

April 14, 2024

Clip In to Meet New People

Scripture Luke 14:12-24

Then Jesus said to the person who had invited him, “When you host a lunch or dinner, don’t invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward. ¹³ Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed because they can’t repay you. Instead, you will be repaid when the just are resurrected.”

¹⁵ When one of the dinner guests heard Jesus’ remarks, he said to Jesus, “Happy are those who will feast in God’s kingdom.”

¹⁶ Jesus replied, “A certain man hosted a large dinner and invited many people. ¹⁷ When it was time for the dinner to begin, he sent his servant to tell the invited guests, ‘Come! The dinner is now ready.’ ¹⁸ One by one, they all began to make excuses. The first one told him, ‘I bought a farm and must go and see it. Please excuse me.’ ¹⁹ Another said, ‘I bought five teams of oxen, and I’m going to check on them. Please excuse me.’ ²⁰ Another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’ ²¹ When he returned, the servant reported these excuses to his master. The master of the house became angry and said to his servant, ‘Go quickly to the city’s streets, the busy ones and the side streets, and bring the poor, crippled, blind, and lame.’ ²² The servant said, ‘Master, your instructions have been followed and there is still room.’ ²³ The master said to the servant, ‘Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”

God bless the reading, the hearing and the understanding of the scripture...

THANKS BE TO GOD.

The Message

What does meeting new people have to do with riding a bike? And what does it mean to clip in? Most if not all of us have learned how to ride a bike, but not all of us have taken it to the next level. Accomplished cyclists use special biking shoes that actually to the pedal by way of a mechanical clip. “Clipping in” can be risky because the cyclist’s foot is locked into place on the pedal, making it dangerous if the bike slows down too much or tips.

Fortunately, the best “clip in” mechanisms are easy to get in and out of, and with practice, the cyclist can learn to quickly detach the foot in emergencies. Riding a bike this way takes the experience to a different level, ratcheting up the risk a notch, and requiring a greater commitment.

We who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ are called to a greater commitment towards hospitality than the traditional expectation of politeness. We are called to transform the world by clipping in and meeting new people. Even people we may prefer to exclude. Jesus didn't have an exclusionary bone in his body and he certainly didn't want anybody else to.

Meals were important social rituals in the ancient world, and one would normally eat only with those of his or her own social class. One's place at the table was determined by social status, with the places on either side of the host representing the highest status. This was true in both Greco Roman and Jewish societies. Roman sources describe meals where guests of different social status were seated in different rooms, even served different food and wine depending on their social rank. We can see an example of this played out in the book of Genesis.

Joseph, the beloved son of Jacob, had been sold into slavery by his half-brothers, to a caravan of Ishmaelites for twenty shekels. Long story short Joseph's fate eventually took him to Egypt where he but ultimately acquired an unusually high-ranking position. After a famine hit the ancient world, his brothers were forced to travel to Egypt, which had huge store houses of food available to sell.

Of course, the brothers, not expecting Joseph to be in Egypt let alone to find himself in such a powerful position, did not recognize him. But Joseph recognized them. Plagued with emotion on seeing his youngest brother, Benjamin, he washed his face and called for a meal to be set. And scripture tells us that, "they set out [Joseph's] food by himself, [the brothers'] food by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with [Joseph] by themselves." (Genesis 43:32a) Why the need for separate dining? Joseph was following the laws of the Egyptian caste system. Egyptians considered themselves highly intelligent and sophisticated. They looked upon shepherds and nomads as uncultured and vulgar. As a Hebrew, Joseph could not eat with Egyptians even though he outranked them. As foreigners and shepherds, his brothers were lower in rank than any Egyptian citizen, so they had to eat separately as well.

So, this form of hospitality goes back not just a couple of millennia ago, but several millennia: segregated hospitality. Jesus saw this as elitist behavior, so as he saw this behavior playing out right before his very eyes, he called his own host out on it. Jesus advised him, "When you host a lunch or dinner, don't invite your friends, your brothers and sisters, your relatives, or rich neighbors. If you do, they will invite you in return and that will be your reward." In other words, when we limit our associations to the people who look, act, and smell like us, we actually limit our reward.

