

Meditation on Luke 14: 15-24 & a Piece of Art

Come – everything is ready!

Come, everything is ready!

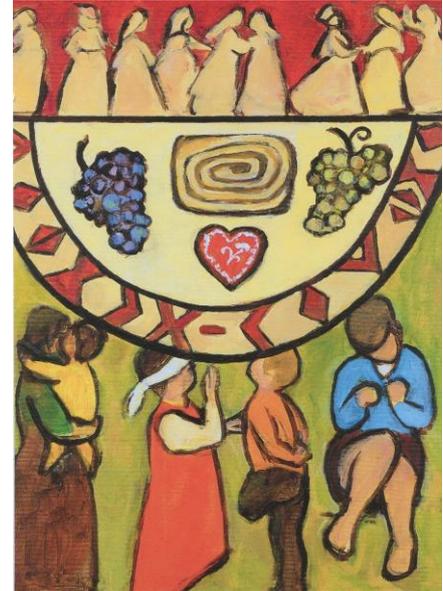
The invitations have been sent out;
the meal is prepared,
the table is set;
the guests are awaited.

But they do not come.

They all make their excuses.

And so, the invitation goes out to different guests
to come and share in the wonderful feast which has been
prepared.

Come, everything is ready!



The Slovenian artist, Rezka Arnus, was asked to paint something specifically for the 2019 Women’s World day of Prayer from Slovenia, based on this story found in Luke’s gospel.

Rezka says of her painting: “I wanted to present two topics: the country of Slovenia and the biblical story.”

Let’s bear that in mind
as we look at her artwork and reflect on its message to us.

Look briefly at the painting for a moment.

What first catches your eye?
The colours?
The food?
The people?

Now look at the picture a bit more closely.

Look at the semi-circle in the centre.

It represents a plate or table,
elements to be found at any meal,
but it’s decorated in the style of traditional Slovenian embroidery –
signifying that this is a special meal.

Look carefully at the table.

It is set for a celebration.
It’s a table full of good food –
food that is typical of Slovenia.

There are:

Grapes (Slovenia is a wine producing country)

Sweet Bread with a nut filling

Slovenian heart-shaped biscuits, often given as gifts and as an expression of love.

What does the food on the table say to you about God's invitation

“Come, for everything is ready”?

Perhaps it is an indication that...

God offers an abundant feast – a celebration.

It is offered in love.

It is welcoming.

Look at the people at the top of the picture.

Who are they?

What are they doing?

Are they...

Greeting one another?

Dancing?

Celebrating?

Rezka has depicted the figures as Slovenian women in national dress, wearing traditional lace cap, mob cap and scarf.

What does this part of the painting say to you?

Could this part represent...

Those who are originally invited to the Celebration?

Those whose main focus is getting on with their own lives?

Those who are unconcerned about the people below?

Now look at the people in the bottom half of the picture.

Who are these people?

Where are they positioned?

Are those people those who are side-lined, on the edges?

They are placed at the bottom of the picture – and under the table.

What does that signify?

Does it remind you of another story in the Bible –

of a conversation between Jesus and a Canaanite woman –

of dogs eating the crumbs that have fallen under the table –

the leftovers?

Are these people the “leftovers” in society –

people unseen,

ignored,

vulnerable?

If you are holding a party or celebration – who do you invite?

Friends?

Family?

People you know and like?

Think of the people you would be least likely to invite to a celebration.

A homeless person?

A drug addict?

An alcoholic?

Someone who has been in prison?

A person who has a disability which makes communication difficult?

A total stranger?

In the painting, the people underneath and “on the edges” are more prominent than those on the top.

What does that say to you about God?

That God especially cares for those who are weak and vulnerable?

That the “have nots” may be much nearer to God’s kingdom than the “haves”?

The story in Luke ends with a warning to those who were originally invited, that they should not be self-satisfied.

They will be the ones to miss out.

Perhaps it’s a warning to us too,
and a reminder that we are all God’s children –
that everyone is valued
and that God’s kingdom is open to all.

Come, everything is ready!

The meal is prepared.

The table is set.

All are invited.

