

Sermon Series: If Jesus Came To Dinner

#3 True Hospitality – Luke 7:36-50

Intro

Have you ever played that social conversation game that asks, “If you could invite any four people in the world, living or dead, to have dinner at your table, who would it be?”



I'll give you my full list of four later in the talk. Perhaps in these next few minutes **you can share your list your four and submit them on line.**

While you're thinking about that, let me tell you of a **strange dream** I had this week after preparing this sermon.

I dreamed that **one of my all-time favourite** musicians had invited me to his dinner party. That's Canadian singer/songwriter/guitarist **Bruce Cockburn**. Since 1967 he's made



music that I love. He's a Christian who's travelled far and to Australia many times. His lyrics capture God's desire for justice and mercy among the poor and downtrodden. He would be my first pick of four to join my dinner party (after Jesus that is!).

In this strange dream I had, **I was Bruce's** dinner guest. And right before my dreaming eyes during this feast among friends, an uninvited intruder entered. It was none other than a famous **Australian right-wing conservative Sydney radio broadcaster** (who

shall remain nameless). He walked right up to Bruce, shook his hand, asked if he could pour Bruce a drink and sit beside him at the meal!

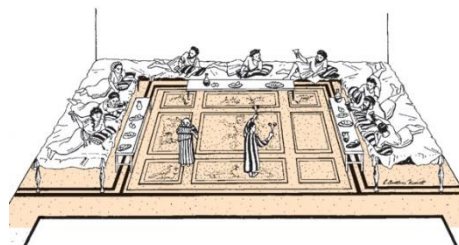
In my dream, I was **shocked** and sick to my stomach! My left-wing champion Christian troubadour accepted the offer of a drink and willingly offered, what should have been his enemy, **pride of place** at the table.

I woke from my dream in a **cold sweat!** But I soon realized there **was a lesson** for me to wrestle with – **I realized that I have very definite boundaries** that exclude **certain people** from **my own dinner table**.

In Luke chapter 7 we heard how the one called “The Son of Man”, who “came eating and drinking” with “outsiders” much to people’s surprise was invited to a dinner party.

36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to have dinner with him, so Jesus went to his home and sat down to eat.

Verse 36 describes a common scene in those days. A select group of guests would **recline** around three sides of a low central table on couches, leaving the fourth side open for kitchen staff to serve food.



I’ve seen first-hand what such large houses were like. The dining area was **visible to the public** through the open courtyard of the house leading into the *symposium*. After dinner a **discussion would follow**.

People on the street could see the guests and hear the conversation. The poor would hope for scraps from the table later.

Luke 7 tells us this was no ordinary house; it was the home of Simon, a **Pharisee**: an elite group of religious

lay leaders among Hebrew people in Galilee and Judea. Simon invited Jesus to question his teaching and behaviour as a Rabbi no doubt. Pharisees had very clear boundaries about who could be considered an **insider**, and who was an **outsider**; what constituted “purity”.



Having set this scene, Luke tells from verse 37 how a woman who was **uninvited**, and who was “unclean” in the eyes of Pharisees, entered the house from the street.

It’s all the more striking to us in these Coronavirus conditions we face when we read that...

37 ...she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume... stood behind Jesus at his feet weeping... began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them.

Long before COVID-19 restrictions, Pharisees set very restrictive rules for Jewish people regarding **washing, touching, proximity**, and so on; not for health and safety so much as to **divide the “righteous” from the wrongdoers**.

Yet, just as in the case of Levi the tax-collector, a **sinner** in the eyes of Pharisees, Jesus **fully appreciated and accepted** this woman and her **true hospitality**. It was a potential further blow to Jesus’ reputation as can be seen in verse 39...

39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She’s a sinner!”

Jesus was being called ‘**friend of sinners**’¹, but to everyone’s surprise he welcomes this title, just as he **welcomes this woman’s actions** described in Luke 7.

The focus then turns to the host, Simon, and his **inhospitable attitude to outsiders**. See verses 40 – 43...

40 Then Jesus answered his thoughts. “Simon,” he said to the Pharisee, “I have something to say to you.” “Go ahead, Teacher,” Simon replied. 41 Then Jesus told him this story: “A man loaned money to two people—500 pieces of silver[i] to one and 50 pieces to the other. 42 But neither of them could repay him, so he kindly forgave them both, canceling their debts. Who do you suppose loved him more after that?” 43 Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the larger debt.”

Luke wants **you** as a reader to be tested here too. **Who do you think the good host is in this scene? Who shows true hospitality?**

- Is it **Simon** the Pharisee? He is the **official host**, but as Jesus points out to him in verse 44 and following Simon did not act like a host at all!
- Or is it this so-called ‘sinful’ **woman** who is **not even a guest** and it’s **not even her home**? She turns out to be the **real host** to the guest invited to dinner. **She shows true hospitality**, and much more.

¹ Luke 7:34

The story begs the question: **Have we** grasped the grace of God; really? **Who are we most like in this scene?**

- The public see a righteous man and a degraded outcast woman.
- Jesus **sees them differently** altogether. He sees into their heart and judges their love or lack of it, saying to Simon...

47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven – as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little.'

The **gap** between God's heart and the heart of proud, self-governed humans is a **chasm** indeed. Jesus found a readiness to accept God's love among the **poor and the outcast**, but rarely among the religious and the wealthy.

I recall sitting in a large courtyard in the slums of Islamabad

in Pakistan one lunchtime. I had been invited as a guest, but the power was out, and we had to wait 2 hours. So the host



opened the gate to the large courtyard and welcomed people from the *bastis* to join us – anyone. There was singing and story-telling till we numbered over 50 people. When lunch was eventually served, all the uninvited guests were fed too.

Jesus perceived that the hospitality the woman gave to him was due to her having heard him speak of the **hospitality of God** to all. He says in verse 48...

48 'Your sins are forgiven...Your faith has saved you; go in peace.'

Conclusion

The other three guests, living or dead, along with Bruce the singer, that I would invite to dinner if I could would be my wife and two adult children if truth be told (there'll be troublesome discussion about why Bruce Cockburn was first choice in this list!)

But this story exposes the narrow "vision" of my heart and challenges my lack of grace toward others. *My invitation list to dinner is heavily restricted. Of course, with COVID-19 restrictions my prejudices are safely hidden now aren't they!* But seriously, I realize I too, like Simon in the story would have some set boundaries that **exclude many from my company.**

Under these extraordinary world-wide circumstances right now, more than ever perhaps, Christians need to find ways to **innovatively demonstrate** the gracious and **hospitable heart of God** to all: especially the poor, the isolated, the sick, the downtrodden, the prisoner, the outcast.

The watching crowd questioned each other: "Who is this who even forgives sins?" In other words, "God's love and grace is amazing!".

I'm left asking, how come the poor and the outsiders show more hospitality and grace than I do?

Steve Webster, St Michaels North Carlton, 2020