

Well, welcome to Sherwood Oaks, everyone. We have a very special guest in the house this morning, and you may be thinking I know who it is. You may not know. Yes, Alan is back with us, but we have a guest from Germany with us this morning. Her name is Elizabeth, and we're just thrilled to have her.

And she's loving right now me calling her out. I'm so sorry. And Elizabeth, I'll never do it again, I promise. I promise you. But we're glad to have her here.

Guten Tag. Welcome, welcome. Also, we have another special guest. Alan Burris is back from sabbatical. It lasted way longer.

Come on up here. When he said he was going on sabbatical, I said, that's fine, we've got Kedra, we don't— we'll be fine, we'll be fine. Kedra is great, but I tell you, within about 3 days I'm like, okay, how long is this sabbatical going to be? Because I need Alan to get back here. There's stuff that he can do much better than I can, and I would love to just hand this over to him rather than me muddling through it.

But he had his email and his phone turned off, and no matter how much I bugged him, he did not respond to me. Now that's not true. What were you doing on your sabbatical? Give us something exciting. Okay, so, uh, sabbatical is about resting, but it's also doing things that renew and refresh you.

So I had 3 things in mind, and I did all 3 of them. One was we have a farm and it has a lot of woods, and so I love— I actually at one point wanted to be a forester, so I spent a lot of time in the woods, timber stand improvement, that some people may know what that is. The second thing was to climb a mountain, so I went to Mount Rainier in Washington. I didn't climb it, but I climbed several mountains. We got some Rainier fans out there.

It's a beautiful place. And then the third thing was just creating precious memories with grandchildren and so on and so forth. So it was great. So I loved it so much. I'm thinking about extending it another 20 or 30 years.

I know, I know, I know what you're thinking. Not yet. Not yet. Not yet. I got 7 weeks of stuff you gotta do first.

He said, "Need 20 hours." And another text, you said, "I got 20 things I want you to," I think you said, "dump on you." But I mean, yeah, yeah, that pretty much, that's it. I'm ready. So, so give us, uh, any insights on the mountaintop. That's where you go for insights. Did you get any revelations from God while you were up there?

You know, theologians talk about two things: transcendence and

immanence. Transcendence is just like the otherness of God, and that Mount Rainier was that. It's just like— Jimmy Souther, some of you know him, went with me, and we were both like, man, we just couldn't get enough. Yeah, didn't want to leave. It's just just so otherly, just so majestic.

So yeah, and then the imminence, the closeness of God through family and just being in the woods. And I don't know, just, it was a beautiful experience. But I missed— you did not— I missed some things. No, you didn't. But that's all right.

Living in your world. Well, part of it, but you're very kind to say that and lie in front of all these people. I missed a lot of it. Next week I won't talk about lying, but Alan's preaching next week on, uh, one of his favorite, favorite parables. And it's— he's going to bring it.

He's going to bring it. I'll bring it. Alan, we're glad to have you back, everyone. Alan Burress.

I— this is one of those sermons where this— the introduction of this sermon has gone many different ways. I'm like, do I do A? Do I do B? Do I do and I think I've just landed on doing ABC. So let me just start by saying this.

When I was a kid, there was a little song we learned, and maybe those of you who are over the age of 50 remember this song, and it went like this: Deep and wide, deep and wide.

Becky went to a fast singing church. Others of you went to Presbyterian churches.

So that's all right. But some of you don't. I sang it on the way out here and none of the kids in my car had ever heard that song before, which is a failure of our Sunday school system, I believe, because it is a great song. Teaches some deep— not to use a phrase, but a deep theological truth. So that's the first one, the deep and wide song.

And then I was talking to Creed. I've got a little boy living with me right now. His name is Creed. He's 11 years old. He's back in the room right now in Sunday school.

Great little kid. And I thought it was him, but it may have been Eli instead. We were getting ready to have some folks over, some of our staff over the other night, and we were talking about people coming, and I said something about we may need to put some leaps some extra leaves in the table. And someone— and I'm not sure who it was— said, what are leaves? And I said, oh, they're these, these slabs of tabletop that you put in to make the table longer or make the table shorter.

Is, is leaves in a table a phrase that most of you understand? Okay, okay, so I'm not the only one. Maybe it was just the Thompsons who called them that. But leaves and table— so you make the table longer. And then third story is this, and this is the one I want to be really careful about.

