

Uniquely Jesus: A Glimpse of the Kingdom | Pentecost 12 | Luke 14:1-14
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What does it mean [practically for our lives here and now] to believe in the resurrection?

Introduction

The “As We Gather” posed a question for you this morning, if you read it, as we were gathering. The question was simply, ‘What would it be like to catch a glimpse of God’s Kingdom here and now?’ What do you think? What moments have you experienced in life where you thought you were getting a little taste of heaven?

While Jen and I were on vacation we made a little trip to the spa. They had this room where you could sit before and after your massage with huge windows staring out over the beautiful landscape and you could just chill. Just hang out right there. It was beautiful, and, frankly, a little taste of heaven!

Our text this morning, from Luke’s Gospel, it gives us a glimpse of God’s Kingdom, too! But unfortunately, it’s not like a trip to Yosemite or the spa. No, it’s actually pointed Law and wonderful Gospel all rolled up together. It’s the turning upside down of everything that we understand life to be, especially our cultural norms and expectations. It’s a drastic reordering of life as we know it. Jesus gives us a glimpse of the kingdom and the ways in which God works on earth now...and the way in which God will work in the end, when Christ returns.

Our Text

As we read through our text this morning we might be tempted to see them as three disconnected scenes, three back to back to back teachings of Jesus but lacking a common theme. But it’s helpful to note that these three scenes aren’t really scenes at all but rather three pieces all taking place in the same scene. Luke sets it up for us, “....”

So what is the common theme? What are we hearing from Jesus? What is Jesus saying that is *Uniquely Jesus*? Well Jesus is giving us a glimpse into the Kingdom of God. He’s pulling back the curtain and showing us what God is up to in the world right here and now. And what God is *going to do* in the future Kingdom when Christ returns to raise us up along with all the dead. That is to say, Jesus is giving us a clear picture of the resurrected life. Both here and now. And in the future to come. Jesus is going to answer for us, then, this question:

What does it mean to believe in the Resurrection?

And the answer will have two parts. What does it mean to believe in the resurrection at the end of all time when Jesus comes back? What’s that going to look like? People want to know all the time, “what’s heaven going to be like?” Well, Jesus, in part, answers that question.

The second part, however, is this: “What does it mean for my life right here and now to believe in the resurrection?”. The Apostle Paul who wrote a chunk of our NT he says that we *have been* raised with Christ. As in present tense. So what does that mean, practically for us day to day?

Well, as we take a closer look at each of these three vignettes to see how God is working in the world, Jesus is going to show us and tell us “*what it means to believe in the resurrection*”.

Luke 14:1-6

In the opening verse Luke sets the scene for us. We’re at the house of a prominent Pharisee and Jesus has been invited to this dinner. The Pharisee’s house is probably filled with the who’s-who of the community. And what are they doing? What is their big concern? They’re watching Jesus *closely*. They’re keeping an eye on him to see what he’s going to do. Jesus has this track record of doing things on the Sabbath that, according to the Pharisees, he shouldn’t be doing. The Sabbath, commanded by God, was governed according to rules developed over time that let people know what was ‘work’ and what wasn’t ‘work’.

Against these rules, Jesus cast out demons (Lk. 4:31ff), allows his disciples to pluck some grain (Lk. 6:1ff), healed a man with a withered hand (Lk. 6:6ff). So they’re watching Jesus carefully.

But this is a text about what it means to believe in and live in the reality of the resurrection. And frankly the resurrection isn’t about having a list of rules to follow. It’s about the redemption and restoration of people. Real, live, people who need to be brought from death to life, from sickness to health, from brokenness to wholeness. And so that’s what Jesus demonstrates.

As all these people are watching him. You know the move, when you’re at a party and talking to one person but really keeping an eye on another person. They’re watching. Waiting to pounce.

But then some guy walks in. And it’s a guy with dropsy (what we call edema today). And Jesus asks the question, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?”. In effect, what is really the purpose of the Sabbath? What’s the point of the Sabbath? Why does God command such a day of rest? Is it to test His people to see how good they can be at resting? Is it to wait for someone to do something too unrest like and then just out and say ‘gotcha!!’

No, Jesus sums it up in Matthew when he says, “the sabbath was made for humanity”. The Sabbath was given for our benefit. We weren’t created to serve the sabbath. So is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?

Luke tells us that Jesus’ dinner companions were silent. They were stuck in an awkward spot because if they said no, it’s wasn’t lawful they would be denying the purpose for

which God gave such a gift. But if they said yes, it was lawful they might be denying the laws and rules on which they had staked their life. So they remain silent.

And then...then Jesus shows us...he doesn't just tell us...he shows us the real purpose of the sabbath. Where there was sickness...now there is health. Where there was disease now there is restoration. To believe in the resurrection of the body, then, Jesus is telling us, is to believe in the wholeness and restoration that God offers to his people. To Believe in the resurrection of the body means to believe that when Jesus comes back, he comes back to bring healing and restoration to our broken humanity. Just as we were created body and soul, a body with a soul and a soul with a body, Jesus comes back to bring restoration and healing and redemption to both body and soul.

We all need this, don't we? We all long for this healing and redemption, don't we? The resurrection of Jesus, the same resurrection that we will one day share in, brings us this healing and wholeness. It brings us relief from sickness and disease. It brings us wholeness.

And that's what the Sabbath Day points us to. Because what is the Sabbath if not a pointer to God's Kingdom? On the Sabbath we take a day to rest and be restored for the week to come. In Christ's kingdom, we receive that eternal Sabbath rest. In Christ's Kingdom we are brought to full redemption and restoration.

