

Love in a World On Fire: FOMO?
Luke 14:15-24; 1 John 3:13-18

Good morning! I love getting to worship with you each week. It is always something that I look forward to—I wouldn't miss it!

Missing out is a big worry in our society. The warning "Don't miss out!" always gets our attention. Have you heard of FOMO? FOMO, F-O-M-O, is the fear of missing out. The New Oxford American Dictionary defines it like this: "anxiety that an exciting or interesting event may be currently happening elsewhere, often aroused by posts seen on social media." FOMO is a powerful force in our society, driven in large part by our phones. We are so connected that everyone worries about whether they are invited to the best events, and doing the best things, or are they missing out? Part of our addiction to our phones is driven by our FOMO. Why would someone need to check a text while they are driving? Because they are worried that if they don't respond right NOW they could miss out. People even are paralyzed from doing anything at all because of their anxiousness that they'll miss something better.

Our FOMO keeps us from actually experiencing the life in front of us. My nephew posted a picture last year of a family waiting to be seated at a restaurant. There they all were, sitting in a row on a padded bench, each person engrossed in their own phone. It could have been a wonderful family time together, but instead each one was looking at their phones to see what *other* people were doing and feeling bad that they weren't somewhere else. Their FOMO kept them from enjoying what they were actually doing! Of course, this problem of the world distracting us from what is really important is not new. It was not created by our phones or by social media. It's true that our phones make it worse, but it has always been around. In fact, we see a version of it in our gospel story today.

Our reading from Luke has Jesus at a dinner at an important religious leader's house. So many gospel stories are about Jesus eating with people—I think he must have been an exciting dinner guest! He certainly was unpredictable. Jesus was always defying people's expectations

and turning over established ways of doing things. This story gives us a warning, a reassurance, and job to do. A warning, a reassurance, and a job to do.

First the warning. Dinners like this were important social occasions—it was an honor to be invited, and you needed to be sure to invite people back so that you’d get invited another time. Jesus told the master of the feast that instead of inviting your friends and relatives over-- instead of inviting people who would raise your status with others or would pay you back with another invitation-- you should invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. You should invite people who *cannot* repay you! Jesus was turning these social dinner parties from ways to increase your own status into ways to help the helpless!

You can imagine the awkward silence. It was broken by one of the guests trying to change the subject—he said “blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God!” But Jesus was not to be distracted—he went on to tell his own parable about a great banquet—a parable that over turned all the social norms.

The way big banquets worked then was that an invitation would go out long in advance so the host would know how many to cook for. Then when the day came and everything was ready a second invitation was sent out that basically said “it’s time! Come on over!” In Jesus’ parable, as the servant delivered the second invitation to everyone, people started refusing to come! These people who’d earlier said “yes I’ll come!” were now coming up with all kind of lame excuses for not attending. One said, “I just bought some property and need to go inspect it?” Really? You didn’t look before you bought it? You have to look right now-- tonight? Or “I need to go on a joy ride with my new oxen”—does that sound like an excuse to you? Or “I just got married??” These excuses are up there with “I have to wash my hair!”

These guests are all so wrapped up in other things that they could not care less about attending this banquet. They are so distracted by their new things that they ignore the great feast waiting for them. How would YOU feel if people started calling the night of your party and giving you excuses like this? It is no wonder the master is angry. He is hurt!

There is a reason Jesus is talking about a banquet. One of the recurring images in the Bible for heaven or the Kingdom of God is a great feast. Isaiah chapter 25 has a famous example, this is how the Message puts it:

But here on this mountain, GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies will throw a feast for all the people of the world,

A feast of the finest foods, a feast with vintage wines,

a feast of seven courses, a feast lavish with gourmet desserts.

. . . Yes, he'll banish death forever.

And GOD will wipe the tears from every face.

He'll remove every sign of disgrace from his people, wherever they are.

Yes! GOD says so!

When that uncomfortable dinner guest started talking about the feast in the Kingdom of God—*this* was the feast he was thinking of. Great food! Great wine! No more death! No more tears! No more disgrace! Jesus' parable is also about this. A banquet put on by the master, or the LORD (it's the same word in Greek) —Jesus is talking about the feast in God's Kingdom!

All of these people in Jesus' story had received God's invitation to the feast of the Kingdom. They'd even RSVP'd and said yes I'll come! But when the time comes, where are they? Where are they? They didn't want to miss out on the new field or ox or bride. Their priorities had changed. They were so distracted by the wealth and opportunities of this world that they ignored the greatest invitation of all time!

The warning is don't mix up getting the invitation with going to the feast! (repeat) In order to enjoy the feast, you have to show up! The goal is not getting an invitation, it is celebrating the banquet! Jesus is telling these religious leaders that many people just like them were going to refuse God's invitation! That is shocking! But that is exactly what was happening *right at that moment!* Jesus, God's Son, was right there, announcing that God's kingdom was at hand—and the religious people were ignoring him and arguing about religious rules. They could quote Bible verses from memory, but they didn't recognize what God was doing in front of them!

We have exactly the same problem. Don't get so distracted by this world that you miss out on what is really important! Don't miss out on the ultimate blessing and party and celebration---the kingdom of God! If you are feeling religious and confident about your status with God, pay attention to Jesus' warning—join in God's Kingdom *now*—don't miss out!

Jesus isn't done upsetting the expectations of the dinner guests—not only is he saying that many of the people who are SURE that they are going to be in the Kingdom won't go; look at who DOES enter the Kingdom! Jesus' reassurance about God's expansive welcome is a powerful encouragement for whenever we feel lost, broken or unworthy.

