



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

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"The Jesus Etiquette" (Gospel of Luke Series)

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Amy Vanderbilt's "Complete Book on Etiquette" is the classic book on manners. In fact, it is so classic and old that you can currently buy the 50th Anniversary Edition.

In this stunning edition (which has been updated since it was first published in 1952), you can learn why Amy Vanderbilt is the first name in etiquette. You can learn about how to use the right stationery, how to behave during a meal, how to host a party, how to properly put together a wedding, how to write thank-you notes (which I fear is becoming a lost art), how to properly invite guests to a function, and how to properly RSVP to an invitation.

But hold on to your seats! The first book on etiquette was not by Amy Vanderbilt, but by Jesus Christ our Lord and friend, the King of Kings. His words on etiquette are in Luke chapter 14, one of the books of the Bible, which, this year, marks its approximately 2000th anniversary edition!

In case you were not with us two Sundays ago, let me give you a quick recap of my sermon that day. We learned that at a dinner party, Jesus said never try to take the place of honor. You see, if we wedge our way to the place of honor, the host may ask us to move someplace else to make room for a

more respected guest. We should instead take the lowest seat because the host might ask us to move up and take the higher seat of honor next to him.

In my sermon today, we'll see how Jesus talks to a religious leader (called a Pharisee), the same host of that party, and tells him how a good host should invite people to a party.

But as usual, Jesus is also talking in metaphorical terms because He uses the dinner party as an illustration for what it means to be invited into the Kingdom of God! (Whoa! This is important to pay attention to!) Jesus also talks about the right way to respond to an invitation and how to be grateful for being invited.

Come. Let us read the words from Mr. Manners, Jesus Christ, on how to invite people to His parties.

Luke 14:12 He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid."

Luke 14:13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

Luke 14:14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Luke 14:15 One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!"

Luke 14:16 Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many."

Luke 14:17 At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready now.'

Luke 14:18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.'

Luke 14:19 Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.'

Luke 14:20 Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.'

Luke 14:21 So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.'

Luke 14:22 *And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.'*

Luke 14:23 Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.'

Luke 14:24 For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.'"

May God bless the reading of His word.

So what points on the Jesus etiquette can we glean from this passage? First of all: Whom do you NOT invite to your parties? The shocking answer that Jesus gives: not your friends, relatives, or rich neighbors.

Now Jesus is making a point. He is at a Pharisee's house. A Pharisee is the host. He is dining with Pharisees and presumably other connected people.

Jesus is NOT saying not to be nice to your friends and not to ever invite them to a party. What He is saying is that when people are invited to the banqueting table in Heaven, when people are invited to be part of the everlasting Kingdom of God, it will not be because they are rich, connected, accomplished, or have a good status in the community.

In fact, Jesus cuts to the core of the problem of how we invite people. He says we often invite people so that they can feel obligated to us for the dinner and so that they will want to repay you. But Jesus says, when you throw a dinner party, don't expect anything back in return.

When Jesus invites you to His banquet in heaven, or a life with Him here on earth, you are not invited because you are cool or accomplished or sinless. You are invited because you are NOT cool. Your accomplishments mean nothing to God. They are not the reason you're invited. Shocking!

But the second point of the story is this: Whom do you invite to a party? Jesus says to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind for they cannot repay you.

I say He invites the physically, the emotionally, and the spiritually crippled, lame, and blind, as well as the financially poor. He invites people who KNOW they have challenges, flaws, and who need a touch of God's love.

When Jesus invites you to be with Him at His party, here is how NOT to RSVP to His invitation. Don't ever say to Jesus, "Let me check my calendar. Let me check on my business. Let me check if my cultural traditions or my family allows me to come."

All of these are covered in His story as we read the excuses given by people on why they couldn't come in spite of the host's gracious invitation.

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In biblical days, it was customary to send out two invites to a party or a banquet. The first one announced the event and the approximate day. The second alerts the guests that everything is ready and that now is the time to come. This all made sense back then because there was no Pony Express, no phones, email, texting, Facebook, or Skype.

People knew a second invite was coming and when to expect it. So when the guests turned down the invitation after the second invite, AFTER the host had prepared everything, Jesus said the host was not happy.

Imagine, as the host you plan a party, and you order a stunning sushi bar that offers sumptuous nigiri sushi from Superb Sushi, delicious barbecue kalbi from Gina's, delectable cocoa puffs from Liliha Bakery, terrific teriyaki chicken from the Korean Restaurant called Millions, and then the piece de resistance, turkey and bread pudding from Ko'olau Ballrooms.

But then the invited guests say no! Too busy! So the host says, "Well, since I was going to have this banquet anyway, let's invite other people who will appreciate this food."

There is a subtext in the story in that Jesus was telling this story to the Pharisees who thought they would surely make it to the Kingdom of God through their accomplishments, their law-making, their fulfillment of the laws, their heritage, and by simply being an Israelite.

Bible commentaries say that this assumption of the Pharisees' acceptance into heaven through ancestry is based on the statement in verse 15:

Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" The implication was that Israelites are already the chosen ones so they will get into the banquet.

But Jesus is saying they will NOT be invited because they are too caught up with business or their traditions to really want a personal relationship with God. They are too busy. They are not grateful for the invite. They think they are too cool to appreciate the invitation or to need to go to that party.

For the banquet in the Kingdom of God, here's who gets invited to Jesus' party. Jesus calls those who know they are flawed, crippled (physically, emotionally, or spiritually), who know they need help, that they need God, and those who are NOT too busy for God.

The problem for many people is that they think they are too good, too smart, too moral, too sophisticated, or too intelligent to need Jesus. What about us? Are we too good or too smart or too accomplished to need Jesus? Are we pushing Him away from certain areas in our life?