Sharing because it's, it's sensitive still and it involves people that are very close to me. Um, last week someone I know had someone come into their home and the person who came into their home, young kid, had something— was wearing something that was very inappropriate.

But this kid had no clue. This is the world this child lives in. So he had this thing on his— on, on the t-shirt, and the person whose home it was, a Christian, absolutely lost it and responded in a way that was embarrassing for anyone who had watched it.

And to their credit, the kid with the t-shirt responded very politely and said, 'Oh, I'm sorry, I, I didn't know.' And it just kept getting worse, so they left. This person, this Christian, had a moment of clarity and thought, 'I need to apologize.' Said, 'I'm sorry for— I'm not sorry for what I said, I'm sorry for how I said it, which is sort of a non-apology.'

And all that to say that there's a lot going on in the scripture today, and I think all of these things tie together. So we're going to jump in, and we're going to jump in to Luke chapter 14. And if you got your Bibles, jump in there because we're going to tackle some stuff that that is— will help define what kind of church we're going to be. Okay, so Lord Jesus, um, just lead us through this passage and teach us what you want to teach us by your Spirit. And I pray this in Jesus' name.

Amen.

So have you ever invited someone to something that mattered to you? Maybe a ball game, maybe a performance you worked really hard on, or a dinner that you took a long time to prepare, and you invited this person to, to this thing where they were going to see you sort of shine a little bit, and they just didn't show.

They were no-shows. They flaked out on you. Now the event still happens. The party still goes on. The ball game is played.

The, the performance happens. But their absence, not being there, stings a little bit. Have you been there and looked out and go, I don't— they didn't— oh, they didn't come.

Now the flip side of this is, have you ever said no to an invitation or didn't show up for something and you kind of wished you had? Like,

oh, I should have gone to that. I should have been there. And that's sort of what's happening in today's scripture. An invitation is offered, an invitation is rejected.

And the way Jesus tells this story, this parable, shows us something very beautiful about the heart of God. When his invitation is rejected, he doesn't just take the leaves out of the table and remove some plates. He actually adds more leaves and throws more plates. He expands the table. He doesn't shrink it. He makes it bigger.

So remember the party we were at last week where Jesus challenged us to very humbly consider how we can help others move to a better place instead of putting ourselves first? Jesus says, listen, listen, let others move up. Look out for others. Esteem others more highly than yourself, Jesus says in other places. And he challenges us to put others first in order that they might move to a better place closer to him.

And this week we're at the very same party. It's a long one. It's a long one. And here's how Luke continues the story. Then Jesus says to his host— let's just read this together— when you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors.

If you do, they may invite you back, and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous. Then someone pops up. There's always someone who's got to add a little bit.

And this guy says, when 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. I can picture him. Jesus looks at him and then he says this: a certain man was preparing a great banquet and he invited many guests. And at the time of the banquet, he sent his servants to tell those who had been invited, come, for everything is now ready. But they all began making excuses.

The first said, oh, I just bought a field and I must go and see it. Please excuse me. Another said, well, I've just bought 5 yokes of oxen and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me. 'Still another said, "I just got married, so I can't come."' The servant came back and reported this to his master.

Then the owner of the house became angry and he ordered his servants, 'Here's what you're going to do. Go out quickly into the streets and the alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' 'Sir,' the servant said, The servant soon said, 'What you ordered has been done, but look, there is still room.' Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and the country lanes

and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.' Now, no one enjoys being corrected. I certainly don't. This morning, as we were going out the door, Robert looked at me and said, is that what you're wearing to church?

Like, yeah, you know, that's why my grandma doesn't think you're a good preacher. I go, well, that's not the only reason, but it may have something to do with it. No one likes to be corrected, especially not in front of other people, but sometimes the situation requires it. And this is where Jesus finds himself in this moment. Last week he reprimanded the guests who shoved their way forward into the best places, and this week he's calling out the host.

And he looks around the room and he sees a very familiar pattern happening. The same people gathering with the same people.

The same circles staying closed. The same table being set for the same crowd. Have you been there where you just go from place to place, you see the same people all the time? You've got your social circle and that's your social circle and you enjoy it. So I don't think Jesus points this out to shame them.

I think he points it, points it out because he loves them and he wants them to see that when we only make room for people who can benefit us, impress us or repay us, we miss the blessings God has for us. So he tells them this story, the one that we've just heard. It's called a parable. A parable is just a story with a message behind it. And this parable is about a party where all the expected guests are invited, the crème de la crème, the top of the tier.

