

There is Another King, Jesus

Luke – Acts

Jesus' Vision for Table Fellowship: Hosts

The Importance of Being Inclusive

Luke 14:12 – 14

Introduction: Domino Sugar

It's an honor to be here with you at Harvard Business School. Since you're probably used to doing case studies of corporations, here's a question for you: How many of you have Domino Sugar in your kitchen shelves? Do you know why it's called Domino Sugar? Because they grow sugar in the Dominican Republic. Years ago, some students who were doing Christian relief, development, and youth work in the DR noticed that Domino Sugar was particularly affected by the idolatry of money. So much so that they weren't paying their workers decent wages. They weren't concerned about the shanty towns that popped up near the factory. They weren't rotating crops so that the soil could have a rest and be replenished. Instead, the soil was getting depleted quickly because it was just being used to grow sugar. So these students, along with a professor of sociology at Eastern College named Tony Campolo, bought one share of Domino Sugar. That entitled them to go to a shareholders' board meeting. They got there, and said, "We've noticed all these things about our company. We are Christians, and we believe Jesus is concerned with the people of the Dominican Republic than he is about profit. In fact, we believe he will come back one day, and that he will not be happy with the way you are running this company." But the executives said, "Give us a few weeks. Let's schedule some meetings together to see what we can do." Weeks later, the board of Domino Sugar came out and said, "We resolve to do the following: We will increase the wages of our workers in the DR. We will implement a system of crop rotation, alternating sugar with food, for long term health. We will dedicate so many millions of dollars over the next few years to education, so many millions of dollars towards infrastructure development, and so many millions to health care initiatives." The message of Jesus and the people of Jesus made a huge difference in lifting oppression by being inclusive because being inclusive and inviting is what represents the kingdom of God.

Relevance to you: Jesus talked a lot about including others in your life, inviting others in, or considering their interests above your own. So when you think about power, justice, and faith, you have to maintain a very important posture in the world. We're going to look at Luke 14:12 – 14 to see that.

Text: Luke 14:12 – 14

The setting: Jesus is beginning his movement, where he is showing his followers how to live in a way that reflects that they are under the reign of God, being ruled by Him and not by other things. At the moment, he is eating with this pressure group called the Pharisees, who eventually oppose him and seek his death. The tension went both ways, and as Jesus was forming his movement, things were heating up. So this episode we're looking at takes place over a meal, because most of life – the significant aspects of life in first century Jewish culture – happened around meals. Here's what happens.¹² 'And he also went on to say to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment."¹³ But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind,¹⁴ and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Jesus' Challenge to His Host: v.12

Now without knowing anything about the cultural background, that sounds challenging to us, doesn't it? I like going out to eat with friends who I know will always argue for the check, at least. 'Let me get that.' 'Oh no!' 'Let me get the check.' 'No, no, please! You got it last time!' Jesus says, 'That's what it's like to go out with your friends, your family, and especially your rich neighbors. They know how to repay you. They know the rules. They know how to preserve the system.' Do you ever spend go out to eat with people who always let *you* pay? 'Let me get the check.' 'Okay, thanks!' Pretty soon, you don't eat with those people anymore. The people you have over to your house are the people who you know will understand your gesture, who will repay you with a visit over to their place, and everything will continue

on. It's that Asian reciprocation thing. But imagine one evening Jesus coming over and challenging you in front of your guests!

Jesus and the Pharisees had completely opposite opinions about the purpose of eating. Culturally, eating was very intimate thing. It was not just serving homeless people in a soup kitchen line. It was inviting someone in to your house, to sit at your table, to put your resources at that person's disposal because hospitality meant everything. Once that person entered your home, BOOM you're befriending them, sharing your life with them. It said, 'You are my friend and equal and you have a claim on what's mine. I am including you.'

The Pharisees saw it as a time to preserve their status and sense of community. When you ate, you ate with your friends. You ate with other Pharisees because you wanted to be seen as part of that community, especially since they saw the Temple as corrupt and wanted to elevate their own circles. But this put them on a collision course with Jesus. Jesus saw eating as a time to give up your status and give up your money. For him, it was a time to open your life, to broaden your sense of community. In Luke, meal scenes are very important. Jesus apparently enjoyed eating because we see him do it at least 10 times in Luke's Gospel. When Jesus eats with people, he is not just saying, 'I like to hang out with you.' He is saying, 'Back in paradise, in Genesis 2, people ate with God. God shared His life with you in that way. Now I am restoring you to paradise, therefore I want you to eat with me.' The reason why Jesus ate with prostitutes and tax collectors was to symbolize to them a new reality he was bringing in.

