

Please echo this prayer -

Open my eyes, Lord. Help me to see your face.

Open my eyes, Lord. Help me to see.

Open my ears, Lord. Help me to hear your voice.

Open my ears, Lord. Help me to hear.

Open my heart, Lord. Help me to love like you.

Open my heart, Lord. Help me to love.

Please listen to a word from God from Luke 14:15-24.

The Parable of the Great Dinner

15 One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!" 16 Then Jesus[a] said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. 17 At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is ready now.' 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' 19 Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' 20 Another said, 'I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.' 21 So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' 22 And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.' 23 Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you,[b] none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.' "

This is a word from God for the people of God.

Thanks be to God.

I. Introduction

There is a thief that sometimes breaks into the back doors of our hearts. It doesn't come in the night with a crowbar. It comes in daylight, wearing our own clothes, whispering that we deserve more, that every feast is prepared for people like us. **We begin to mistake our blessings for our birthright and our privileges for promises from God.** And somewhere along the way, we forget the miracle of being invited to the feast at all. In Luke's Gospel, Jesus tells a story about a table, an invitation, and the dangerous hunger of entitlement.

The Gospel of Luke is a story of a God who refuses to make people stand outside of the door.

The image of God that Luke paints for us is a God who always says, "Come in."

Of the four Gospels, he has a particularly tender eye for the people pushed to the edges of society—the poor, the hungry, the sick, the stranger, the sinner, the widow, and the forgotten. Again and again, he invites us to see the world through the eyes of those who have been overlooked, dismissed, or told they do not belong.

It begins with Mary, a young woman whose song announces that God will scatter the proud, bring down the powerful, lift up the lowly, fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty. It continues with shepherds sleeping in the fields, a Samaritan who stops to help a wounded stranger, a father who welcomes his lost son home, and a dinner host instructed to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

In his Gospel, the kingdom of God often arrives from the bottom up. It's an upside down kingdom. Grace shows up in unexpected places. Holiness wears ordinary clothes. And the people society considers least important become central to the story God is telling.

Perhaps his most enduring invitation is this: if we want to know where God is at work, we might begin by looking for the people the world has forgotten. There, among the least and the last, we may discover that God has been waiting for us all along.

Webster's Dictionary

Entitlement – a belief that one is deserving of or entitled to certain privileges.

Gratitude – thankfulness

As a person who tries to follow Jesus, I want to build tables instead of walls.

I want to tell people, "Come in" instead of "Keep out."

I want to tell people over and over again, "You are God's child and you are welcome here.

II. Entitlement mistakes privilege for blessing

If our privilege keeps us from seeing, hearing and treating justly the people who pick our fruits and vegetables, then we haven't truly thanked God for our meal.

Mango Prayer

Dear God, this morning I held a mango in my hand.

It came from Guatemala.

It was soft like a human cheek.

It was the color of sunset.

I thought about the person who picked the mango.

Was it a person with two children like me?

Does he pick mangoes to help his family survive?

Was it a little girl like the little girls who were in my classroom at school?

Does she pick mangoes to help her family live?

Who picked the mango?

May we help the person who picked the mango, as the person who picked the mango helped us.

May we help all of your children, O God, especially the ones who are the smallest and most forgotten in this world.

May your beloved community come on earth as it is in heaven.

Before sunrise, Miguel walks into a mango orchard at the Finca El Mango in Santa Rosa, Guatemala.

The air is cool, and the trees are heavy with fruit.

He ties a tattered cloth around his head, takes his patched picking bag, and begins a day of work.

Miguel knows how to recognize a ripe mango.

He knows which mango is ready to be picked and which needs another day in the sun.

Carefully, he reaches among the leaves, twists each mango from its stem, and places it in his bag.

By midmorning, the sun presses against his back.

His hands are sticky with mango juice.

His shoulders ache.

He thinks about his children.

The money he earns will pay for their meals, their clothes, and their schooling.

The mangoes he picked are sorted, packed into boxes, and transported across borders to markets and grocery stores in the United States.

There, someone will choose one from a display of golden fruit, carry it home, slice it open, and taste its sweetness.

The consumer won't learn Miguel's name.

Miguel won't know whose table his mangoes reached.

But between Miguel's hands and that distant table, something connects them: the work of one human being helping another live.

And perhaps that is where gratitude begins—not simply with thanking God for the mango, but with remembering the hands that picked it.

Because every mango has a story, and every person who feeds us is somebody's beloved child and a beloved child of God.

III. Entitlement turns the table into a possession

It is one thing to give somebody a meal. It is another thing to give them a permanent seat at the table.

Juniper was sitting on the brick wall between Stone Avenue and the Mercy Center, writing in his tattered notebook with his trusty pen.

Tina parked her grocery cart with everything she owned in the world beside him.

She sat down with a snap, crackle, and pop of her knees and back.

"I'm a walkin' commercial for Kellogg's Rice Krispies," she chuckled.

"Sometimes I think I'm a commercial for Grape Nuts," he chuckled.

They sat beside each other for a while.

They were very still and very quiet.

"Juniper, who gets to sit at the table?" She finally asked.

He looked up from his notebook.

