

The Message for Oct 9, 2011**Luke 14:15-24***Is The Bible True?***The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller**

Imagine being invited to a fancy formal dinner party with high profile people. You get all dressed up and follow the unspoken rules of acceptable social behavior. There is a proper protocol to follow at such gatherings. You watch what you say, watch what you do, and watch who you hang out with. Everyone is on their best behavior so as to not offend or create a scene. Politeness rules or you'll get kicked out of the party.

That's the setting for our reading today from Luke 14:15-24. Luke writes (read text)...

Jesus is at a dinner party at the invitation of a high profile religious leader. Jesus has already shaken things up at this party. He silenced the lawyers and Pharisees about healing on the Sabbath, instructed them on seating arrangements and guest list protocol, and now he dares to respond to a religious remark made by one of the invited guests.

This is not going well for Jesus! He is not playing by the rules of politeness. He's supposed to stay in line and mind his manners at gatherings like this. But he doesn't. He breaks the rules. It almost makes the reader wonder what Jesus is going to say or do next!

Picture everyone at that party mumbling to each other... Who is this guy?! How dare he say such things?! Can someone get him out of here?! He's ruining the party. We are drawn into the story anticipating what Jesus is going to say or do next. And Jesus does not disappoint us.

He has just finished talking about what it means to be blessed, when one of the guests reminds everyone how blessed they will be at God's heavenly banquet – and everyone probably nods and hums in agreement. There is a hint of entitlement in his words. Proper protocol requires no comment; just silent reflection. That would be the proper thing to do. And everyone does, except Jesus.

He basically says that this far-off, future, glorious, heavenly banquet is actually happening right now. And the people at the party are not who you might expect. We can almost see the people asking, "Is this true?"

So Jesus tells a story saying, a man throws a big dinner party, but the people he invited made excuses about coming, and at the last minute, on the day of the party, they tell the host they are not coming. Can you imagine? What is the host supposed to do? What would you do?

The food is ready, the room is ready, everything is ready and so he decides to have the party anyway. The banquet will still go on as planned, but the people attending will be different. The servants (in the Bible the words *slave* and *servant* are interchangeable) are told to go out to the streets and gather the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame. The host goes against the accepted social behavior and invites the least likely to come to the party -- doing for them what they cannot do for themselves.

Now when a person hosted a party in those days they invited their friends. Notice his friends ditched him using some really lame excuses. It was expected that you would go to the party and then sometime later you would host a party and return the favor by inviting all your friends. But the people who come to this party can never return the favor.

The outcasts come – the cast offs of society show up for the party! And there's room for more, so the servants are told to go out as far as possible and bring more people in, from wherever they can. The host wants the room filled with anybody and everybody. "Ya'll come!" The banquet doors are open for the least likely to come!

Can you imagine the people at that party hearing Jesus tell this story? They look around at each other and realize the discrepancy between who is at that party and who Jesus is saying is at God's party. Then Jesus ends by saying "*For I tell you none of those who were invited will taste my dinner!*" Who is this guy?!

Jesus is making a point that at God's banquet table the least likely will be there. Imagine hearing Jesus tell this story! What does that mean for you? Is Jesus talking to you? Could this be true, the least likely will be at God's banquet table? Is the Bible true?

For the past 300 years or so we've been living in the age of Enlightenment. We've been enlightened. We've been taught that the truth needs evidence before we'll believe it. Show me, show me the facts and then maybe, maybe I'll believe it. Sound familiar?

But it wasn't that way in Jesus' day. The Bible was written before the age of Enlightenment. We come to the party with a whole different perspective and a different view point. For us "facts = truth..." But there is more to the truth than facts. The age of Enlightenment also brought with it a "fact-value split." Sometimes the truth can't be proven but it's still the truth.

For example, here in America, is it true that freedom is better than slavery? Most would say, "Yes, it is!" Okay, prove it! Even with a list of pros and cons, the bottom line of truth lies in the *value* of freedom over slavery. That's the fact-value split!

Or consider love... Is love true? Prove it! Once again the fact-value split. The truth lies in both realms of facts and values.

Facts call for understanding. But as Jesus points out God is after something we can't see or touch or prove. It's not about facts – it's about faith. Facts can only take us so far and even scientists say, at some point, faith takes over.

David Lose in his book *Making Sense of Scripture* puts it this way...
 “Facts can tell what something is, but they can't tell you what that thing means. So while you might be able to prove what sequence of historical events led to the Civil War, you definitely can't prove what the Civil War means. In the same way, seeing Jesus may prove to Thomas that Jesus is alive, but it doesn't prove what that means. And so Thomas has to make a confession of faith about what it means to him. It's not something Thomas can prove, but it's definitely something that he believes, and it's definitely something that shapes the rest of his life. Which is why, I think, the Bible was written.”

We're called to have faith. But what if you still want proof? And most of us do, at some point. Show me the facts. So when we apply our “facts = truth” lens to the Bible, we usually get troubling results. Looking for the facts and we will find all kinds of inconsistencies in the Bible. Those inconsistencies may cause us to wonder if the Bible is really true.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible is the one about a guy named Jonah and a big fish. God tells Jonah to go to Nineveh and give a message to the people. Jonah refuses to do God's will and ends up in the belly of a fish (not a whale) for three days. Then finally he goes and does God's will after the fish spits him up on the land.

Is that story true? Did it really happen? Probably not... But that story certainly points us to a greater truth: **God's love for all people and our calling to do God's will.** That's the truth to which the story reveals.

The writers of the Bible didn't look at truth the same way we do. They looked for the bigger truth through a bigger lens. The Bible has inconsistencies no doubt about it. But that doesn't negate the larger truth to which the Bible points – **God's love for all people and our calling to do God's will.**

Imagine leaving worship here this morning and heaven forbid you saw an accident out here at the intersection. The police arrived and interview you as a witness. Hopefully you would tell the truth of what you experienced. Your story is different from the other witnesses who saw the same accident. One might argue that since the facts aren't the same, there are discrepancies to the stories then someone is not telling the truth.

Truth is... it's a good thing there are discrepancies to the stories. Because if every witness told the exact same story with the exact same words, chances are, it would be a fabrication of the truth and not really the truth at all.

That's what we find in the Bible. There are discrepancies in the Bible – especially the time line and location of Jesus' death and resurrection. We might wonder if the Bible is true until we realize that the details point us to a larger truth.

The writers seem less concerned about the “what” and more concerned about the “why” of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Their stories move us into the realm of meaning. What do Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection mean to us? That’s the truth of what the writers offer.

We are invited into the story of the Bible. And once inside we are invited to see not only truth, but to see a way of making sense of our lives and the world around us. It’s not about getting the facts right, it’s about getting right with the faith that is ours in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jesus has placed his faith in you and in me. That’s the truth of the Bible but there is no way to prove it. The question is -- do you believe it? Jesus has placed his faith in us and that faith is revealed and strengthened every time and anytime we read the Bible. Do you believe it?

The party has started and you are invited. Will you accept the invitation? Will you put aside any excuses? Will you go and invite the least likely to come to the party too? There is always room for more. God’s heavenly banquet is underway right here and right now. Do you believe it? Amen.