

Pentecost 13 – C (2019)
Luke 14:1, 7-14

I sometimes joke about our weather in the Midwest being affected by hurricanes, but for those who are affected, I can imagine it is no laughing matter. By now, Hurricane Dorian has already affected parts of the U.S. after moving through the eastern Caribbean. As the hurricane approached, people began to make preparations which included stocking up on necessary things for riding out a hurricane.

You can probably guess what the most crucial items are: bottled water, ready-to-eat canned foods, instant coffee and tea bags, pantry staples, high-energy foods and the like. But can you guess what the most purchased item is? Pop-tarts!

Here in the Midwest, we have our own weather events we need to prepare for. We have no time to make last-minute preparations for tornadoes, but snowstorms, unfortunately, may be here before too long. Hopefully, we won't have the same kind of snows we had last winter. But there are things we can do to prepare for those.

I used to listen to Garrison Keillor and his Saturday night radio program: "A Prairie Home Companion." He had some wonderful monologues during which he spun stories of Lake Wobegon in Minnesota: "the little town that time forgot, that the decades cannot improve." "The town where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children – are above average." But those are Norwegian Lutherans.

He had wonderful monologues, one in which he reflected back on his school days in Minnesota, recalling how the school principal assigned each farm child a "storm home" in town for the winter months. In case a blizzard came up while school was in session, the children would be sent to their storm homes to stay the night.

The day he received the slip of the paper with the name of his "storm home" family -- a family he'd never met -- Keillor walked over to the house to have a look at it.

It looked like the home of the kindly old couple that the children lost in the forest suddenly come upon in the clearing and know they are lucky to be in a story with a happy ending. That was how I felt about the Kloeckls ... though my family might have wondered about my assignment to a Catholic home, had they known. We were suspicious of Catholics, enough to wonder if the Pope had ordered them to take in little Protestant children during

blizzards and make them say the rosary for their suppers. But I imagined the Kloeckls had personally chosen me as their storm child because they liked me. "Him!" they had told Mr. Detman [the principal]. "In the event of a blizzard, we want that boy! The skinny one with the thick glasses!"

No blizzard came during school hours that year, all the snowstorms were convenient evening or weekend ones, and I never got to stay with the Kloeckls, but they were always in my thoughts and they grew large in my imagination. My Storm Home. Blizzards aren't the only storms and not the worst by any means. I could imagine worse things. If the worst should come, I could go to the Kloeckls and knock on their door. "Hello," I'd say. "I'm your storm child."

"Oh, I know," she'd say. "I was wondering when you'd come. Oh, it's good to see you. How would you like a hot chocolate and an oatmeal cookie?"

We'd sit at the table. "Looks like this storm is going to last a while."

"Yes."

"Terrible storm. They say it's going to get worse before it stops. I just pray for anyone who's out in this."

"Yes."

"But we're so glad to have you. I can't tell you. Carl! Come down and see who's here!"

"Is it the storm child?"

"Yes! Himself, in the flesh!"

A story like this speaks to our souls -- because there's a little part of us that wishes we had a storm home, a place where hospitality is gracefully offered, and gratefully received.

In spite of some of the difficulties and challenges that face us in these days, there are some things about our United Methodist Church that I really like and find to be a wonderful expression of faith and discipleship. This first Sunday of the month many churches, including ours, are celebrating Communion as we gather around the Lord's Table. Sometimes, I will forget, but 9 times out of 10, I will say something like, "In the United Methodist Church, we practice an open table. All who desire to know Jesus better, to follow Jesus more nearly, are welcome to come and share in this meal. It is a gift of God for the people of God -- a gift which we can neither earn nor pay for."

In our reading from Luke 14:12-14 today, Jesus offers a challenging interpretation of table fellowship, enjoining us to bring outsiders to the table. In fact, this passage is about the radical hospitality we experience

with God, which ought to be the model for our own welcoming of the stranger. The word *hospitality* actually means "love of stranger."

Jesus certainly has concern for feeding the hungry, especially those who have no way to repay our generosity. He says, "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" (v. 12).

That hits close to home, doesn't it? Most of us give luncheons or dinners for precisely the groups that Jesus mentions: Friends, family members, relatives, neighbors. We enjoy feeding them and then being fed by them.

But Jesus says to go a different direction. Think of hungry children, whether there are two or 22 million. "When you give a banquet," he says, "invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (vv. 13-14).

Feed those who cannot repay you, commands Jesus. The poor who live in cheap motels without kitchens. The crippled who have trouble entering most rooms with their wheelchairs. The lame who need to have meals brought to them. The blind who are often stuck at home because travel is so difficult.

Make lunch or dinner for *these* people, suggests Jesus. Not for the folks who easily pay you back with a lunch or dinner of their own. And don't just make it a meal -- make it a banquet, a celebration.

When I visit our home-bound church members, those who are not here at the table because they are unable, I will tell them that if they can't come to church, the church will come to them. There are many in this world who we will never meet and who will never come to this church, but I think Jesus tells us that we have a responsibility to care for those in need.

In our connectional United Methodist Church, we have a perfect vehicle to care for those in need which we call apportionments. We can do so much more together than we can separately. I hope that your giving goes beyond your weekly tithe to the Church, but that is a good place to start if you don't already give beyond the local church.

Just when we think we have everything figured out, Jesus throws a curve ball and turn our ideas on their heads. Our reading from Luke today, this whole discussion isn't really about the dinner party. It's a metaphor, a parable about the kingdom of God. By eating with all classes of people,

Jesus symbolized God's intent and desire to include all people in the kingdom. Being followers of Jesus means doing the same.

It may mean changing our church and our worship and the way we do things so that the stranger, those who are not like us, feel welcome and invited into this little corner of God's kingdom. It may be about sacrificing our own preferences for the preferences and needs of the stranger. It may mean tolerating and offering ways of worship and doing church that we not be comfortable with and may not understand. This is a scary and uncomfortable thought and one which we might not even want to consider, but we are not God and yet Jesus, as Paul writes to the Philippians in chapter 2,

who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not regard equality with God
 as something to be exploited,
⁷ but emptied himself,
 taking the form of a slave,
 being born in human likeness.
 And being found in human form,
⁸ he humbled himself
 and became obedient to the point of death—
 even death on a cross.
⁹ Therefore God also highly exalted him
 and gave him the name
 that is above every name,
¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus
 every knee should bend,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹ and every tongue should confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord,
 to the glory of God the Father.

Our exercise of hospitality and welcome is, eventually, for the glory of God and the building of God's kingdom. It is about doing our part in creating a little bit of heaven in this place at this time, so anyone who comes and anyone who hears of the Waupun United Methodist Church knows that God is here and they are called and invited and welcomed into God's presence.