So, if we are not to invite the people who look like us, our friends, our siblings and other relations, or the rich folks next door, who do we invite? Jesus challenged his listeners to stretch beyond the social norms of the day, he is telling them to go to the next level of hospitality, he is daring them to clip in by inviting, "the poor, cripple, lame, and blind." (vs 12-13) This would have been socially dangerous to a host. Such

fraternization with someone of a lower social status could risk one's own social standing with friends and colleagues.

But you know, I have read this particular scripture multiple times never had I noticed that one of the dinner guests actually gets it. Verse 15, "when one of the dinner guests heard Jesus' remarks, he said to Jesus, 'Happy are those who will feast in God's kingdom.'" "Kingdom of God," refers to the messianic banquet predicted by Isaiah who said, "on this mountain [Zion] the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples." (Isaiah 25: 6) While Isaiah makes it clear that the messianic banquet is for *all* peoples, there was a tendency in Judaism to reject the notion that Gentiles, that is the non-Jewish, would be invited to ride with them. Jesus clearly wanted them, and now us, to expand the circle of people we know.

We just celebrated Easter a couple of Sundays ago, but we are not done celebrating Easter. In fact, technically today is the third Sunday of Easter, next week will be the fourth Sunday of Easter, followed by the fifth Sunday, you get the picture. Forty days we celebrate Easter because, yes, Jesus rose from the dead, but he also stuck around for a while. We don't know how long he stuck around, but church tradition recognizes the seventh and final day of Easter, which this year is May 12, as Ascension Sunday.

Spoiler alert! Ascension Sunday is the day we remember that Jesus ascended, that is he left the disciples, and was raised into the heavens. But, according to Matthew's gospel, before he left, he offered some important parting word to the remaining eleven, saying, "I have received all authority in heaven and earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to obey everything that I've commanded you." (Matthew 28:18-20)

Now, he didn't exactly give detailed instructions on how they were to go about doing this. But I imagine they didn't just grab people of the street and dunk them in a river, and say, "Bam! You've been baptized!" In fact, if you know anything about the early church it was a year long process before one was baptized, and the baptism occurred on Easter Sunday. What was the first step? They had to clip in to meet the people and they were to do it the way Jesus did.

Throughout the gospels Jesus intentionally sought out relationships with the people he met on his journey; and he didn't exclude anyone. Take for instance, his journey from Judea to Galilee, which led him right through enemy territory, Samaria. Samaritans came into being after the Assyrian captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel. Some people were left behind during the exile and intermarried with the Assyrians, making them half-Jew and half-Assyrian, but they also differed in their understandings of what it means to worship God. As can be seen in this particular trip Jesus took.

Now a good Jew would have taken the long way around Samaria to get to Galilee, for the purpose of avoiding any chance meeting with a Samaritan. But not Jesus, according to John's gospel he went ahead and cut right through their land stopping at a well that was believed to have been dug by their forefather, Jacob. Yes, the father of Joseph and his band of brothers is the one who dug the well. It was there that there that Jesus clipped in and met a Samaritan woman in a very meaningful way.

Long story short, what started out as a request for water, turned into a theological discussion, that resulted in the revelation that Jesus was the Messiah. This led the woman to go tell others in her community about him, a community who originally shunned her. Lest you see this as an unremarkable action on Jesus' part, notice the reaction of the disciples when they returned with food. John 4:27 tells us, just after she learned of his identity as the Christ, that, "Jesus' disciples arrived and were shocked that he was talking with a woman, but no one asked, "What do you want?" or "Why are you talking with her?"

And his next level hospitality isn't just about crossing the male-female line, there were others he clipped in and met. For instance, take the story in Luke's gospel, when he makes a new acquaintance in Zacchaeus, a tax collector. Now, Zacchaeus was not just any tax collector, he was the chief tax collector and wealthy one at that. Why is this a big deal? The Romans placed heavy taxes upon all nations under their control, including the Judeans. Of course, the Jews oppose these taxes because they supported a secular government and its pagan gods, but they were still forced to pay. For this reason, tax collectors, like the Samaritans, were among the most unpopular people in all of Israel. Even though they were Jews by birth, they were considered traitors, not only because they chose to work for their Roman enemies, but also because they had the reputation of becoming rich by gouging their fellow Jews.

So, when Jesus approached Zacchaeus, who interestingly enough was in a sycamore tree, and basically invited himself over to the tax collector's house, he faced criticism. Verse 7 states that, "All who saw [this interaction] began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be a guest of one who is a Sinner.'" Time and time again Jesus intentionally started conversations with people he met on the way to somewhere else. And he did it with people who any "good" Rabbi would not have offered the time of day to.