Short Address on Luke 14: 15-24

Biblical stories are a bit like windows through which God can be seen. And not only God, no! Biblical stories are windows through which we can catch a glimpse into God’s world, get an idea what his Kingdom looks like. They show us a way into God’s future and teach us how to live and love. They are a guideline for our lives: for our planning and dreaming, and our decision-making. Windows into God’s world today are psalm 23, and the image of God setting a table for us, the piece of art of the Slovenian painter, her thoughts about the Bible text, and the Bible story itself. All these stories have to do with food, with meals, and with invitations to God’s table.

The story which we heard as the Gospel reading is a story Jesus told. Jesus often told stories. Jesus used images from people's everyday experiences to talk to them about God. He talked of the world of great estates, leaseholders, day labourers and hard-working women – just to give you some examples... And in today's story the master of a great estate is the main figure: Just try to imagine Jesus sitting at a dinner table in a Pharisee's house. It is a Sabbath day. And of course the group gathered is, as so often with Jesus arguing about religion and the rules of religion, about healing on the Sabbath, about God's Kingdom and the places people would be offered there... and: about life in God's world being a feast – a party with plenty of food and drink for all. This is when Jesus tells his story...

Jesus talks about the coming of God's Kingdom:
a host is celebrating a big feast.

He can afford to throw a big party, and he invites people who buy land and oxen - people who are respectable and have money. An invitation goes out.

A slave comes and passes along the message:

"Look, I have prepared my dinner... and everything is now ready; come to the banquet."

But the guests refuse to come.

This is a painful experience for the host:

they give their fake excuses and prefer to go and follow their own business...

farming, money-making, getting married... all these excuses are pretences.

When the servant reports them to the owner of the house, the master is understandably disappointed and angry.

His social fellows and peers, his friends and family have let him down.

So he sends his slave out to bring in substitute guests:

people from the streets, poor and lowly folk.

The hall becomes full. In the end the feast takes place; everybody has a great time!

People who were the poorest of the poor in those times were now gathered for the great dinner.

Poverty, brutality, violence, injustice and oppression were all part of their everyday lives... They had to put up with cruel dictatorship and exclusion from the lives of the rich every day. But now they'd been invited!

Jesus tells a story of which those poor people's dreams must have been made.

The Kingdom of God is not compared with a space, a place or a state.

It is compared with a person... The Kingdom of God lies within what a person is doing.

God sends out into the broad streets and the narrow lanes to bring in the outcast from all over the city. The homeless and landless were invited to come to where they were normally not allowed. It is those with no voice, no place, and no social standing who in the end are dining with the host of the great feast.

And I think it is here where we can catch a glimpse of the point of the whole story.

The future of the Kingdom of God will not be a continuation of the present, Jesus seems to say.

The future with God is a reversal of all social and political conditions many of those who listened to Jesus were suffering from!

Entry into the Kingdom of God depends on neither the master's determination, nor human initiative. No one can enter the Kingdom of God without the invitation of God, and no one can remain outside it but by his own deliberate choice.

The main question of the story however is not:

Who do we have to be, in order to be invited and chosen by God?
But: how do we respond to God's great and unconditional invitation?

And back in the parable we discover a behaviour that may lead to an answer:
the guests invited first seem to have more important things to do;
they do not want to accept the invitation at all.
They all want to do what they look upon as more important:
go out and work the field;
stand in a shop, do some business at the bank, make a profit, please their family...
Can none of that wait?
Is that us?
The people with the deadly excuses?
The people with the "so much more important things which cannot wait"?

When the invitation to the feast goes out again, it happens without any selection. Everybody is invited to God's table. And the people were obviously keen to come; the master's house fills, the seats at the tables are all taken, and the party becomes a success.

God cannot be discouraged from celebrating the feast of life, even if some refuse to come. God still invites all – and cannot be turned down as he offers his love and hospitality to a strange and sometimes hostile world.
God wants to be the host of a world wide party.
Sitting at God's table is an offer to renew our lives and to promise to work with him towards a great future for all humankind.

With his story Jesus invites us to be a guest at his party.
And it is up to us to say "Yes" or "No".

Come and celebrate, - let nothing get in the way.
God is giving a party, - and we are all invited.
Amen.