The Pharisees want to keep to their 'in crowd.' Jesus wants his disciples not to be that way. In this particular meal scene, the difference of opinion is painfully clear. So Jesus turns to address his host in this very public way and says, 'You are a bad host': You only invite people who can pay you back. What about all the people who can't?

Who's on the Invite List?: v.13

Why does Jesus do that? Because Jesus wanted to show how God's kingdom invites all, and wants to include all. So Jesus wants to reach the poor and the lost through us. And he wants to do that for our good. They are intimately related. Let's look first at who Jesus wants us to reach in v.13: 'But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.'

In first century Israel, the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind were the ones who were thought to be cursed because of their sin. They were very vulnerable. They were on the margins. They made you feel uncomfortable, maybe even inconvenient. Imagine having to build a wheelchair ramp into your house. That could cost a few thousand dollars. Not only that, these folks were usually thought of as being disadvantaged because of sin: either their own or their parents. It was a variation on the conservative mantra that the poor are poor because they're lazy, because if they just worked hard, they'd be able to make it. It's the same 'blame the victim' mentality. Jesus spoke many times against that view, and he went further in inviting them, including them in his circles.

I'm going to translate what our lives could look like, then, if we were to really take this seriously. Now who are the outcasts today? Well, certainly it's the homeless, especially if they smell. There are HIV/AIDS victims.

Illus: We chose a kindergarten for John that was full-inclusion: disabled kids integrated with non-disabled kids. But the high-power attitude says: Those with handicaps – they slow you down. You want to push them to the margin of your existence. It's just like the U.S. to push them into institutions and nursing homes. This reveals the fatal flaw of liberal democracy: if what is important is an individual person reaching their potential, how do we feel about those who seem to have less potential? Jesus says make them the center of your life; bring them in! Don't push them away.

And what does Jesus want us to do today? It's not just a superficial 'to eat with them.' That would be untrue to the cultural significance of what Jesus was actually doing. Table fellowship was not a singular practice apart from the rest of life. It was the practice that symbolized all of life. It had repercussions into everything.

This is why table fellowship – eating together – became the dominant social expression of the early church. And why inviting and including others was the guiding ethic. The early Christians invited their non-Christian friends to eat with them. Why? Because in Luke 5, Jesus ate with Levi and his tax collector friends. In Luke 7, he ate with the sinful woman. The early Christians celebrated people becoming Christians at meal times. Why? Because in Luke 15, Jesus told stories about communities celebrating a lost sheep being found, a lost coin being found, a lost son being found. The early Christians ate together a lot. Why? Because it was an experience of community. Jesus did that, like in Luke 10, when he brought his disciples to Martha and Mary's place to eat together. The early Christians repeated Jesus' teaching at meal times and taught others there. Why? Because Jesus did it. The early Christians served communion as a special time of a meal. Why? Because Jesus did it to symbolize how it's important to internalize his death and resurrection. What a great opportunity to ask someone, 'Do you want to receive Jesus into your life?' And the early Christians redistributed wealth, especially at meal times. Why? Because they thought of all Christians being at one spiritual table together, and if one person said, 'Can you pass the bread,' then you passed the bread! So in Luke 14 and 16 and 18, Jesus teaches us to do that.

But it is essential, and let's not stop at our home lives. There are ways that we can demonstrate Jesus' invitation and Jesus' inclusion on the professional level, too. How do we care for the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind on that level?

Corporate decision making is exclusive. It has a narrow definition of who is a shareholder and what is their interest. Its decision making policies are exclusive, not inclusive. It reinforces the power of the powerful, and tramples on the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind – the vulnerable, those without a voice, or without other choices. Every problem we've had with corporations is the result of that exclusivity in its decision making. Think about it. Why did the pornography and strip club companies move into Chinatown? Because they included Chinatown residents in their decision making? No! It was because they knew it'll be easy to exclude them, because of language barriers and a transitional population. Why do corporations exploit children? Exclusive decision making. Some people made decisions without really considering or inviting others into that decision. Why did corporations start with a 14 hour work day, then go to a 10 hour work day? Exclusive decision making. Why do corporations have unsafe work environments; unequal opportunities for women and minorities; racism in its hiring and management, harmful or wasteful products, products that nobody needs (like remote controls designed for toddlers)? Why do corporations degrade the environment, relocate work without concern that they're leaving behind massive urban poverty, become corrupt like Enron? Why do corporations influence U.S. foreign policy? Like when we endorse terrorism in Venezuela because they don't sell us oil. Like when we give \$100 million to Colombia, not to fight drug cartels or quell civil unrest, but merely to guard the Cano Limon oil pipeline, like when we prop up Saudi Arabia and get involved in Central Asia to guard our access to oil. All of those issues manifest an exclusive use of power by the wealthy, for the wealthy.

