



## **“Who Are the Just Ones?”**

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### **Scripture (CEB):**

#### **Luke 14:1-14**

**14** One Sabbath, when Jesus went to share a meal in the home of one of the leaders of the Pharisees, they were watching him closely. <sup>2</sup> A man suffering from an abnormal swelling of the body was there. <sup>3</sup> Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, “Does the Law allow healing on the Sabbath or not?” <sup>4</sup> But they said nothing. Jesus took hold of the sick man, cured him, and then let him go. <sup>5</sup> He said to them, “Suppose your child or ox fell into a ditch on the Sabbath day. Wouldn’t you immediately pull it out?” <sup>6</sup> But they had no response.

<sup>7</sup> When Jesus noticed how the guests sought out the best seats at the table, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup> “When someone invites you to a wedding celebration, don’t take your seat in the place of honor. Someone more highly regarded than you could have been invited by your host. <sup>9</sup> The host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give your seat to this other person.’ Embarrassed, you will take your seat in the least important place. <sup>10</sup> Instead, when you receive an invitation, go and sit in the least important place. When your host approaches you, he will say, ‘Friend, move up here to a better seat.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. <sup>11</sup> All who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up.”

<sup>12</sup> Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, “When you host a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. <sup>13</sup> Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. <sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected.”

## **Sermon:**

I have six siblings, and I love each and every one of them. One time, one of them came to the town where I was living for surgery, and I opened my home, for the time of their recovery. Lying around, weak and all, brings out my nurturing side so I was doing the chicken noodle soup thing, pillows and tea and chat thing.

Until...

Until this sibling felt good enough to engage in a little bit of homophobia and started to rant about “fags”.

My sisterly good-will dried up fast, and I stood in my living room, pretty red faced and furious, telling this sibling that if they had that attitude and they had that language on their lips, they were not welcome in my home, surgery recovery or no surgery recovery. It was tense!

But we got past that moment because of love, and mutual care. I calmed down, they humbly apologized, we talked. We are still close to one another, and yes, we are a lot clearer about our values, too.

I cannot control how they talk in other settings, but they are respectful enough that they don't talk that way in front of me. I want to think that they learned something from me and they don't talk that way anymore, anywhere.

This week, I read about the verbal sparring between Jesus and the Pharisees and I wondered if it wasn't like that, perhaps?

Jesus, some scholars have suggested, was educated by Pharisees, was knowledgeable of their relationship to both the Law and Prophets, both the written Law and the Oral Law, and from them Jesus learned much that was valued.

But somewhere along the way, they parted company. And yet, there was mutual affection, and respect, too.

So, perhaps Jesus knows what they are thinking when he heals the man with dropsy on the Sabbath, because he was part of the theological dialogue with other Pharisees when healing on the Sabbath was debated together? The argument he uses, is their own argument, and they have nothing to say, because, just maybe, they have already heard that

argument within their own discussions, and circles of debate. And maybe they agree with it?!

They know each other.

They have grudging respect for one another.

Maybe, they have love for one another, but they stand on different sides of the issues, and they get red faced and angry just like me with my sibling.

They argue hard!

Because it matters. Because they care about each other. They love each other. And they have values that matter, that they need to be clear about with one another.

Right now, in America, I hear a great deal about “echo chambers” in which we only speak to people who agree with us. We only listen, or respond in social media, to people who think and feel like we think and feel.

It can be a toxic mix of self-righteousness and blame.

It can be talk that is black and white, right and wrong; a world of extremes, when actually, the moments of tension are in a hundred shades of grey and full of mixed emotions.

One emotion that might be lacking is that of love; the sort of sibling care, or friendship care, that strives to listen, and hold your tongue just long enough to seek to understand. Not accept. Not necessarily to accede. Not to agree.

But to slow down enough to try to get through the wall of defensiveness or anger or fear. Tell a story, or use an anecdote that might get through with the point you are trying to make, the value you are trying to uphold.

Maybe Jesus was trying to do that with his story of the fancy wedding party with all the highbrow folks showing up.

He says, “ya know how it is; you can no more control the healing power of God to a day and a time, than you can control where you sit at a wedding banquet. And god forbid, you end up being the fool who sits in too important a spot, only to have someone even more important come in and take your place! How embarrassing.

Surely, it is better to be the humble person, the non-judgmental person who is quiet, curious, amenable to change in the place you sit, or the opinions you hold?

If you can have enough self-restraint and common sense to not be egotistical enough to take the best spot, try having that same self-restraint, that same humbleness of mind, for the grace of healing, the acts of goodness, mercy, generosity and care.

If Jesus were in a modern “echo chamber” he wouldn’t even bother to tell the stories, to argue with the Pharisees.

But there is care and there is concern and so the arguments go back and forth, all through the gospel of Luke.

Both Jesus and the Pharisees care about the “the resurrection of the just”.

Jesus agrees with them about that.

But getting to that “resurrection of the just”, is based on actions of mercy and inclusion that focus on the Torah and the prophets that speak to such a world. And his friends, the Pharisees, focus on other parts of the Law and the prophets.

Jesus is pretty sure that the resurrection of the just comes to those who are generous and humble, rather than sure, and self-righteous, judging others, condemning others.

So, his stories tell us about a wedding feast that goes on for everyone, for days. And bread and fish for thousands. And celebrations that are open to tax collectors, the sick, women, children and foreigners. That is what his stories focus on.

Certainly, his family friends among the Pharisees enjoyed the parties, and the desire to see God’s reign...but they came at it so differently!

- The Pharisees tried hard to make both the Law and the oral traditions about how to live out the Law, sensible to regular Jewish folk. So did Jesus.
- Part of their teaching focused on understanding purity Laws, and the distinctive ways of life that set Jews apart in the cosmopolitan Roman world.
- Jesus chose another way.
- Neither of them particularly revered the Temple worship and sacrifice, neither of them particularly liked the religious elites among the Sadducees.

After the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE, the rabbinic tradition would guide the Jewish people, lead them in faith and identity throughout the world. This tradition grew out of the Pharisees.

Surely Christians and Jews can approach each other like siblings who love each other but have different opinions that matter, and are willing to listen to one another because of that love for each other?

Surely human beings can approach each other as siblings, too?

Surely we can try to use the power of mutual affection to keep us from cruelty, from isolation that denies the humanity of others, demonizes them, destroys them?

Jesus and his Pharisee brethren, both, hoped for and trusted in “the resurrection of the just”.

But the just ones, as we understand it from this teaching of his, are the welcoming ones, the generous-hearted ones, the ones who go beyond the trap of our differentness to the greater truth of compassion for our shared humanity.

This we can build on in every people, in every faith tradition.  
It is the teaching of our guide, our Teacher, our Rabbi, our Christ, Jesus.

May we honor it, teach it, live it. amen.