**Excuses and Invitations: Empty chairs at the Table**

 **Luke 14: 15-24**

Questions of who should be invited and who should be left out abound in this parable. We are forced to consider what makes real and authentic community. Certainly, there is an expectation of inviting the typical neighbors, those who are likely to return the favor. However, when they refuse, an alternative guest list must be considered. The meal should not be wasted; community is still needed.

If we see ourselves as the original invitees in this story, we are challenged to think about the excuses and misrepresentations we often produce when we are invited to share our honest perspective. Our churches are full of pretenders who feel that if they express their true selves or expose their vulnerability, bad things can happen.

What if churches made a priority of seeking out those who have disappeared as much as we emphasize the need to connect to the big financial contributors? What if we understood our primary obligation as a church was to set the table for nonjudgmental community?

*Question for reflection:*

Imagine arriving at a banquet and finding that your fellow guests are not the sort of people you expected. How would you feel? Do you imagine God’s heavenly banquet might feel this way?

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