

II Trinity 2026

Sermon - Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

I St. John 3.13-24 St. Luke 14.16-24



There was a time not so long ago all of the businesses in town were closed on Sunday. These so-called “blue laws” were intended to keep people pious and focused on Church and family. The earliest known law prohibiting work on Sunday was in 321 AD, by none other than Roman Emperor Constantine. Some states prohibited sales of alcohol and automobiles on Sunday ...and for some reason pots, pans and washing machines.

This morning’s Gospel from Luke is the story about a Great Feast and excuses people make for not accepting the host’s gracious invitation to enjoy his hospitality. But first we need some background information. Jesus is having lunch with an important religious leader on the Sabbath Day. Earlier in the Gospel, Luke tells us everyone was watching Jesus closely.

A man with edema came to Jesus for help. Rather than letting the religious teachers trap him with the question they wanted to ask...he asks them if it is OK to heal a sick person on the Sabbath. They knew better than to answer Jesus...so he heals the man and sends him on his way. Jesus challenges the religious leaders to do the right thing thing. After all...wouldn’t they pull a son or ox who had fallen into a well and save him from drowning on the Sabbath Day.

Jesus then tells a short story about humility and hospitality. Remember...Jesus is having lunch at an important religious leader’s house on the Sabbath...but we don’t get the idea he is at the head table. He watches guests push each other out of the way to get the best seats next to the host. What follows is a lesson in humility and hospitality. Don’t push people out of the way to get the best seat...you might be told to take a seat in the back. Instead, take another seat...and graciously accept the host’s invitation should you be asked to sit closer to him.

The stage has now been set for Jesus to tell the story of the “Great Feast”. The host has sent out Invitations, the tables are set, the food has been prepared, everything is ready. Email and texting didn’t exist...the host’s personal staff would have gone out to collect the invited guests. Imagine his disappointment when his guests made excuses for why they

couldn't come: one bought some property, one bought some oxen, and one got married.

The invited guests were giving lame reasons...not even excuses...for saying "no" to the host's gracious invitation to the most important dinner of the year. The host had every right to be angry. He's also disappointed the invited guests didn't think enough of his invitation to come and enjoy his hospitality. Who gets to enjoy the Great Feast? The homeless, the poor, the disenfranchised, and the dregs of society.

Many of us have cooked Christmas and Thanksgiving dinners. We invite our family and friends to come and enjoy our hospitality. It's also great privilege and honor when we are invited to dinner. If for some legitimate reason we can't go to the dinner...we send our regrets and include a note of thanks. Anything less would be disrespectful.

Now let's imagine we've spent all day cooking dinner and our guests one-by-one start making excuses for not coming. Wouldn't we be angry, hurt, and disappointed? We might think twice about inviting the "no-shows" to our house again. We do have to be careful and not be overly harsh or judgmental. Some of those excuses may be very real...and we wouldn't want to hurt that person.

The story Jesus tells in today's Gospel is about heaven and us getting ready to go there. God sends out the invitation to come with the expectation we will answer yes! The story also makes it clear God doesn't think there are any valid reasons for not saying yes, although some people might make that choice. Let's think about what making the wrong choice does to God. He has every reason to be angry. He has more reason to be disappointed.

The Great Feast isn't a story about God taking away our place at the head of the table because he wants to punish us for doing bad things. We have a choice to do good or evil...to do what is right or what is wrong. God wants us to do the right thing...on Sunday and every other day of the week. What God wants for us is to join him at the Great Feast in Heaven for his Son, Jesus.

Jesus has handed us a personal invitation and it reads..."How happy are those who will sit down at the Feast in the Kingdom of God. Will you be there?"How can we possibly turn down such a gracious invitation? Our RSVP must be...Yes!

✠