Illus: After I worked at Intel, I joined a start up company trying to bring technology and employment to the inner city. My friend Khary started a company called VisioSoft. He's African American, so VisionSoft qualified as a black-owned business, and we were hoping for a piece of the Covisint initiative, the big automakers trying to link their supply chain and workflow onto the web. Now we didn't get very far, in part because the dot com meltdown happened in 2001. But here were some of the questions we were asking ourselves, and the dreams we had. Could we run the company in a way that maximized employment, rather than maximized profit? Could we avoid hiring people who come from the suburbs or rich areas? Could we avoid helping gentrify the city by sharing our business plan with community groups and looking for talented people already living in the community, or encourage them to get the skills we'd need? You see, we need to do business and live life in a radically inclusive way, and I'm convinced that some of you have the smarts to do it.

Jesus' ethic of inclusion also has an impact on ALL OF LIFE. When I graduated from college in 1994, I got a job at Intel, and soon afterwards I moved into a Mexican immigrant community to do ministry there. One morning, I was heading out to work, and Graciela Sanchez, a grandmother who was about 50 years old, asked me if I could give her a ride to work. Her usual ride, she told me, had been arrested. So I gave her a ride that day. We spoke in Spanish so I could practice. I gave her a ride the next day. I got to know

her family better. I gave her rides to and from her work for over a year. Needless to say, that constrained my work hours. This was during the heyday of the late 90's when the stock price was doubling every year. Employee surveys showed that over 2/3 of all Intel employees worked more than 50 hours a week. Usually, single people lead the rat race because it's not until you're married do other people look at you as if you have a life outside of work. But I wasn't married then; instead, I was doing enjoying what Jesus was doing through me, enjoying my Christian team of friends, and discipling some younger guys. One day my supervisors offered me a promotion. I thought and prayed about it, studied Scripture, and decided NO. It would require too much from me. Some said, "Really? You'd get more stock, more impact in the company, more visibility." I said, "I'm sorry. I'm a Christian, and I feel like what Jesus is doing with me outside of work is too valuable – I don't want to cut into that." Within the next year, they offered me another promotion, and I turned that one down, too. By the time I was there for 4 years or so, I had mastered my job and was working about 30 hours a week. People knew that I loved Jesus and that he mattered to me, not least because every Monday, my co-workers asked me how my weekend was, and I told them about the youth in my apartment, about how we prayed for them, about how we valued spiritual mentoring, about how I saw families that had been transformed. And most importantly in this example, Grandma Graciela had asked me if I could be 'el padrino' – the godfather – to her son Uriel. In Mexican culture, that is a huge privilege, and I felt very honored. I was able to share that. All these opportunities happened because I included this Mexican grandmother in my decision making. Because I invited her into my life in a way that really affected me. Jesus showed me the importance of being inclusive and inviting.

Illus: Right now, I would invite you to join a small group experience called Lazarus at the Gate (www.lazarusatthegate.org) in order to help you include the global poor in your financial lifestyle choices. In 2005 – 06, my friend Gary and I really felt strongly that we hadn't done enough to radically include the global poor in our lives, especially given how many times the New Testament talks about caring for the poor. So we formed a group of 14 friends, shared out budgets openly, our struggles with money, best ways of saving money, and then we decided to give that amount and more to the global poor. We gave \$40,000 to 5 organizations working all over the world. You can join one of these groups, or lead one! And radically include in your life those who are radically poor.

Maybe some of you believe that the ends justifies the means, so that if you want to accomplish something that requires that you sell your soul, you can, because once you have the power, you'll be able to do something amazing like free the slaves and then you'll get your soul back. But no: The way in which you want to use power must be reflected in the process by which you get it. The ends do not justify the means. You must always be ready to include, to love, and share power. That is the witness to the powers and principalities, the rulers and authorities of the appropriate use of power. God willing, they will change.

Our Reward: v.14

But Jesus calls us to invite and include the poor, the sick, the crippled, the blind. He calls us to always invite the outsider. Why? In v.14, Jesus says it's for our good: 'and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

God knows your sacrifice. God knows your generosity. That is nothing He does not see. There is nothing He does not notice. Nothing is wasted. Everything will be gathered up. He knows. And He will, in the coming future, reveal publicly that He knows all this about you. And He will say, 'Well done my child.'