It's a great party. It's going to be great. It's going to be lovely. When the banquet is ready, the host sends word, everything is ready. Come on, join us.

The table is set. The china is cleaned and polished. The silverware is shining. The stemware is crystal clear. It's beautiful.

And then the excuses start rolling in. Oh, I just bought a house unseen. And now I need to go see what condition it's in. Oh, I bought a car on Carvana and I need to see if it actually runs.

I just got married and my wife tells me my partying days are over. And they're polite excuses. They say please after all, don't they? They may even be reasonable excuses. But Jesus' point is this: they had accepted the invitation, and then when the moment came, they treated the host and they treated his, his work like optional things in their life.

So what does the host do? He doesn't say, fine, we'll just not have

the party. No, he says, okay, Here's our second plan. We're gonna, we're gonna open the doors wider. We're gonna, we're gonna go out and we're gonna find all the people that normally would not get invited to my kind of party.

The overlooked, the ignored, the pushed aside, those who are left out altogether. And he tells his servant to go into the streets and the alleys, the shelters, the nursing homes, the hard places, the forgotten places, anywhere there are people who need to know that there's a place where there is room for them. Go find them. And they start coming. Uber starts dropping people off.

The big shelter bus rolls up and the guys walk out and they're looking around going, are you sure we're supposed to be here? Are you? Is this right? Did we get the right address? Did we understand correctly?

They walk in. They're just, they're like, is there a catch to this? But there's no catch. There's only a table. There's a host.

There's plenty of food. And there's more than enough grace. And then when the host looks around, says there's more room, the invitation goes even further. He goes, okay, you've scoured the city limits. Now I want you to go outside the city limits.

I want you to go out to Fayetteville, Harrodsburg, Tunnelton, Heltonville, Springville, Needmore. Get out there. Guthrie, Judah. Buddha, wherever that is. Get out there and find the people that still don't know about this party and bring them in.

And what began as just a predictable dinner party like they would have had all the time becomes, becomes a once-in-a-lifetime celebration of grace that is all over Facebook the next day. And I can just guarantee you there's some of those original attendees who looked at that and saw the pictures and saw who was there and said, Well, I wouldn't want to be there anyway. Those aren't my kind of people.

Welcoming and loving people who are different from us is at the very heart of the message of Jesus. It's right at the heart of his heart of compassion. In Luke 6, he says this: If you love those who love you, what credit is that? Even sinners love those who love them. But if you can love the hard people, Jesus says that's great.

One of my favorite quotes is from an author by the name of Anne Lamott, and she says this: the surest sign that you've made God in your own image is if he hates the same people that you hate. You know what I'm saying? Does that strike you like it strikes me?

Jesus says, there's an old song I want you to sing to yourself, and it goes like this: Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide. That's as hard as it gets. Sing it with me.

Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide. It's If you know the motion, sing it with me this time.

Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide. Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide. What is in that fountain that's flowing so deep and so wide? What is it? It's God's love.

That's it. I know this because Paul has a prayer for the Ephesians in the— in his book that he writes to them, the letter he writes to them. And he says this: I pray that you would grasp, that you would understand how wide and how long and how high and how deep is the love of Christ. Deep and wide, deep and wide. And God's love warmly welcomes the stranger.

He accepts the rejected. He keeps adding new leaves to the table, making it longer and longer and longer and longer. And his love flows deeper and deeper and wider and wider, much wider than our narrow banks often allow. God's love rises and rises and breaks levees and floods entire areas. Flows out into the highways and the byways and the country lanes and into the nursing homes and the shelters and prisons.

And that fountain of love grows deeper and deeper and wider and wider, and it flows to the outcast, it flows to the sinner, and it flows to your enemy. Jesus says, love your enemies, do good to them, be merciful just as your Father is merciful. Deep and wide. To love like Jesus means extending grace instead of keeping score, and that can be hard, especially when loving someone costs us comfort, convenience, or control. A.W.

Tozer says, if our love is only for the agreeable and the easy, then we've missed the heart of the master.

Jesus says, a new command I give you: love one another as I have loved you sacrificially. Some of you are very challenging to love, and yet Jesus says, I love you, so you must love one another. God's love to call each other— God's call to love each other is bold and holy. It asks something of us. It calls us to put others ahead of ourselves and to love people we may not naturally understand, agree with, or even know yet, or find offensive.

In some way.

