

36 Go into the Streets

“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.” (Luke 14:21)

I do not watch many movies twice. One that I have seen a few times, however, is “Father of the Bride,” starring Steve Martin. It is actually a remake of the old movie that featured Spencer Tracy. The movie has many hilarious moments—some of them far fetched, but others closer to the truth than one might want to admit. In one scene, they are going over the guest list. Actually, I found through my own experience in my daughter’s wedding planning that this process is not so much about who will be invited as who will be cut. I suspect many families have approached this task with greater turmoil than a baseball manager faces in making the final cuts to get his team to a 25-man roster.

Just the opposite is true with God. He holds nothing back when it comes to inviting people to the His Son’s wedding feast. In fact, when one looks at the record of Scripture, He appears almost reckless in his love and openness to those He invites. Look at the parables and you will find a shepherd who is willing to leave the entire flock for the one lost sheep. In another parable, the father is coming—no running—down the road toward the humiliated son returning home. He does not seem to care that his actions will make himself the object of shame. His son is returning home! (Luke 15).

In the parable of the wedding banquet, rejected by many who are too busy, too indifferent or too self-centered to come to his son’s banquet, the King invites—even

compels—the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame to come to his banquet. He holds nothing back. He is not looking who to cut, but rather who can be added to the list. What an amazing picture these parables offer us!

I agree with Philip Yancey who wrote, “. . . Jesus did not give the parables to teach us how to live. He gave them, I believe, to correct our notions about who God is and who God loves” (p. 53). The danger I find is that we become so familiar with these parables that we lose the sense of just how raw and almost reckless is the love of God. God is intent on one thing—He wants His house full.

“Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full’ (Luke 14:23).

Nothing will deter Him. No excuses, no matter how lame or personal against Him, will discourage Him. There will be those who will be too preoccupied with things: “*I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me*” (vs. 18). This is just an excuse. Would you not check out the land before buying it? Others will be too busy making a living to have time for Him: “*I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I’m on my way to try them out. Please excuse me*” (vs. 19). Still others will allow relationships to stand in the way of following the will of God: “*I just got married, so I can’t come*” (vs. 20). Again, this is a pretty lame excuse. Weddings

went on for days and would have involved the entire village. This banquet would not have been scheduled to conflict with such an event. The man is really saying, “I am busy; I cannot come to your banquet.”

I am reminded of a story that appeared in the Boston Globe in June of 1990. It is a modern day version of this strange and amazing wedding banquet:

“Accompanied by her fiancé, a woman went to the Hyatt Hotel in downtown Boston and ordered the meal. The two of them poured over the menu, made selections of china and silver, and pointed to pictures of the flower arrangements they liked. They both had expensive taste, and the bill came to thirteen thousand dollars. [Keep in mind—this is 1990.] After leaving a check for half that amount as down payment, the couple went home to flip through books of wedding announcements.

“The day the announcements were supposed to hit the mailbox, the potential groom got cold feet. ‘I’m just not sure,’ he said. ‘It’s a big commitment. Let’s think about this a little longer.’ When his angry fiancée returned to the Hyatt to cancel the banquet, the Events Manager could not have been more understanding. ‘The same thing happened to me, honey,’ she said, and told the story of her own broken engagement. But about the refund, she had bad news. ‘The contract is binding. You’re only entitled to thirteen hundred dollars back. You have two options: to forfeit the rest of the down payment, or go ahead with the banquet. I’m sorry. Really, I am.’”

“It seemed crazy, but the more the jilted bride thought about it, the more she liked the idea of going ahead with the party—not a wedding banquet, mind you, but a big blowout. Ten years before, this same woman had been living in a homeless shelter. She had got back on

her feet, found a good job, and set aside a sizeable nest egg. Now she had the wild notion of using her savings to treat the down-and-outs of Boston to a night on the town. And so it was that in June of 1990 the Hyatt hotel in downtown Boston hosted a party such as it had never seen before. The hostess changed the menu to boneless chicken—‘in honor of the groom,’ she said—and sent invitations to rescue missions and homeless shelters. That warm summer night, people who were used to peeling half-gnawed pizza off the cardboard dined instead on chicken cordon bleu. Hyatt waiters in tuxedos served hors d’oeuvres to senior citizens propped up by crutches and aluminum walkers. Bag ladies, vagrants, and addicts took one night off from the hard life on the sidewalks outside and instead sipped champagne, ate chocolate wedding cake, and danced to big-band melodies late into the night” (Yancey, pp. 48-49).

