hall illuminated by a chandelier, with servants at attention, an impressive centerpiece adorning the table, and champagne chilled and ready to be served. I imagine the kind of seat that Jesus would have occupied when dining with the Pharisees and the sort of dining etiquette he might have followed as a guest. What would have been the reactions of the host, the leader of the Pharisees, who invited Jesus to dine with him on the sabbath day when Jesus stirred up trouble in a banquet hosted in honor of him? Why was Jesus asking us to include the excluded when we host someone in a banquet? Let us revisit the previous chapter in Luke 13:28-29, where Jesus discusses the messianic banquet and connects it with today's reading, which involves the healing of a man with dropsy. There is a thematic similarity between them on the issue of who is included and who is excluded at God's banquet in His Kingdom. The healing of the man with dropsy at the dining table on the day of the sabbath must be correlated with the banquet hosted by God in God's Kingdom. This passage takes us beyond the question of healing the sick on the sabbath day because this instance of healing is the fourth one recorded in Luke's Gospel. His authoritative healing of the man with an unclean spirit in

chapter 4, the healing of the man with the withered hand in chapter 6, and the healing of the disabled, bent woman in chapter 13 were the preceding instances where Jesus healed the sick on the Sabbath. This particular instance of healing on the Sabbath is more significant due to its location, the audience, and the subsequent discussion, which helps us understand the issue of God's radical hospitality, the invitees, and our response to His invitation.

God's radical hospitality is concerned with His care for the outsider who is culturally, socially, and religiously excluded from the list of invitees to the banquet. God redefines His preferential treatment of the outsider, granting them a position of honor, access, and belonging to His table, which is otherwise reserved for the in-group dynamics of the privileged group. This is where Jesus' radical restructuring of the Kingdom's social structure draws our attention because God wants this restructuring to happen on this earth. Radical hospitality of Jesus primarily includes an invitee list of the poor, the disabled, and socially and religiously marginalized to his banquet. This is the hospitality of God's Kingdom, and it has nothing to do with segregated commensality. It is a matter of a reciprocal relationship that is honorable to God.

In most cultural practices, especially in my Indian context, the meal, dining habits, and hospitality protocols serve as a means of creating social and economic barriers between those "within" and those "outside." We may think that dining as

such does not exhibit any manifest function, but what we have to acknowledge is that it does serve a latent function of exclusion, rejection, shame, and differential treatment of others. This is where the parable of the banquet gains its significance. The parable of the banquet has a message to both the host and the guest. It has a two-pronged attack. Jesus' message is first given to the guests. Whoever is thought to be a favored friend may find disgrace and denial, and he may be asked to take the lowest place. But those who humbled themselves and took the lowest place in the banquet may be invited to come and occupy the highest place. His message is then directed to the hosts, directing them on preparing the guest list or the invitee list. Jesus insisted on including outsiders on the guest list. The outsiders that Jesus talked about are the guests who were not invited to the banquet, and who occupy the back seat at the banquet. The appearance of the man with dropsy at the table provides a tangible example of those who are not invited and are not vying for a place of honor but will be assured of honor in the messianic final day banquet. This advice to hosts and guests is intended to address and set right the unequal, unjust, and disproportionate economic, social, and political opportunities in the world. His mission in this world is to reverse the social situation of the poor and the rich, the low and the mighty. Inclusion at the dinner table in this world is seen as a juxtaposition with inclusion at the eschatological messianic banquet and the redeeming of the Kingdom of God on earth.

A banquet typically offers a collective and festive experience of joy, thanks to the response shown by the guests to the host. Therefore, it is a matter of concern for the host about the success of the banquet. It all depends on whether the acceptance or rejection of the invitation is made. The host will not invite an enemy or an unknown person to the dinner. Even a rare acquaintance is not a qualification to be a guest. Only those who have a bond or a strong connection with the host will be invited. Naturally, friends, family members, or those of the same economic status having a business connection will be included in the guest list. Because of the close relationship between the guests and the host, any refusal of an invitation from a known person is a more serious matter than a stranger's refusal to accept the invitation. Refusing an invitation from a known person involves an intentional element. It cannot be construed as an act of forgetfulness or negligence. Additionally, for the banquet to be considered a success, it is not just the attendance of the invitees that matters, but also their involvement in mutual conviviality and forming associations is essential. Non-attendance at the dinner is a sign of fractured friendship. This is what is reflected in the banquet parable. God's grace is manifested as an open invitation to all. What is our response to his invitation to the kingdom banquet? The joy and celebration of the banquet await us. God never wants to exclude anyone. His invitation includes everyone. More specifically, he is inviting the outsiders, the poor, the marginalized, the outcast. God wants the banquet to be

an occasion for joy and happiness. His banquet is not intended to fulfill individual spiritual delight and enrichment. His kingdom banquet is a corporate collective experience of joy and happiness. To what extent we respond to God's invitation determines how we react as guests to His heavenly kingdom and honor His invitation. We are called to share our lives with strangers. This sharing of life is not simply about being nice to those who cannot repay us. It is about our own healing from a disease that can be terminal. We must learn that at God's table, vying for position or following protocols are unnecessary, because we are all welcome. Jesus offers his host, the guests, and us a deeper understanding of what it means to be successful in the kingdom banquet and the extent of collective joy that everyone will experience. While the Pharisees are pushing to the head of a rectangular table, Jesus' table is a circle where no person is better than another. The nature of our guest list, who is on it and who is not, has everything to do with whether we are being the church of Christ.

Here is where radical hospitality begins: not with us, but with God. Before we can welcome others, we must first allow ourselves to be accepted by God — to drink deeply from His living water, to be filled with His grace, and to remember His faithfulness. Hospitality flows out of abundance, and that abundance comes only from Him. Our response is to embody that same generosity by welcoming the stranger, lifting up the lowly, and living as a community shaped by humility,

gratitude, and love. Jesus flips the idea of a banquet upside down: “Take the lowest place.” And then He goes even further: Don’t just invite your friends and relatives who can repay you. Invite the poor, the disabled, the lame, the blind — those who cannot repay you. That is radical. That is disruptive. That is Kingdom living. Hospitality, for Jesus, is not transactional — it is transformational. It is not about getting something back — it is about reflecting the generous love of God. Let’s pause here: Who in our own community is invisible? Who are the ones who cannot repay? The single parent, the refugee, the unhoused neighbor, the lonely elder, the student far from home? These are the ones Jesus is asking us to bring into our circle, into our homes, into our hearts. Radical hospitality is not just about occasionally offering a dinner invitation. It is a way of life — continual praise, continual generosity, continual love. It means our homes are open, yes, but also that our calendars, our wallets, and our hearts are open. True hospitality is a living sacrifice — not something that earns us honor, but something that pleases God because it mirrors His own generosity.

And finally, let us remember Jesus’ words in Matthew 25, which talk about the radical Christian hospitality. “Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you are the blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.’” Our

place in God's eternal kingdom is connected to the place we make in our own lives for those who are hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, in prison, or a stranger to us. God's invitation into the Kingdom is tied to Christian hospitality in life. Our response to His invitation is to give the experiences of the poor and the stranger to Jesus through our ministry. May God help us to do our ministry to bring the kingdom banquet on this earth.