On this particular Sabbath day at the house of a Pharisee, Jesus gives us this glimpse of the kingdom.

Luke 14:7-11

But Jesus goes on from there. Getting no response to his teaching on the Sabbath, Jesus continues to pull back the curtain on what the Kingdom of God will look like by telling this parable [read text...]

Then Jesus ends with the punchline in verse 11: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Now, Jesus is not talking about some Karmic sense of justice. He's not telling you how to outsmart God into giving you a better place in heaven by performing some disingenuous acts of humility here on earth. He's not even giving us tips on how to act at a party. No, once again, Jesus is giving us a glimpse of the kingdom. He's showing us how God works in His Kingdom. He works by grace. Not by works. He works by taking those of low estate and lifting them up.

This is a big theme in Luke's Gospel. In fact, Luke plants the seeds for this way back in chapter 1 with the Magnificat, the Song of Praise that Mary sings. [Read Luke 1:46-55]

While the Pharisees longed to take the positions of honor at the table, Jesus reveals God's love and grace for those who *do not* hold positions of honor and those who are

relegated to humble places here and now. The Kingdom of God lifts up those who are humble.

CS Lewis illustrates this perfectly in his book, *The Great Divorce*. Towards the end of the book, the narrator sees this big procession to honour a particular woman, Sarah Smith, who had entered heaven. There are flowers and children and musicians and animals. An exchange between the narrator and his Teacher goes like this:

“And who are all these young men and women on each side?”

“They are her sons and daughters”

She must have had a very large family, Sir”

“Every young man or boy that met her became her son - even if it was only the boy that brought meat to her back door. Every girl that met her was her daughter”

Isn't that a bit hard on their own parents?

No, there are those that steal other people's children. But her motherhood was of a different kind. Those on whom it fell went back to their natural parents loving them more. Few men looked on her without becoming, in a certain sense, her lovers. But it was the kind of love that made them not less true, but truer, to their own wives.

And how...but hullo? What are all these animals? A cat - two cats - dozens of cats. And all these dogs....why I can't count them. And the birds. And the horses.

They are her beasts.

Did she keep a sort of zoo? I mean this is a bit too much

Every beast and bird that came hear her had its place in her love. In her they became themselves. And now the abundance of life she was in Christ from the Father flows over into them”

Lewis, of course, does not purport to be describing what the kingdom will *actually* be like but his point is simply an echo of Jesus. Sarah was not a famous person or an important person. She wasn't a person who sought gain for herself. She simply loved. Thus, Lewis shows us that, by grace alone, does she receive this incredible processional with everyone in her life whom she had impacted.

“The one who exalts himself will be humbled, and the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Jesus pulls back the curtain and shows us what it means to believe in the resurrection.

Luke 14: 12-14

But that's still not all Jesus wants to reveal about the kingdom, though, is it? Now Jesus directs his attention at the man who is throwing the party, that very prominent Pharisee. He doesn't chastise the Pharisee, he doesn't mock the Pharisee, but Jesus extends an invitation to the Pharisee. Jesus invites him to live in the lavish love and grace of God by throwing parties not for the social capital that he will gain or the invitations he will receive in return. Jesus invites the Pharisee to see the reality that, in God's Kingdom, we are not governed by social stratification or social norms or expectations. We are governed by the generosity of God's love for His creation.

And so Jesus invites the Pharisee to throw a party so that the hungry will be fed, and those who are cast out and ignored will be brought in. In doing so, if the Pharisee is going to receive the invitation of Jesus, he will live into the great biblical images of God's Eternal Kingdom.

This, again, is a glimpse of the Kingdom. Who are those that God welcomes into his heavenly feast? The hungry, etc...

Application - *What does it mean to live this out now?*

Jesus gives us a beautiful picture of what his future kingdom will look like. And this is uniquely Jesus, isn't it? Wholeness, restoration, the humble lifted, the hungry fed. This is the kingdom that we, as God's people, long for.

But the question for us today isn't *only* what *will* God's kingdom look like *someday*? The question for us this morning is what God's kingdom looks like here and now? What does it mean to believe that the resurrection of the body, this line that we confess weekly in the creed, what does it mean to believe that this is not just a future hope but a present reality?

Well...we've seen it in Luke 14:1-14 today. We've seen it as Jesus invites the Pharisee and as Jesus invites us to live in his lavish grace and generosity.

We've seen it as Jesus invites us, also, to see the world with the eyes of the creator. Although we see with eyes broken by sin, we can see the world afresh, with the eyes of Jesus. These new eyes, well, they see the humble. They see the lowly. They see the forgotten. They see the lowest of the low. And rather than condemning or mocking or even the greatest sin of simply ignoring or being apathetic, Jesus gives us eyes to see them as ones who will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ah, the humble will be lifted up. With the eyes of Jesus we can begin to see those people who will be the greatest in God's kingdom. (I am getting the sneaking suspicion that the greatest in the kingdom won't have earned a Master of Divinity degree.)

And finally, Jesus invites us to live out the reality of the resurrection and his kingdom here on earth by receiving the blessings of the Sabbath. By simply resting and allowing God to renew and restore us. Jesus invites us to rest...and to share that rest with others as well. To make people front and center in our practice of the Sabbath.

I'll be honest, I think in a place like Silicon Valley, we as Christians need to practice and model this more than anything else. What are the values of this place? What is held as supreme? Work? Achievement? Innovation? Go, Go, Go?

What if God's kingdom was valued above all else? What if a living, breathing demonstration of God's promised eternal rest and redemption, and restoration was our priority? How might that change things? How might that change you? Your workplace?