

# Bible Study Luke 14:15-24

## Parable's background

The story in this parable has a background in Israel's worship. The Jewish temple worship included a fire, a priest, slaughtering of animals and preparation for prayers. The Temple worship represented a communion with God. The prophet Isaiah speaks of God preparing a banquet on the mountain for all people, at which the veil around the people would be torn asunder. Death would be destroyed and God's eschatological kingdom will come (cf. Isaiah 25:6-9).

A banquet is a celebration. To the Jews, a shared meal was something very personal, intimate, an act of friendship, and a place of bonding with people. "To share a meal with someone" signified for a Jew "being one with them" and "uniting with them".

Jesus also announced the Good News by eating with people. Jesus got along with the ones considered sinners in his time. He shared meals with them, healed them and in a special way restored them to communion with God. You could say that all of Jesus' teaching and work consisted of showing how to prepare for and accept the invitation to the banquet in the Kingdom of God - an invitation to life in its fullness.

The first Christians also shared meals, as we can see in the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians. We could say that 1 Corinthians 11 is a concrete realization of this section of Luke's Gospel. In this passage we can see a foretaste of what Jesus is going to do - it is He who will serve at the banquet and give his body and blood. Paul speaks of the Eucharistic Meal and shows us, theologically, that we are already participating in the messianic feast, which is a sacrificial meal. And by sharing the meal we all share in this sacrifice. Therefore, new relationships between people must prevail at this banquet - and in this way the Kingdom of God is made present.

## Explaining Luke 14:23: "and compel people to come in..."

In most Bible translations, the verb used in verse 23 disturbs people. The verb "compel"

used in this extract comes from the Greek word "*anagkástos*", which means forcefully, urgently. The Greek verb "*anagkázō*" (translation: oblige, force, invite compellingly) means to persevere in offering hospitality. This is a metaphor for the kind of insistent hospitality which won't accept a "no".

Back in the Old Testament there is the famous example of Abraham who, when he was visited by the three men, almost forced them, in the name of hospitality, to stay with him and let him give them a meal (Genesis 18:15). This practice, this kind of "pushy hospitality" is still practiced today by people in; *inter alia*, Arab countries and the Balkans.

In the New Testament, the Greek verb used in Luke 14:23 appears also in two further places:

- Luke 24:29: the disciples on the road to Emmaus with the stranger (Jesus) "... they urged him, stay with us...", In Greek an even stronger verb with the same meaning is used here.
- Acts 16:15: Lydia, invited Paul and those accompanying him to stay with her, a woman so persistent that they could not refuse: "She prevailed on us to come."

## Interpreting the parable

Jesus Christ - who is the greatest of all, said that we should first invite the poor to sit at the table of the great banquet. That is the only way to bring about that radical breakthrough into God's grace. This breakthrough is like conversion, a radical change. Our response to this conversion can be spoken in terms of our new relationship with our neighbours. In this relationship, care and mutual acceptance reflect God's love where there is no place for discrimination. We all receive God's grace although we don't deserve it. There is no place for attitudes of pride, when that means perceiving the other as less than ourselves.

At this banquet's parable Jesus demonstrated God's prodigal generosity through this wonderfully bountiful table laden with choice foods intended to feed and nourish humankind. Here is the food, here is the bread with which God fills us, builds us up and renews us in his image. In the Gospel according to Luke, there is a strong emphasis on the 'lame, the poor and the crippled', to whom God shows mercy. The people in this story have no idea why they have been invited so unexpectedly to this banquet. The

Good News comes to us when we are not precisely looking for it, unexpectedly, which is why it keeps surprising us. The heart of God's insistent invitation lies in inviting a person to do something which is not just a matter of course. We are all invited to the feast, but this invitation demands a response from us. Our mission lies in inviting others to feast on God's Word.

This passage from Luke's Gospel emphasises that we as Christians may not desist from acts of radical hospitality. Jesus wants us to be lovingly insistent. And that insistence is the call of God's love. We don't take "no" for an answer. We don't use force, but on the other hand we cannot be indifferent to our neighbour and so we keep on inviting 'until the house is filled'. There is still space at the table, let's go to the streets and say **Come—everything is ready.**

### Questions for group discussions

*The questions and commentaries are designed to help people to understand the implications of God's generosity in inviting all to his banquet, to understand how shocking this all-inclusiveness was to a people, and then to continue this reflection by applying it to our own situation today.*

### Tale of a feast

It was quite clear that a celebration was called for, so we agreed on a date and I promised to let everyone know at what time we would gather on the day, when everything was prepared. My servants are faithful and hardworking, so when the appointed day came, everything was prepared for my guests.

As agreed, I sent my servant out to bring the good tidings and to invite our guests to come and join in this very special meal. To his surprise, his news was not made welcome - everyone claimed to have more important things to do than going to a party: one had bought new fields, another was newlywed, a third wanted to try out his new oxen... Some were quite rude and insulting as they made their excuses before hurrying away about their business.

When my shocked servant returned I shared his sense of rejection and it made me very angry. I vowed that none of my so-called friends would get even a mouthful of what had been prepared, made sure that my servant knew he was not to blame,

then sent him out again with instructions to invite everyone he met in the town and assure them of a welcome. Many came, some very excited, some more hesitant, unsure that they would be made welcome in such a place. But my servants soon put them at their ease as they washed their feet, anointing those which were injured, and provided each with a festive garment.

But even so, there was room for many more, and so I sent my servant out again, this time to search the highways and byways outside the town walls and to urge all he met, even foreigners, to come and join our celebration so that my house would be filled.

### Background:

*In Jesus' time it was customary to invite guests to a feast on a particular day without specifying a time, the time being specified when the feast was prepared. Thus the guests knew in advance that "this was the day" of the banquet in the Kingdom of God.*

### Reflection pointers

- Can you imagine how the host would have felt when all his guests announced that they had more important or urgent things? Have you ever experienced the rejection of a previously accepted invitation? How did it make you feel? How did you react to such a situation?
- God is inviting us to His feast. We too can be good at finding excuses for turning him down. Ask yourself about your excuses and how you can come to God's table, which is open to all.
- Imagine that you are one of just two or three of the original guests who did not refuse to come. Having reached the house you find it full of people who are complete strangers to you: the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind (Luke 14:13). Who would those be in your community? Would you come in and enjoy their company?
- Jesus announced the Good News of God's Kingdom by sharing meals with people, including the ones marginalized in his time. In Jewish society, and for many others even today, sharing a meal with someone is a way of "being one with them". Who are you

having meals with? Is your table open for others?

- We believe those outside the city were the foreigners, non-Jews. There were other occasions when Jesus interacted with non-Jews. Can you remember any of them?
- What do you think Jesus was trying to say to the man who had said: Blessed are those who will eat bread in the Kingdom of God? Why?
- Imagine that you were one of those invited off the streets. Would you rejoice at the unexpected invitation? How would you like to sit at the table of the Kingdom of God?
- Read silently the parable in Luke 14:15-24 and ask yourself whom you would encourage to come in if you were the messenger sent out to find new guests. Would you invite the homeless, the beggars, the street children...?
- Conclude the conversation with the reading of Isaiah 25:6-9.