No matter how offensive or lame the excuse, God will not be discouraged. I wish that I could say the same for me. I struggle with this at times. When I reach out to people and witness to them, it is one excuse after another. If it isn’t their lives being too busy with the kids, then it is that the church is not friendly enough. Or, that work is just so demanding that it leaves no time. It leaves me with the feeling sometimes of, “Why bother?” I become hesitant to approach someone else out of fear or resentment of the next excuse.

In those moments, one thought propels me forward: “Go quickly” (Luke 14:21). This is more than a thought. It is His command and our calling. Jesus calls us to go quickly and invite people to His banquet. This is not a calling for the ordained only. Each of us has been called through our Baptism into this priesthood.

“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare

the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light”
(1 Peter 2:9).

In those moments when I get discouraged by the barrage of excuses, it is this sense of calling that keeps me going out into the streets, inviting people into the banquet. Jesus’ call to “Go quickly” reminds me that irregardless of how people respond to me or even what they may think of me, my life is accountable to one person and the call He has laid on my heart. In his book, “The Call,” Os Guinness has helpful words in this regard:

“Only madmen, geniuses, and supreme egotists do things purely for themselves. It is easy to buck a crowd, not too hard to march to a different drummer. But it is truly difficult—perhaps impossible—to march only to your own drumbeat. Most of us, whether we are aware of it or not, do things with an eye to the approval of some audience or other. The question is not whether we have an audience but which audience we have. This observation underscores another vital feature of the truth of calling: A life lived listening to the decisive call of God is a life lived before one audience that trumps all others—the Audience of One.

“In Genesis, Abraham’s call is to live a life of trust in God as he journeys before God. Usually God calls Abraham, but at one point he appears and says, “*I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless.*” Behind the voice of God is the eye of God, and behind the eye, the face, and behind the face the heart. To follow the call of God is therefore to live before the heart of God. It is to live life *coram deo* (before the heart of God) and

thus to shift our awareness of audiences to the point where only the last and highest—God—counts” (p. 73).

Keeping this in focus frees me. Free from wondering what people think of me. Free from worrying how people will respond because, ultimately, it is the Lord they are responding to when we live before the heart of God as Abraham did.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who understood something about standing strong and not backing down, said:

“Who stands fast, only the man whose final standard is not his reason, his principles, his conscience, his freedom, or his virtue, but who is ready to sacrifice all this when he is called to obedient and responsible action in faith and in exclusive allegiance to God—the responsible man, who tries to make his whole life an answer to the question and call of God?” (Guinness, p.94).

When we are living before God and certain as to where we stand with Him, we are freed to demonstrate that same kind of reckless love we experience and see in Jesus. I suspect that if one listened closely, there could be heard the applause of One—the applause of nail-pierced hands.

Prayer: Father, thank you for inviting me. I do not deserve your invitation, but you have extended it to me because this is the nature of your love. Yet there is still room, isn’t there? Who is it that you want me to go and invite as well? No matter the excuse, help me not to become discouraged, for there is too much at stake. In Jesus’ name I ask this. **Amen.**

Challenge: Who is one person that you know who has not yet responded to Christ's invitation? Pray for them throughout this day that God would stir their heart and make them receptive to coming to the banquet.

Scripture Reading: Luke 14

From the Book of Concord: "In all these sayings Peter represents the whole company of apostles, as is apparent from the text itself. For Christ did not question Peter only but asked, 'Who do you (plural) say that I am?' [Matt. 16:15]. What is said here in the singular—'I will give you the keys' and 'Whatever you bind . . . '—is said elsewhere in the plural: 'Whatever you (plural) bind . . . ' [Matt. 18:18] and, in John [20:23], 'if you (plural) forgive the sins of any . . . ' These words show that the keys were entrusted equally to all the apostles and that all the apostles were commissioned in like manner. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that the keys do not belong to one particular person but to the church, as many clear and irrefutable arguments show. For having spoken of the keys in Matthew 18[:18], Christ goes on to say: 'Wherever two or three agree on earth . . . ' [Matt. 18:19–20]. Thus, he grants the power of the keys principally and without mediation to the church, and for the same reason the church has primary possession of the right to call ministers. One must, then, see Peter as representing the whole company of apostles in these sayings, which consequently do not attribute to him any special prerogative, preeminence, or lordship" (Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope, p. 334.23-24).