

Life-Giving Lessons:
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Excuses and Unintended Consequences
Luke 14:15-22
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INTRO: The setting for the telling of this parable is in fact, a dinner party in the home of a leader of the Pharisees (v.14:1). Jesus had been invited to eat a meal on the Sabbath, and "they were watching him closely".

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. ²⁴I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

No doubt about it. Each and every one of us have done it. And we have done it intentionally. We have made excuses. So here's a plan for a "No Excuse Sunday".

Cots will be placed in the foyer for those who say, "Sunday is my only day to sleep."

We will have steel helmets for those who say, "the roof will cave in if I ever come to church."

Blankets will be furnished for those who think the church is too cold and fans for those who think the church is too hot.

One section will be devoted to trees and grass for those who like to see God in nature.

Finally, the sanctuary will be decorated with both Christmas poinsettias and Easter lilies for those who have never seen the church without them!

No doubt you are familiar with "the dog ate my homework" excuse. Or "the check is in the mail" excuse, and countless others. I read an article in Psychology Today (online) by professor Susan Whitborne who studies the psychology behind why – otherwise honest people make lie, procrastinate, or make excuses.

Her interest in this topic began when she read an article which accused college professors of killing off the grandparents. That is to say, the author of this article reported that the most typical student excuse for missed deadlines for papers and exams, was the purported death of a grandparent. Some students have, according to this article, killed off not just 4 but as many as 8 or 10 grandparents in the course of their college careers. Obviously, said the author, these students were just making excuses.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/fulfillment-any-age/201005/excuses-excuses-excuses-why-people-lie-cheat-and-procrastinate>

Did you know there is a website online that will help a person find the "perfect excuse" for missing work! There is a simple to question multiple choice quiz that will help you find your "perfect excuse". It can be found, rather surprisingly, at:

<http://allhealthcare.monster.com/videos/quizzes/49-whats-your-perfect-excuse>

Naturally, I had to take the quiz! My "perfect excuse"?

"I had to take my cat to the vet!"

Which comes with the accompanying explanation:

People will totally believe this one because you're usually so caring. You're probably even nice to that guy in the office no one can stand. They could definitely see you going out of your way to tend to some poor, helpless creature. So just tell them that your cat was hit by a car. So you don't have a cat? (Which I do not!!) It's time to make one up. Don't say it was your dog, because they'll wonder why you didn't talk about it before. Just a nice, quiet cat. And if they want you to produce the animal later, well then, poor Fluffy is going to have to take a turn for the worse and

die (giving you days off for bereavement in the process?). We promise it won't just get you a day off but some much-needed sympathy as well. Good luck!

Who knew? One, that there was such a website, and two, that *people need help finding excuses?!!*

It's that time of year— a time for celebrating graduations, weddings and anniversaries.

I recently received a wedding invitation: Today with the internet it is not uncommon to receive an e-vite or electronic invitation, but this was an old-fashioned snail-mailed one.

"the hosts...Mr. and Mrs. ...request the the pleasure of your presence.

You are cordially invited...

To the marriage of our daughter....to

Date, time, place.

R.S.V.P.

Today it is common to receive a "SAVE THIS DATE" notice, well in advance of the event.

I don't know about you, but such an invitation can result in a variety of responses: excitement, disappointment because of a conflict in schedule, or dread, or??? What would your response be? (Turn and Tell your neighbor!)

Usually when I receive such an invitation in the mail, I get a little excited...I anticipate the celebration...the event which brings everyone together –often like a family reunion. A festive gathering offering a time to reconnect with loved ones, to celebrate, in this case, with a particular couple and their families, and to enjoy some conversation, some music, and a banquet of delicacies. It's fun. It is something to look forward to.

Throughout the Bible, both OT and NT--this image of a banquet – or in particular, a wedding feast—is a commonly used as an image of the Kingdom of God.

In a similar way that is what happens in this parable. The host sends his servant out to extend the invitation to the guests, and essentially he says "Save this date." All of the recipients agree. They seem eager to accept the invitation.

The day arrives. The servant is sent out once again to say the preparations are underway, dinner will be ready at 5 p.m. That is when the trouble begins! The guests lives are so full—surely they marked their calendars. Today we have no excuse—so many ways to track events, that our computers and our cell phones, Siri or Alexa will ping us or verbally remind us: "You've got a dinner date at 5 p.m. today!"

The parable is pretty straightforward up until this point. But here is the surprise: a social catastrophe! All the guests, who previously had accepted this invitation, now are begging off, giving excuses.

Give example of some excuses....

One—asks to be excused so that he can inspect a field he recently purchased. Another because he must test drive some recently acquired oxen, and the third is a newlywed! He is otherwise occupied!

