



Worship Resources for *Steeple's Ad Run* – Fall 2008

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Luke 14:12-13

He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind."

Jesus Includes

Just over eleven years ago I was injured in a hit-and-run accident, when a drunk driver plowed into me while I was bicycling. After four months in the hospital, including six weeks in a coma, I was released to try to get back into parish ministry again.

It wasn't going to be easy. I was in a wheelchair now, trying to figure out how to navigate the world on wheels. I also had to re-image myself as a person with a disability.

On one of my first Sundays back in the pulpit, the lectionary passage for the day was from Mark chapter two, the story of the paralytic who was healed by Jesus. "Your sins are forgiven... Stand up and take your mat and walk." I had preached that text before, mouthing some platitude about healing and forgiveness that had seemed true at the time. But now, my superficial interpretation didn't seem to fit. The experience of the paralytic in the gospel story didn't seem to have anything to do with my situation. I had nothing to say to my congregation.

This caused me some concern. Over the next months I searched scripture for some good news for myself and people like me who had disabilities. Searching among stories of forgiveness didn't seem right – I had a hard time believing that disability was punishment for sin. Searching among stories of miraculous healing didn't seem right either, much to the disappointment of my faithful parishioners who prayed fervently for my recovery. To me, disability was something that just happened, that, in time, has come to represent simply part of my identity, like my hair color or my gender.

I wasn't searching for forgiveness or fixing. What I came to desire most was just to be included. When I returned to my hometown after my injury, I found, to my utter dismay, that my favorite coffee shop was up a stair from the sidewalk. My church claimed to be accessible, but the chancel had three steps. I used to love playing outdoors with my kids. Now I had to sit and watch them from a distance. I fell over trying to climb or descend curbs. Bathroom doors and toilet stalls were often too narrow.

So I went back to the Bible looking for stories of acceptance and inclusion. And you know what I found? The concept of inclusion is the key to unlocking the Gospel. Jesus wasn't distinguished by faith healing. Healers were a dime a dozen in his day. There were other teachers plying their trade in the Near East. His prophetic message wasn't particularly

unique in relation to his predecessors. What made Jesus unique in his world and culture was his practice of radical hospitality.

The Levitical Holiness Code had spelled out clearly who was to be included and who was supposed to remain outside. Jesus made a point of reaching across those cultural and religious barriers. He ate with sinners, spoke openly with women and gentiles, and touched the sick and the dead. When you give a banquet, he says in Luke 14:12-14, don't invite your friends. Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Just think – the Kingdom of God is A.D.A. compliant!

The United Church of Christ has a contemporary way of putting it. We say, "No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here." Walking is optional.