Leviticus calls us to love the foreigners among us. Hebrews calls us to show hospitality to strangers because you never know, those strangers might be angels unaware. You could be entertaining an angel and instead you say, mm, I don't know, I don't trust that person. They don't look like me. The love of God is not narrow, but broad enough to include the outcast, the stranger, and the person who thinks thinks or

looks differently than us.

Deep and wide, deep and wide, there's a fountain flowing deep and wide. And so maybe the question for us is this: is the fountain flowing deep and wide through me?

If it is, Jesus promises a blessing. He says, although they can probably never repay you You will receive your reward at the resurrection of the righteous. You see, there's another banquet being prepared, another party that an invitation has been extended for. There's a wedding feast. It's called the wedding feast of the Lamb in the book of Revelation.

That guest at the first party, he had it right. Blessed are those who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. There's a blessing at being invited to sit at that table, but you have to accept and show up.

Jesus issued a stern warning to those around him. He says, if you reject the invitation, you won't get to enjoy the kingdom of God party. Last week we celebrated our 10-year anniversary. It was a great day. There was still chicken on Friday from that.

One of my dreams that I talked about is that we would be a church that continues to serve the community around us, always inviting others up to a better place. And if you're serious with me about being a church that follows Jesus wherever Jesus leads, then our tables, our homes, our ministries, and our lives should always be making room for people we might not naturally gravitate toward. How do you feel about that?

Honestly, it makes me a little bit nervous when I think about the kind of people God could send here. I look around, you all look perfectly pleasant, perfectly fine. I, I think I like all of you. You've not given me a reason not to, then I do. But I know there's people out there who are going to show up with things on their t-shirt that some of you may find deeply offensive, that I find deeply offensive.

But how we respond to people matters so much. It matters so much. And are we going to be the kind of church that says, you can't come in here like that? Or do we say Get in here. There's a place for you here, and we're going to show you who Jesus is.

If that's the kind of church that you think, I want to be part of that, then, then you need to know that, that it can get messy, it can get challenging, and it can get It may make you think, is this the kind of place where I want to bring my kids?

The tension is real. I get it. There is a certain comfort that comes when I can be confident that me and the people I love are surrounded by people who look like us and who think like us and who vote like us

and who live like us and who feel, feel familiar to us. There's a certain comfort in that. But Jesus says, deep and wide, brother, deep and wide.

There's a fountain flowing deep and wide. Don't build your levees too tight. Don't bring your banks in too tight. Don't keep your table too small.

Instead, invite others to it. Dig it out. Make it wider. Bring them in. We're going to share in a time of communion here in just a moment.

And I tell you, every one of us has been the recipient of grace that has gone the extra mile, the extra distance to get to us. We all, if we're honest with ourselves, understand how far grace has traveled to get to where we are today. We come to this moment realizing we did nothing, nothing to deserve being here. We all showed up still highly inappropriate. And Jesus says, get in here, pull out a tape, pull out a seat, sit at my table.

I'm going to teach you what it means to live in the kingdom of God.

I grew up thinking that communion was for those who pretty much had it all figured out, who hadn't sinned that week. They weren't gonna— I was terrified of taking the cup and the bread in an unworthy manner, where I thought, oh, if I've done something, if I've messed up, if I've If I've had a bad thought— I had plenty of bad thoughts as a kid— every time I took communion, I just felt like the lightning is just waiting. But when we think about this, taking it in an unworthy manner, the most unworthy way we can take communion is to take it in a way that doesn't understand how deeply we need it. That's the unworthy way. If you understand how far grace has come to reach you, then you are worthy to take this cup.

God wants you to.

This moment is for people who heard the invitation of Jesus and said, "Yes, I'll show up. I don't know why you invited me, but I'm showing up for it." We remember that Jesus' body was given and his blood was poured out so that those who were far away could be brought near, those who were broken could be made whole, and the outsider could become one of our family.

And that invitation is still going on. It's still out there. There's still room at the table, room to make more, put out more chairs. We can do it. We can do it.

Every time we receive this bread, every time we receive this cup, Jesus, this morning, this is our prayer, that when we receive the cup, when we take the bread into us, we are reminded that your grace is not narrow. Your grace isn't restricted to a select few. Your grace isn't

just limited to those who look like us, think like us, vote like us, smell like us, dress like us. Your grace is deep and it flows wide.

Help us to say yes to you. Help us to come to you with an understanding of what it costs to bring us to that table.. And let us come today with the desire to extend that grace to others around us, all those around us who need you. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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