

# Insatiable Desire

*How Jesus provides the antidote to what is killing us*

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Proper 17C | Luke 14:1-14

Jesus is a terrible dinner guest. One would think that by now the Pharisees would know better than to invite Jesus for dinner.

He's always complaining about how we treat the help and how exclusive the guest list is. He calls us out in front of our friends and all but calls us greedy and self-absorbed.

That is, if we see ourselves as the Pharisees.

If we're outside that pecking order, we might hear Jesus's words a bit different.

But to get there, let's reexamine the context.

## **Jesus keeps showing us what the kingdom looks like.**

He humiliates one host by letting a woman wash his feet at the dinner table. Then another who he compares to a cup which only gets washed on the outside, but inside it is filthy. And probably full of bacteria.

He warns his followers about hypocrisy and political cowardice.

He liberates a woman from the bondage of a bent over body declaring that the Sabbath is for liberation.

Then in the rest of chapter 13, right before this morning's passage in 14, we get the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast. He says to his followers

"What is the kingdom of God like?"

something which grows like crazy because **GOD** is involved.

Then he warns in a cryptic message about a narrow door and not wanting to get stuck on the outside. About missing our chance to get in.

## **Then on his way into the dinner, Jesus heals a man of dropsy.**

Dropsy is a funny word.

Many of us today try to figure out what this condition really was. Like *House* we're looking for a diagnosis. What is this mystery ailment *really*. Obviously it isn't Lupus.

But illness in Scripture, like in literature has a bigger meaning. It isn't just literal. It is much more than that.

From literature of the time Dropsy was understood as a particular kind of swelling driven by water retention. And it was associated with a sense of insatiable thirst. So people would drink water, which made the swelling worse. Think about that.

Dropsy is the physical manifestation of greed. Of never having enough. Of always wanting more.

Our lectionary cut out the most important part of the story: the part which explains what Jesus thinks of these hosts for this dinner party. This man, who appeared out of nowhere on the Sabbath, like the woman bent over, appeared out of nowhere for liberation. Because the Sabbath is for liberation. This man is freed from his affluenza.

## Affluenza is our dropsy.

Our insatiable desire to consume is literally what's killing us.

Possession of land and who gets to live there.

Production and distribution of oil, which helps keep the lights on and our cars running.

And the granddaddy of all things humans fight over; the one we have fought over from the beginning of time: water.

Water access was behind Russia's recent invasion of Ukraine and 25 years ago when Iraq invaded Kuwait.

In California, water rights are fought over in the midst of droughts. And climate change is leading companies like Nestle to try to corner the market on fresh water. Private companies are buying public water sources.

And if you're following along with our friends in North and South Dakota, there's a fight going on right now. There, the tribal members of the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation are trying to protect their water source from another broken treaty, threatening their source of fresh water, their access.

And it isn't all politics and fights with others. It's in our homes and our own lives. It's there when we talk about our homes and our incomes and all our stuff. *When is enough enough?*

### When have we taken in all the water we can stand?

Never. We never can. That's the disease of greed. There is no end. The end is death.

We will consume until our spiritual stomachs burst, until we've killed off creation and made our neighbors to suffer in a wasteland.

That's the great villainy of any escapist theology. One which has us joyfully celebrate our salvation and another's great suffering. One in which we turn the question of "Who is my neighbor?" and it's profound response: *The Good Samaritan, of course!* into a distorted tail of the Great Sort. Into a nightmare world of which

we escape and GOD is so generous even some of those nasty Samaritans will get in. *But only the good ones.*

This is the demon Jesus exorcises when the man with dropsy appears.

"Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?"

His hosts refuse to say. But we know the Sabbath is for liberation.

## Jesus again teaches Pharisees over dinner.

This dinner is different, though. He doesn't yell at them in their own home. He teaches. He gives them the antidote to their sickness, the freedom from their demon, the liberation from their oppression.

It isn't dropsy. They don't thirst for water. Power is what drives them.

We might be lulled into the subtle nature of Jesus's disruptive argument, appealing to their good manners. I can almost imagine the clarity in Jesus's voice as he suggests

*you don't want humiliation, having to give up your seat to a more notable dinner guest.*

It makes so much sense we might mistake it for common sense.

But it is anything but common sense. Not when you flip the script as Jesus does. That more notable guest is someone lower on the pole and behind in the pecking order.

### In his upside down economy, Jesus is telling these powerful people that they are powerless.

Powerless to their greed and powerless to what god is doing in the kingdom.

The lectionary cuts off the end of the story, contained in a profound parable. It goes like this:

One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!' Then Jesus said to him, 'Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, "Come; for everything is ready now." 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 apologies." Another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my apologies." Another said, "I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come." 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." And the slave said, "Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room." 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. For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner."

That's it! We don't know what happened to Jesus at this dinner party. We don't know if the hosts understood that Jesus was telling a story about a horrible dinner party at a horrible dinner party. We don't know if they understood that Jesus was taking them to task for their part in unsettling the world.

It ends with the parable and then picks up with the crowds outside.

But **we** receive this message and its unsettling connotations. We hear its implications for the powerful and for what dinner with Jesus looks like.

Don't be spooked. It ends with a call back to the last chapter. What we thought disturbing is actually a source of joy.

## **This is the kingdom of god.**

When Jesus was talking about the Narrow Door, we might focus on who doesn't get in. But we might miss who does get in. Not just the faithful.

"Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God."

The kingdom is an inclusive banquet where all get a chance to eat. All get a chance to come in. The honored guests are the poor and the destitute, the marginalized and the outcast. And there's still room!

GOD will take in people from all corners.

So we invite the rest on the fringe. The homeless. Our lesbian, gay, bi, transgendered neighbors. Our refugee neighbors. Our mentally ill neighbors. Women in burkinis. Hipsters and hippies. Chemistry professors and even lawyers.

## **And we say come and eat with us. For here is the kingdom of god.**

This is why Jesus is always eating **and** why we love our square donuts and carry-ins. Because the kingdom is a dinner party. And the people of the risen Christ get to host all the people.

Even those of us with our poor eyesight and getting bushy beards. And our tattooed arms and pierced eyebrows. Our peanut allergies and opiate addictions.

Because a dinner party which doesn't want all these people, coming "from east and west, from north and south" isn't the kingdom. It's just a private party by invite only. And we know what kind of guest Jesus is to that kind of dinner.