Tony Campolo, who will be preaching here next March and who will be the speaker for the Men's Retreat also in March, told this true story.

He was in Hawaii to speak at a conference. He checks into a hotel but cannot sleep. So he gets out of bed at 3 am, and he realizes that because of jet lag, he is also hungry. So he looks for a place to eat. He finds a dive in an alley, sits at the counter, and orders a donut and coffee.

At around 3:30 am in walk eight or nine loud-talking women of the night. They sit down at the counter near Tony, swearing and smoking. Tony gulps down his coffee and figures that this is not a good setting for him.

He is about to leave when one of the prostitutes says to her friend, "You know what? Tomorrow's my birthday. I'm gonna be 39."

To which her friend replies, "What do ya want from me? A birthday party? You want me to get you a cake and sing happy birthday to you?"

And the first woman says, "Aw come on. Why do you have to be so mean? Why do you have to put me down? I'm just sayin' it's my birthday.

"I don't want anything from you. I mean, why should I have a birthday party? I've never had a birthday party in my whole life. Why should I have one now?"

Well, when Tony overhears he decides right then and there to do something. He waits until the women leave, and then he asks Harry, the guy behind the counter, "Do they come here every night?"

"Yeah," Harry answers.

"But the one right next to me, she comes in every night?"

"Yeah, that's Agnes. Yeah, she's here every night. She's been coming here for years. Why do you want to know?"

"Because she just said that tomorrow is her birthday. What do you think? Do you think we could throw a little birthday party for her right here in the diner?"

And the guy behind the counter looked at Tony and said, "Yeah, yeah, that's great. That's great. I like it."

Harry turns to his wife in the kitchen and says, "Hey, come out out here. This guy's got a great idea. Tomorrow is Agnes' birthday. And he wants to throw a party right here."

His wife comes out and says, "That's terrific. You know Agnes is really nice. She's always trying to help other people and nobody does anything nice for her."

So they make plans. Tony says he will be back at 2:30 am the next morning with decorations, and Harry says he will bake a cake.

The next early morning, Tony is back with tons of stuff. He has crepe paper and other decorations with a huge cardboard sign that said, "Happy Birthday Agnes!"

Word gets out on the street, and by 3:15 am, it seems like every hooker in Honolulu is there—prostitutes wall-to-wall in the diner.

At 3:30 am on the dot, the door swings open and in walks Agnes. They all scream, "Happy Birthday Agnes!"

Agnes is flabbergasted, stunned; her mouth wide open. Her knees begin to buckle, and she almost falls over.

Then the cake comes out, and she totally loses it. She starts crying, and Harry yells, "Blow out the candles, Agnes. Cut the cake!"

She blows out the candles and then everyone chants, "Cut the cake. Cut the cake. Cut the cake!"

But then Agnes says, “Look Harry, is it all right with you if, I mean, if I don’t, I mean, what I want to ask is, is it okay if I keep the cake a little while? Is it all right if we don’t eat it, right away?”

Harry is stunned but then says, “Sure, if that’s what you want to do. Keep the cake. Take it home if you want.”

She says, “Oh, could I? I live just a couple of doors down the street. I want to take the cake home. Is that okay? I’ll be right back; honest.”

She gets off her stool and then, as if holding the Holy Grail, she carries the cake high in front of her. Everybody is stunned into silence as she walks out and the door quietly closes behind her.

They all look at Tony who then gets up on a chair and says, “What do you say, that we pray all together?”

And then Tony prays that Agnes’ life will be changed and that God will be good to her.

When Tony finishes praying, Harry leans over and says, “Hey, you never told me you were a preacher. What kind of church do you belong to anyway?”

And the words miraculously come to Tony who says, “I belong to a church that throws birthday parties for prostitutes at 3:30 in the morning.”

And Harry thinks for a moment and they says in a mocking way, “No you don’t. There’s no church like that. If there were, I’d join it. Yeah, I would join a church like that.”

Friends, today’s passage is saying that when Jesus throws a party, that is exactly the kind of party He throws for those who are emotionally, physically, and spiritual poor, crippled, and lame. That is what the Kingdom of God is like. And that is exactly the kind of church He wants.

Have we not heard story after story of our own staff and church members who got pregnant outside of marriage, who had a drinking problem, who had a drug problem, or who suffered the traumatic loss of a loved one because of a drunk driver? And today we just heard Jerry Coffee talking about suffering a heart attack far away from home. This is who we are—in desperate need yet so grateful to be invited to the table with Jesus.

Michelle Tolentino who has spoken here at First Prez and who was a summer intern with us last year, is a Compassion-sponsored child born and raised in the slums of Manila. We had supported her, and she is now a college graduate. She has been working for several years now, including in a project with church members Chris and Mari Kanemura that helps women and children rescued from the global sex trade.

When it was Michelle’s birthday, and my friend Mark Gehri gave her a cake. She said, “Wow this is my third birthday cake.”

And Mark said, “Sorry that this is your third birthday cake today.”

She said, “No, I meant this is only the third birthday cake I have ever had in my life.”

Jesus offers us His party. He wants us to have birthday cakes,

and to have a life and party with Him forever. Jesus’ words sail over the centuries to say live a life and build a church that is open to all, a church that provides a place at the table for everyone.

When I ask people who are irreligious to come visit our church, they often say, “I’m not good enough to go to church and be with Jesus. If I walk into a church, lightning will strike because I am a sinner. I won’t be accepted by God or by other people.”

No, church is always open to all people, especially designed for the irreligious, the non-Christian, and the sinner. That’s how each and every one of us got here.

There is always a place at the table for Jesus’ party. There is always room at the inn. And we in our own homes should have room for all, too. That is the Jesus etiquette. Amen? Amen. Let’s pray.

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