Who does the Lord of the Feast bring to his table? First the servant is sent out to bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. All of these are people who would have been considered under God's curse. Certainly not blessed to join the kingdom! The servant is sent to find them in the streets and alleys of town. Street people! Homeless people! Smelly people. They are all welcome in God's Kingdom. They get to enjoy the feast even when those originally chosen are distracted by the world's shiny new things and don't show up.

Jesus' expansive invitation doesn't stop with these broken, hurting, marginalized people. No—the Lord of the feast sends the servant out for still more people. He says go out of town, into the countryside. Out to the highways and the hedges is how the old King James put it. Start beating the bushes! Bring in the outsiders! Bring in the Gentiles! Bring those who have experienced injustice. Those who have been driven out of society. Everybody's welcome!

The Lord of the Feast wants us ALL at his banquet! See God's expansive welcome! Do you think you are disqualified from being with God? That is what the crippled and blind thought! Do you think you are cursed by God? That is what the poor and lame thought! Do you think God would have nothing to do with you? That is what the folks living out in the fields and under bushes. But they were all wrong! God's feast is open to them! They are welcome at his table! They can be part of his kingdom! You can too! The invitation is for all—including YOU!

Jesus warns the religiously self-satisfied—don't get distracted by the world! Don't miss out on God's banquet! The Kingdom Feast is the one thing in all the world we should have FOMO about. Don't miss God's great banquet!

And Jesus reassures the rest of us that we are all welcome. No matter who you are, no matter how far away you are from God, from religion, from whatever you think God demands—the invitation is open to you. I love how the servant is told to *compel* the people to come in. God knows that we need encouragement. He knows we are quick to tell ourselves that we are

not *really* welcome. But the Lord says no, *really*—this feast is for you. It is for ALL of us—no matter what divisions we see between us—race, class, politics, education, whatever—Jesus came to tear down all of those barriers. He came to unite us all together and invites us all to join in the great Feast of God’s Kingdom.

If the key thing is to show up for the feast—what does that look like? This feast is not just some future hope. No—Jesus came announcing that God’s kingdom is at hand! It is right here, available now! That is the good news—we can join in God’s kingdom right now. We even celebrate a foretaste of that great banquet every time we gather around the communion table.

The way we show up to God’s feast is by taking our part in his Kingdom now—by joining in his rescue mission. The parable hints at it—we are like the servant bringing folks into the feast! Jesus told his followers to go out to the ends of the world and make disciples of all people. We are to welcome all kinds of people—from every nation, every race, you name it—into his Kingdom feast. We do that by seeking justice for the downtrodden, by sharing our goods with the poor, by acting in love for everyone—even the unlovely. That’s our job.

This is a hard job. It can be uncomfortable to reach out to people who are different from us. To welcome them. Staying with our own peeps feels much safer. A few years ago Alice and I had an opportunity to be the transitional home for a family of refugees. The idea was to provide the people with a safe, clean place to stay for a few weeks while their longer term housing gets finalized. It is also a chance to be some of the first people in America to welcome this family.

We had a lot room in our house and one day we got the call—a family was coming in—of SEVEN people! A mom, two sons, and four girls, ranging in age from 9 to 20. They were coming in from Turkey, but they had been living in refugee camps in Turkey and Syria for almost 10 years, and they were originally from Iraq. They were Muslim. I’ll never forget the night they arrived—it is hard to imagine people more different from us-- on the outside. All they had were the clothes on their back and what was in their luggage. They looked different, they talked another language. The mom and older girls wore head coverings—hijabs.

It was scary. For us and for them! What would they be like? Are the two young men dangerous? We sent a letter to our neighbors informing them of our guests and inviting them

to come meet them. No one did, but no one called the police either. We worked together with our guests to try to communicate. As we shared meals, went shopping, took them sightseeing—we became friends. The differences faded away and our common humanity pulled us together. By the time their apartment was ready we were sorry to see them go. We are still friends with them to this day. Our lives were greatly enriched because of them. Reaching out to others can feel like a leap of faith, but it is often rewarding. God made us all different and he made us to be together. We are better together. That is the promise of his Kingdom Feast.

So who are we called to invite to God's table? Who are we supposed to include? Is there some person or some group popping up in your mind right now—someone you hope you do NOT have to include? Friends—that is where God is pointing you. Go to THOSE people and invite them. Welcome *them* to God's party! That includes welcoming them to our table here in worship and to our tables at home. That includes welcoming those who can't pay us back, and those who make us uncomfortable. Reaching out to people who seem different is hard—its uncomfortable. That's why our Race Talk study is so important. I hope you'll join us in that.

Jesus is telling these dinner guests that love is costly. John says the same thing in our other reading today. Love isn't wimpy, it is costly—a rugged commitment for others. John says that love calls us to even lay down our lives for others like Jesus did. Showing up for the Kingdom means helping even when it is inconvenient. Taking our place in the kingdom means that we are to LOVE—not with just words or talking, but with actions and in truth. Listen again to what John said—if we have possessions and see our brother or sister in need—our fellow Kingdom citizen—and we don't have pity on them—then God's love is not in us! Ouch. Love is Costly. Justice is costly. First Pres—Love is a verb—it is an action word. We are called to love God and love our neighbors, not just with words, but by what we DO. Let's get out into the streets, the alleys, the highways and even beat the bushes. Let's invite them to the Lord's great feast and love them into God's kingdom!

Let's Pray:

Lord Jesus—you welcome us AND you make us uncomfortable. Don't let us miss out on your celebration. Spur us in our discomfort to ACT. To live out your love and to go and spread the

good news of your invitation to God's great feast. Help us to live out the invitation you have given us and protect us from being distracted by the world. Help us to walk close to you, and to be your welcoming ambassadors, this week and always. Amen.