

# ROOM at the TABLE

## MAKING ROOM at the TABLE SAMPLE SERMON

By John Longhurst

### Scripture Reading: Luke 14: 12-24

*Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid.*

*But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

*When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God."*

*And Jesus replied: A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests.*

*At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'*

*But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'*

*Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'*

*Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'*

*The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'*

*'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'*

*Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.'*

## Background

In order to fully appreciate the point Jesus is making in this parable, we need some background on social and religious codes in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine.

As people who live in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we don't rank people according to their income, social standing, disabilities or religious purity—or, at least, we shouldn't.

As a result, it can be hard for us to understand what is going on in this chapter.

Things were more complicated back in first century Palestine. When it came to social events like banquets, there were rules related to wealth & social standing, purity, reciprocity and even where to sit. Only those of similar wealth and social standing, only those deemed pure by the rigorous purity laws of the day, and only those who could afford to extend a return invitation should be invited to be your guests. And as for where to sit, the closer you were seated to your host, the higher your status in their society.

## The Parable of the Great Banquet

The host in the story had prepared a banquet and invited his guests. Presumably, he had followed all the rules and codes. But when the time came, nobody showed up.

They all had excuses—pathetic excuses that anyone at that time could see right through.

### The Excuses

One said he had just bought a field and had to go see it. Who does that? Who buys land sight unseen?

Another said he had bought five yoke of oxen. Again, who buys anything—a car, say—without a test drive? Ditto for the oxen. Plus, a man of this high social rank would likely not test drive his own oxen. That's what servants are for.

Another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.' Well, OK. That sounds like a better excuse—until you remember that women at that time were at the bottom of the social ladder, below men. To spend time with a woman, even your wife whom you just married, instead of with a male friend who invited you to a banquet, would be a breach of social etiquette.

**The message is clear:** The guests won't be coming, for one reason or another. They have stood the host up and humiliated him.

This would normally be an occasion for great shame for the host. But he turns the tables on his guests. He tells his

servant: Make room at my table for the marginalized—for the poor, the disabled, the blind. Those who have no economic status, those who are considered impure.

By implication, he is saying to the guests who turned him down: You think you're so great? These people are as good as you. Better, maybe, because they accepted my invitation.

This would have been a scandalous thing for Jesus to say. It challenged the social conventions and understandings of that time. The story of the rich man inviting the poor to his banquet tears down long-held and fiercely-supported walls of exclusion, animosity, convention, rules, customs, and beliefs.

### It also challenges the rule of reciprocity.

These people can't repay the host.

As Jesus said earlier in verses 12-14:

*"When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid."*

*But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

Says Jesus: If you want to be of high status in God's eyes, make room at your table for the marginalized—the poor, the disabled, the blind, those who can never repay you for your generosity. You will not be rewarded for your hospitality on earth, but there will be a reward in the life to come.

## Take-Aways from the Parable

Altogether, this parable was a radical transformation of the values, codes, conventions and social order of the time. It likely scandalized those who heard Jesus speak these words.

It was a powerful lesson of how those who are seen as less than are to be treated with dignity as they are given food and welcome—despite what the culture and the religious structure says is appropriate and the "correct" way to live your life and treat others.

It challenged those who heard him to imagine a new way of viewing interaction with others, and to stop seeing people as belonging to certain classes or groups based on their wealth, race, gender, or disability.

All are welcome at my table, Jesus says. I make room for all—and so should you.



# THE MESSAGE OF CANADIAN FOODGRAINS BANK

At a time when the world seems to be polarizing into us and them; when borders are closing; when people are living in fear of “the other;” when the new rule seems to be to look out for ourselves first—as a country, or as individuals; Canadian Foodgrains Bank takes the message of Jesus seriously: There is room at the table for all.

Working with our 15 member agencies, with the generous and faithful support of thousands of Canadians, we make room for people who are poor, victims of war, refugee, children who are malnourished, mothers and fathers worried for their children, farmers trying to make a living off a little plot of land—people who can never repay us.

All that is required to be guest at our table is a need for food—no other rules apply.

As Jesus said in Matthew 25 (a paraphrase): When you saw me hungry, you didn’t ask whether I was worthy, whether I had enough money; whether I was the right socioeconomic class; if I was the proper religion; if I had the correct theological belief; if I was disabled or sick; or if I was the correct race or nationality. **You just gave me something to eat.**

That’s all anyone needs for an invitation to the Foodgrains Bank table—you only need to be hungry.

Last year the Foodgrains Bank made room at its table for 900,000 people in 39 countries, providing \$40 million of food-related assistance.

## Stories

[Click here](#) to find stories of people who have been made welcome at the table provided by Canadian Foodgrains Bank. You can tell these stories to show the kinds of people the Foodgrains Bank, with support from your church, has welcomed to the table. You could also tell stories of people who have been welcome to the table through your own church in your community.

## Conclusion

Like the story of Great Banquet that Jesus told long ago, we are also to prepare banquets for people who are not like us; who are not our neighbours or friends; and who can never repay us.

One way to do that is through Canadian Foodgrains Bank. Through the Foodgrains Bank, Canadians can take action in a world of hunger—by being generous and supporting programs that provide food and assistance to farmers in the developing world; by advocating to the Canadian government for good policies that will benefit those who are poor and hungry; by praying for people who live in poverty and worry about where they will get their next meal, both overseas and here in Canada; and by learning more about the issue of hunger.

**In so doing, we all can put this parable into practice, living out our calling as Christians to make room at the table for those who are hungry.**

For more information, see Gord King’s book *Seed Falling on Good Ground: Rooting our Lives in the Parables of Jesus*. [wipfandstock.com/seed-falling-on-good-soil.html](http://wipfandstock.com/seed-falling-on-good-soil.html)



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A Christian Response  
to Hunger