It seems fair to say that Jesus calls us to do the same. Meet new people wherever you are, making an authentic connection, that just may make a difference in their life. Clipping in to meet people where they are means you get out there not only in the physical sense but in the spiritual sense and that requires prayer.

Many of you know that last summer I was on a three month renewal leave. Two particular experiences came to mind. The first I believe took place in Arizona we had been driving all day and we found a hotel that had a working hot tub. I was looking

forward to it, there was a woman already there chatting with a man. It wasn't long before I realized this woman was having a political discussion.

Now I don't have issues with people respectfully sharing their views, I think that is important so we can better understand one another even if we don't agree. That's part of meeting people where they are at. That's part of transforming the world. This woman was not being respectful, she was loud, making cutting remarks, and not leaving room for others' opinions even if they wanted to share them. I sat in the tub for a while until I just couldn't take it anymore. I finally got out and went over to the pool trying to drown out the sound of her very loud voice. I essentially got off my bike, I was not going to get to know this woman.

But you know what I really struggled with that decision, I prayerfully struggled over the choice I made. A few weeks later after finishing our route 66 track we started heading up the coast all the way up to Oregon. We again were staying at a hotel that had a working hot tub. We had walked one and half miles to the top of Multnomah Falls, I was ready for a relaxing night in the hot tub. As I approached the outdoor pool area I could hear what was basically a male version of the person I had heard at the hot tub in Arizona, only louder and more verbally violent.

So instead of going to the hot tub, I went to the pool, but there was no escaping the loud thundering voice of this very angry man. So, I swam, and I prayed. I recognized that avoiding meeting this man would make no difference in the world, and the world needed changing. I didn't know what to do, but I believe that God wanted me to do something. So, as I swam I prayed for God to give me the strength and most importantly the words and the demeanor I needed to meet the couple of men in the hot tub, trusting I could always leave like I did the last time.

I went over, and gave a cheerful, "Hi" to them both. I got in and I started asking questions of the very vocal man. He was a trucker whose home base was in Los Angeles, California, a fact he expressed shame of. I asked why, since he hated it there, that he didn't move away. His mother was elderly, so he was sticking around at least until she passed. In the process of asking questions that helped me get to know him better, his demeanor dramatically changed. He left room for others to speak.

In fact, the gentleman, who from what I could tell prior to that couldn't get a word in edgewise, was a businessman from Iowa. He struck me as a good Midwesterner trying to politely listen to the other man's ranting, whether he agreed or not. I don't know that the actions I took changed the world, but it did change the environment. That is what that level of hospitality does, it changes the environment. But it also changed me.

By nature, I am an introvert, which means I do a lot of thinking, and despite my presence up here before all y'all I don't by nature, do a lot of talking. It's very easy for me to go through the day and not speak to a single soul. I like the quiet... I don't need the drama. I'm perfectly content coasting on my very traditional 10 speed bike. But

Jesus calls us to the next level of riding, to clip in to meet people where they are at, no matter who they are, and trust that God is at work.

We already do that with our friends and family now lets take it to the next level. I challenge you to intentionally engage in conversation with someone new this week, I challenge you to clip in to a higher level of hospitality meeting someone new.

Let us pray.

Next Steps

- I will ponder/memorize/meditate on, 1 Samuel 16:7b God doesn't look at things like humans do. Humans see only what is visible to the eyes, but the Lord sees into the heart.
- I will expand my circle of friends by being open and engaging to the people around me whom I don't know...yet.
- I will invite someone to join me in worship:
 - _____ Live 9:00am at 833 3rd Street, Reedsburg
 - _____ YouTube Sunday afternoon
 - _____ Reedsburg TV Station 11.1 Tuesday at 3:00
- I will read/meditate on Luke 7:36-46 in preparation for next Sunday's worship.
- I will continue to support RUMC through my prayers, presence, gifts, services, and witness.
- I will attend the remainder of the sermon series Clip In.
- I will pray the breakthrough prayer at 8:33 am & 8:33 pm:
 - All loving God it is by your grace we thrive.
 - Continue guiding us in using your Spirit
 - to boldly move us in fulfilling your purposes.
 - We name it! We claim it, in Jesus' name. Amen