

Radical Hospitality

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Luke 14:15-24

The People called Quakers, and in particular Cincinnati Friends Meeting, believe in radical hospitality, and that God is not bound by the lines of race, sect, class, sexual orientation or gender. What we experience at Cincinnati Meeting is a mirror of the spirit of Jesus who shunned no one, and who consistently spoke in ways that broke down artificial barriers, and who, in his own life, shared bread and wine at table with all manner of people.

The Society of Friends has a unique and particular voice to raise to the world, a unique and particular vision of how the world is meant to be. Our Testimonies build a sense of identity around that particular voice and vision. Such practices as Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship of the Earth, strengthen our community by reminding us who we are. The Spirit of Christ as expressed through the People Called Quakers moves

against classism, racism sexism and sectarianism, against the setting up of walls between groups of people who come to God in different ways. Whether it was women, children, tax collectors, people of ill repute—any who were outside the circle that society drew—Jesus *drew them in, and welcomed them in.* And he did *not* do it because they adhered to a certain belief. *He did it because he loved them, because he made himself open to them.* Put another way: The most important thing about being a Christian expressed through the People called Quakers *is not* about adhering to certain beliefs. *What is most important is the desire for a direct experience with the Living God, that moves and transforms us to a spiritual place where we practice radical hospitality and where we begin to imagine a world where everything that we do is based on love.*

Jesus told a story about a man who gave a banquet. Some of the invited guests did not want to come or were too busy to come. That was frustrating to the host, and in Luke's version of this parable, *it made the host angry.* But the impulse, even stronger than his anger,

was the desire that his table be filled, that he gather in all who would come to his banquet. The host engaged in an energetic, active, even aggressive hospitality, bringing people in from streets and lanes and even out on the country roads. His hospitality extended to those with Trump flags on the back of their pick-up trucks, and those with bumper stickers who are supporting Kamala Harris and Tim Walz. This radical hospitality also extended to those fleeing oppressive governments and gang warfare, including Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico, who are seeking a new and safe home in the United States. Friends and strangers, people of every and any condition, the host wanted to bring them in.

I think of God in this way...as the host of a banquet. Here God is pacing inside the house, looking out the window every few minutes, eager to see more guests coming up the walk, eager for more people to come and be at his table. This is how Jesus understood God's love and his radical hospitality. He boiled down his faith to just two propositions: to love God and to love one's neighbor. The writer of

the Gospel of Matthew would later add: the second is like unto the first. I believe this to be true. To love one's neighbor is to love God. For to love God is to love *love* itself.

Jesus believed that the experience which he had of God, could be translated into human relationships and forms of community. How did he imagine this? Jesus told many stories, parables offering glimpses of what authentic human community might be. I am so very grateful to Donne Hayden and her new book, *Opening the Parables*, where she has emphasized the meaning of the parables to be about LOVE. Donne will be sharing about her new book in the library following lunch. The parables include the story of the table that is open to all...the scripture reading from Luke which I shared earlier. The workers in the Vineyard, a parable of worth and work, in which all receive at the end of the day enough pay to meet their need, no more, no less...the Samaritan, where one's enemy becomes salvation and unexpected care renders the old maps of who belongs where, utterly ridiculous; the Prodigal, a tale of lost and found, in

which a brother must choose love over honor or risk losing everything. How can we imagine human life and relationships lived out of the fundamental reality of love? Jesus tried out scenarios in his parables. As stories, they are experiences of love manifest in relationships, *not* templates for community formation. They are not a blueprint, but invite further imaginative work: How might love be embodied in all of our relationships, and within a diverse, multi-racial culture?

I do not know where such imaginative work on love and community will take us. I do know where it will not take us, and that is to deal with our problems in this country by divisive rhetoric and mean-spirited 30 second commercials showing immigrants to be responsible for all of our nation's crimes. The emphasis upon an "Us vs. Them" way of living has never built community, and it never will.

The imaginative challenge of love that Jesus presented in his stories about human relationships and community offer us an

alternative that has never been more needed than right now. How might we imagine life together in this world where the poor are blessed, the hungry fed, the depressed filled with laughter, and the abused and frightened made safe? How might we imagine a world in which the anxieties of those who live teetering on the margins of life, never knowing whether food will come tomorrow *might disappear in a sea of enough?* Or, what if those struggling for asylum and freedom, who do not know if they will be welcomed into our communities, or rounded up like cattle and placed in human animal pens, *might disappear in a sea of freedom?* Does this sound too hopelessly naïve? I don't know. I do know that historically Quakers have always worked toward that dream of food security and justice for all. As I speak there are Quakers in Gaza feeding those who are starving and ravaged by war, as well as being on our southern border working toward a just immigration system. Does it sound too utopian to dream such food security dreams and dreams of justice for everyone? I know that Jesus dreamed such dreams, and today I believe that we are called to dream such dreams as well.

I close this morning with one of my favorite quotations from Friend John Woolman. Donne uses this quotation as an epigraph to her chapter on the *Great Banquet or Parable of the Feast parable*, which she titles, "Who's welcome in the Kingdom of God." This is how Woolman concludes his little pamphlet, *A Plea for the Poor*:

Our gracious Creator cares and provides for all his Creatures. His tender mercies are over all his works; and so far as his love influences our minds, so far as we become interested in his workmanship, and feel a desire to take hold of every opportunity to lessen the distresses of the afflicted and increase the happiness of the Creation. Here we have a prospect of one common interest, from which our own is inseparable, that to turn all of the treasures that we possess into the Channel of Universal Love becomes the business of our lives.