

That is the miracle in the verse that says, “Christ died for you.” We are not saved by good works because none of us have done enough good works to accomplish that. ‘Grace’ is the great equalizer that fits all of us for the kingdom celebration

IV. The people who know about the party and have been invited and know it and are going and will be welcomed because they got an invitation from the host. These people sing: “I belong!” This group includes most of us who came with this mindset today even if we still have doubts and question #3. Jesus clearly emphasized in the text that He expects a full house all the time. A grieving and hurting world will fill any church that declares the host’s invitation in a clear and loving way. Just because someone says ‘no’ the first time they are invited or the second doesn’t mean they don’t want to come. Someone once said to me, “Pastor Charlie, I hate going to a happy wedding because I am living so miserably at home.” These kind of barriers can be broken down. I’m told it takes an insurance salesman 13 visits to make a sale. If we are going to the party then we must not disappoint the host by coming alone. An old song asks, “Do you really care, do you know how to share with people everywhere?” It is a reasonable question. Jesus said “come unto me you who are laboring under any kind of burden and I will take your burden and give you relief.” That is an offer that no person can afford to turn down and no one wants to turn it

down when it is presented lovingly and persistently.

Conclusion: Some years ago a young Lutheran minister in Minnesota planned a ‘reject room’ in his church for those who did not have a date for the prom and had been rejected by everyone for some reason that disqualified them. It was a great success as the rejects came together and gave and received acceptance. When Jesus assembled his first church group, it was like a ‘Reject Room’ but God used them to build the kingdom of God. Jesus said, “I have come to give life and give it abundantly,” and we must never forget that.



March 9, 2008
Fifth Sunday in Lent
Sermon by:
Pastor Charlie Chilton, Interim Pastor

Come to the
Party
Luke 14:12-17

First Baptist Church of Memphis
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Celebration is a recurring theme with Jesus. Worship and Fellowship with God is noted by a praise attitude. The Kingdom of God and heaven is described in the parables as great fun. CF: The Wedding feast. Ken Chafin said there were four kinds of people in the neighborhood around the feast.

I. People who didn't know there was a party. So many people around that are miserable from 'partying' and tired of living. The good times they know are synthetic and contrived. The hangover isn't worth it and there are so many 'party crashers' who what to fight and hope to die in it. Another typical 'weekend party' is not appealing. Gallup polls can't always be trusted about the spiritual life of America. They report that 80% claim to be very religious. In the book, *The Day American Told the Truth*, only 13% said they believe all Ten Commandments. There are so many miserable people plodding through life with few options for 'real joy.' This is in both lower and upper class people. All dressed up with no place to go. A party where real people go and don't pretend to be something they are not and everyone want to experience life-changing joy would be a welcome party, but people must be told about that kind of party. Personal experiences of joy experienced will make that kind of party 'a must.'

II. People who know there is a party but do not know that they are invited. There are people in the world that are

very sensitive and observant. They observe at work and community events that there are people who have a different lifestyle and a different moral standard but they assume that is not for them. They feel forever excluded from that group. They think that these folks are members of some exclusive club. They note that the sign says 'First Baptist Church.' It is an old, well-established building that is in country-club like state of repair. Every indication is that it is a private club. If you are not a Baptist and you are not a longtime resident of Memphis, this is obviously not a place for you. This is probably why v. 21 in our text has Jesus insisting that the least likely to receive an invitation be told that all are invited.

Many people have been mislead and deceived so many times that they don't know what to believe. Many have visited once some places that looked inviting but when they got inside they discovered that they were only person of their skin color or language in the place and felt out of place and have been to shy to attempt such a visit again. There are so many con artists around especially in the religious field. The story is told that the great conductor Toscanini was leading the orchestra through Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*. At the end, great applause erupted. Amidst the ovations he said to the orchestra, "Gentlemen, you are nothing;" then "Gentlemen, I am nothing;" then "Gentlemen, Beethoven is everything." And the orchestra felt they were in the

wrong place. Yes, people may have heard about a party, but they will not attend unless someone takes them. Someone who is familiar with the party.

III. People who know about the party and know they are invited but don't feel 'good enough' to attend. After all, we live in a time when so many people feel like 'damaged goods' because someone has told them that they are not as good as others. People are called divorced, scholarly, geeky, secularist, materialist, clothes crazy, immoral, weird, economic failure, alcoholic.....the list goes on and on, there is something in their past that disqualifies them from ever attending a nice party where only nice people go. There is an old poetic line that I once heart that goes, "I didn't seek forgiveness until I knew I had been forgiven." Our society does a great job of lowering the self-esteem and self-worth of people despondent and withdrawn they put themselves down with "I don't look good enough," or "I'm too fat" or "I don't have anything to wear." Many of us have used these lines and similar until someone loves us over the barriers of our insecurity. What about those who feel spiritually disenfranchised? Someone once asked me "Would you really like me if you knew the real me and knew my past?" God is not interested in our yesterdays, but only in our tomorrows. God must use the touch of another human being to assure me that I am good enough to attend the party. Every person must be affirmed as to their worth before God.