

Advent Lutheran Church
Invite Everyone
August 3, 2025
Luke 14:15-24

Throwing a good party can be rewarding, but it can also be a lot of work. Over the years, Susan and I have opened our home on many occasions – correction: on many many occasions.

We've hosted colleagues, neighbors, friends, family, ministry supporters, and church members. We've hosted groups of just four or five people and groups with over 100. We've thrown cocktail parties with light bites, potluck meals, and full-fledged dinner parties.

In our younger days we once hosted a plated dinner for 70 members of the church I was serving. Last December, around 50 members and friends of Advent traveled to North Arlington for our Christmas open house.

Over the years, we've learned quite a bit through these experiences about what works and what doesn't.

We've made miscalculations along the way resulting in having far too much food – occasionally enough to feed five times the people present. And, on the other extreme, we've realized too late that we prepared a comically small portion of something everyone really wanted.

We've learned the best start time and how to pace varying aspects of the party experience. We've also learned how to craft the right guest list based on the occasion. After so many years of continuously calibrating, our unique approach might well be viewed as a proprietary formula. I won't share our secret blend, but will confide it starts with the basics. We follow much of the unwritten and nearly universal wisdom that most of you also abide by, beginning with how to develop the guest list.

Each party we've hosted starts with crafting a guest list. The people should share something in common. A little diversity is

welcomed and can enhance the conversation, but too much difference makes things awkward. And then there is the cut off – the point at which the list is long enough to yield the desired crowd size. If RSVPs are lower than expected, we can invite a few more people.

After almost 25 years of following these rules, we decided it was time to intentionally break them. Leading up to this event, we had been hosting two very different groups with some regularity.

The first group is extended family. I'm blessed that my sister and her family live nearby and that our parents are alive and also local. Remarkably all of my dad's siblings still live in the metroplex along with many of their children and grandchildren.

The second group is a subset of my church family known as our small group or life group. This group from Cathedral of Hope gathers in our home every week for bible study and prayer. Additionally, we often host the group for potluck socials.

Without getting too personal or oversharing stories that are not mine to tell, let me just say that both groups are lovely people but they have very different lived experiences.

So, we decided to invite everyone for Easter. Did you hear me, Advent? Susan and I decided to invite everyone for Easter. Rather than holding two separate events, we began planning for a single feast.

Predictably the RSVPs were light. And the excuses were polite. I may have expanded the guest list once or twice. Nonetheless, we knew our vision could be realized and we persisted.

Okay, I'll confess. I grew this from two groups that no one would suggested we bring together to include a third. I invited some folks from my work. After all, there were so many seats left to fill.

Every Easter is an important part of my faith journey, but Easter 2023 was especially meaningful and memorable.

Siblings in Christ, it happened! People who would have never met each other for any other reason met one another in our home that day. They practiced polite small talk, gathered in a large circle listening as each person introduced themselves, recognized the presence of God among us in a time of prayer, and then broke bread together enjoying an Easter dinner with more than enough of everything for everyone. And, most folks even hung around for a group picture.

This unusual approach to a guest list actually worked. Invite everyone! All are welcome.

Why am I oversharing? Why does this not fit the pattern of my typical sermon? Why are we all a bit uncomfortable? Because of this morning's Gospel lesson.

Throughout our summer series on the lesser-known parables of Jesus, I intentionally saved the Parable of the Great Banquet for last.

I knew that as we wrapped up this series and started shifting from the slower pace of summer to the structure of the school year, we'd need a fresh reminder of God's incredible, inclusive, and inexhaustible love. I also trust that by now, you know that the parables – Jesus' favorite teaching tool – are meant to give us glimpses of what the kingdom of God is really like.

The banquet in the story is one of many vivid images Jesus uses to describe the reign of God. It's not just a metaphor for heaven or the afterlife; it's a vision of how God longs for us to live in the here and now.

This parable reminds us that God is serious about the invitation. No one is excluded. No one is overlooked. Everyone is welcome at the table. Everyone has a place in the kingdom of God.

Some will make lame excuses for why they don't accept the invitation. I mean, really, who buys a field or oxen before seeing them or trying them out? And, what newlywed is so consumed by their new marital status they can't attend a dinner party?

Could it be that our fixation on our possessions keeps us from the kingdom? Is our insatiable appetite for more and newer for better and bigger blinding us from seeing what's possible?

Or might it be that our overreliance on certain relationships is keeping us from the kingdom? Are we creating our identities solely based on human relationships with our spouse, our children, or other close connections?

The excuses were endless in the first century and are limitless today. God's invitation remains. God continues to invite those we expect and those we don't. Our God is an always inviting host.

Now back to my story . . . Easter 2023 wasn't a one-time miracle. Instead, it has become an annual reminder of what is possible and what God intends. We hosted the combined group again in 2024. And, then, this year, even while serving as your Pastor – role that included some Easter duties here at Advent – we hosted them again in 2025.

As I enter my final month as your interim pastor, I recognize that I won't be able to invite you all to dinner in my home. I am, however, grateful to extend a much better invitation to our Lord's table.

No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are invited again this morning. After you receive communion, listen for a reminder that the nourishment we receive at God's table of more than enough strengthens us to live out our faith.

May God's kingdom become more real in our lives and in the world each day even as it is fully realized in heaven.

Amen.