He put down his pen.

"I suppose," he said, "the people who own the table get to decide."

Tina shook her head.

"Well," she said, "I think that's what they want you to believe."

She told him a story about Fannie Lou Hamer, a Black woman from Mississippi who spent much of her life picking cotton.

She had known what it meant to be hungry while other people ate.

She had known what it meant to work a field that would never belong to her.

And when she tried to register to vote, the people who owned the power decided she had no business asking for a place in the room.

"They beat her," Tina said. "They threatened her. They tried to make her afraid of her own voice."

Juniper felt something tighten in his chest.

"Did she stop speaking?" He asked.

"No," Tina said. "That's the part you need to remember."

Fannie Lou helped organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. In 1964, she traveled to Atlantic City to challenge the all-white delegation that claimed to represent Mississippi at the Democratic National Convention.

She stood before a television camera and told the country what had been done to her and to her people.

The powerful offered a compromise. A couple of seats. A little room at the edge of the table.

They acted as though justice were a favor.

As though freedom were something the powerful could portion out like buttermilk biscuits and gravy.

"What did she do?" Juniper asked.

"She kept telling the truth," said Tina. "Some people think the question is, 'Will the powerful invite us to dinner?' Fannie Lou knew the real question was, 'Why do they believe they own the invitation?'"

Juniper opened his notebook and wrote that down.

Then he crossed it out.

It sounded too much like a slogan that sounds good but doesn't change anything.

He tried again.

The kingdom of God has a table, but no bouncer.

He showed Tina.

She considered it.

"Better," she said. "But who sets the table?"

Juniper looked toward the Mercy Center, where people were beginning to gather for lunch.

"The hungry, maybe," he said. "And the strangers?"

"Especially the strangers," answered Tina.

"And who decides who belongs?" She asked.

Juniper closed his notebook.

Tina stood, straightened her yellow scarf, and pushed her cart toward the door.

Juniper followed.

There was bread inside.

There was soup.

There were people who had been told, in a hundred different ways, that they were not welcome.

Juniper held the door open.

"Come on in," he said.

He did not ask who had been invited.

He simply made room.

IV. Gratitude makes room for others

Gratitude is not complete when we thank God for our place at the table. It becomes complete when we help make room for somebody else.

It was a cold night in New York City.

The cold went right through your coat and into your bones. Have you ever known cold like that?

A cold rain moved through the streets, searching for someone to trouble.

A man stood outside the Catholic Worker house.

His shoes were battered.

His hands trembled.

He was hungry.

He was right smack dab in the middle of a city full of people hurrying home.

He had no place to stay, no home to hurry home to.

He didn't know if he should knock on the door, if he was worthy enough to go inside.

He decided to take a chance and knock.

Dorothy Day came to the door.

She wore a tattered blue wool sweater over a plain blue dress and old tennis shoes.

Her hair was pinned back under a threadbare blue head scarf.

There were deep wrinkles around her eyes, across her forehead and on her cheeks.

She held a newspaper in her calloused hand.

Her eyes were as blue as a winter morning sky.

She didn't have an easy answer to the world's suffering.

She was a journalist who'd given her life to following Jesus among the poor.

She and Peter Maurin had started the Catholic Worker Movement, opening houses where people could find food, shelter, and community.

Where people could find a place to belong.

She looked closely into the man's earthy brown eyes.

She noticed the way he held his shoulders, for they were hunched over as though he'd learned to make himself small in a world that didn't want to see him.

She didn't ask him what had gone wrong.

"Come in," she said.

Inside, there was food.

There was warmth.

There were other people who knew something about rough sleeping, losing a job, being forgotten, and wondering where bread for tomorrow would come from.

The man wasn't alone any longer.

Nothing about the world had suddenly become fair.

The cold rain continued to fall.

The city still had its locked doors.

But that evening, one person was received rather than rejected, fed rather than ignored, welcomed rather than turned away.

This was the revolution Dorothy Day believed Christians were called to practice: not merely speaking about the love of Christ, but making room for Christ in the person standing at the door.

And perhaps that is the question her life leaves with us at Triune Mercy Center.

When someone arrives carrying the weight of a hard life, will they find another closed door—or a voice like Dorothy Day's that says, "Come in."

V. Conclusion

Perhaps gratitude begins when we stop counting the places we believe we deserve at the table and start noticing who is still standing outside. The upside-down kingdom of God is not a private dining room for the deserving. **It is a feast where the forgotten are remembered, the overlooked are seen, the unloved discover that they are loved, and the unwelcome hear the words, "Come in!"** There is bread enough. There is room enough. There is grace enough. So may we loosen our grip on what we think is ours and open our hands to the gifts we never earned. And may our gratitude become an invitation for everyone, EVERYONE, to come to the table.

As some people say, "Build a wall!" I say, "Build a table."

As some people say, "Eat outside!" I say, "Sit at the table!"

As some people say, "Keep out!" I say, "Come in!"

Come in, Lord Jesus.

Amen.

V. Benediction

No matter who you are or what you've done, who you love or what you've lost, where you've gone or where you've stayed, there will always be a seat for you at Triune Mercy because you are a beloved child of God.