Scholars have a wide variety of opinions regarding the excuses and those making them: are these lame, contemptuous excuses? Hollow and disdainful? Perhaps they are legitimate (however, one would normally check out a purchase *before* shelling out one's hard earned money for a field or for oxen!) The third excuse actually finds support in the Torah (OT Law) as it says in Duet. 24:5 "For a year he (groom) is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married." Newlywed males were exempt from military service or any other duty during the first year of marriage!

These excuses "represent three essential commitments of life: Property, occupation, and family. These three commitments constitute the greatest rival to the Kingdom of God." (James Edwards, Luke p. 421)

From a human perspective, these are "good" excuses—I dare say that at one time or another, each one of us has used them to get out of doing something. But this is not just *any* invitation these folks are declining. This is an invitation to a banquet in the Kingdom of God! Does that make a difference? If you received an invitation to a state dinner at the White House? Or an invitation to join Queen Elizabeth for tea? Would you attend or make an excuse not to? Hmm.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter how "good" their excuses are or not—the point is, they all miss the banquet!

From the perspective of the host/God, to refuse this invitation is sheer foolishness! Even a good excuse isn't good enough!

But the emphasis in this story is on the host—one whose deepest desire is to share his abundance and joy with others in a shared meal. He plans the banquet, he invites the guests, and when ready, he declares: "Come, for everything is now ready." (v.17)

Given that the initial guests are all no-shows, the host instructs the servant to go and "bring in" the previously uninvited guests: the poor, and disabled or differently abled. Apparently they respond affirmatively, but there is still room at the table.

Some party-givers would simply cut their losses and call it a day, but this host is nothing, if not doggedly determined. He is tenacious. He is going to throw a party, and he'll not be denied! He demands that his servant "compel them to come in, so

that my house will be full". (v.23) The implication in the Greek, "compel" them, emphasizes the positive aspect of hospitality that graciously invites and will not take "no" for an answer. The image here is of a determined host who takes the hand of a hesitant guest, ushering him or her personally into the party. (JEdwards, p.423)

Now the invitation goes out to the "least and the lost", those who were totally unsuspecting. When they are invited to the banquet, they respond with great joy! This is a reflection of what really happened during Jesus' ministry: The well-heeled, good religious folks barely gave Jesus the time of day, whereas those on the margins of that society were much more receptive to Jesus and to his teaching.

This is a story about a great reversal— the honored guests are no-shows, and those who had no notion of ever being invited, become the honored guests! The insiders are out, and the outsiders are in!

Jesus makes the following concluding remarks, addressed to his listeners then, and now. ²⁴I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."

What is your excuse?

The ones offered by the initial invitees are reasonable. But "God's offer has priority not simply over our worst but also over our best agendas. Those who attend do so, not because there was nothing else to do, but because the banquet was the best among attractive alternatives." (F. Craddock, p. 179)

WARNINGS

There is a word of warning in this parable: With all God's heart, God desires for each of us to come joyfully to the party, BUT it is possible to miss it altogether! Not for lack of invitation, but for lack of response on our part. Created with our free will intact, God invites us, but God fully allows us to choose. That is the rub, as the good can crowd out the best.

Ultimately we can miss the place set for us at God's bountiful banquet because we defy God's love, or because we are so consumed by the demands of daily life that we miss the Kingdom. We fail by default.

(JClaypool,p,62)

It is my understanding that when Queen Elizabeth was to be crowned in 1952, invitations were sent throughout the realm. Included among those invited were members of her own and other royal families (her peers), members of the British government and foreign dignitaries as well as some commoners—all strata of

society were included. Each invitation concluded with these words: "All excuses ceasing" – in other words: this is a command not a suggestion. No excuses!

Here Jesus addresses a common misconception: that God sends people to hell. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, it is quite the opposite: The Host/God excludes no one. It is he who extends the gracious invitation. It is the invited who, refusing the invitation, exclude themselves.

They are not excluded because they are bad, sinful or wicked. They are good upstanding citizens whose priorities do not reflect the will of the Host. They allow other things—business/work, career, family and finances to take priority. The parable concludes with a sobering admonition: Having first refused the invitation, it will not be offered again. Those who refused, will have only themselves to blame. (JEdwards, p. 424)

You and I have been invited by the King of Kings to be present at the banquet of his Kingdom. All you have to do is this:

ACCEPT HIS INVITATION BY

A--Admit that we are sinners in need of God's grace

B—Believe that Christ died for our sins and trust him as our Savior and Lord.—and so paid the price for the banquet.

C—Confess this belief, tell others...and Follow in the footsteps of Jesus.

The invitation says: "ALL EXCUSES CEASING"...

The time is now...to respond to God's gracious invitation.

Choose life! Indeed...

v.2 "Blessed is the one who sits at the feast in the Kingdom of Heaven."

Let us pray....