

BEWARE THE UNDERTOW: Fun in the Sun**Message for July 22, 2018****North East United Methodist Church****Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian**

Luke 14: 16-24 (NLT) - *Jesus replied with this story: “A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, ‘Come, the banquet is ready.’ But they all began making excuses. One said, ‘I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.’ Another said, ‘I now have a wife, so I can’t come.’*

“The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious and said, ‘Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’ After the servant had done this, he reported, ‘There is still room for more.’ So his master said, ‘Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet.’”

PRAYER

Top Ten Excuses for Not Attending Church

Sorry I missed church, but...

10. I can find God in nature.
9. I prefer watching televangelists (*There’s just something about a remote control that makes me feel like I’m in control of my own spiritual life*)
8. It would make me miss my Zen class
7. There are too many hypocrites in church, and besides it interferes with my tee-time
6. There’s too much hugging and real warmth
5. There isn’t enough hugging and real warmth
4. I went once, but I didn’t recognize the place without the lilies and poinsettias
3. I’m an atheist – I swear to God!
2. Even Jesus wouldn’t have gone if he’d had to wear pantyhose
1. The dog ate my offering

Excuses. Excuses are deadly things. They poison the life of the Christian. They keep us from growing closer to God. They prevent us from following God’s guidance. They hold us back from the blessings God has for each of us.

God gives us a tremendous gift, a tremendous invitation. God gives us an invitation to dine with the Creator, to live as one of His adopted sons and daughters. God gives us **an invitation not just to eternal life but to benefits and blessings in this life including power and strength, purpose, confidence, fulfillment, security, help with weakness, peace and freedom.**

God has sent us a personal invitation in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ, to invite us to a relationship, to a banquet, to life. Unfortunately, like the undertow at the beach that can pull even an able-bodied swimmer out away from shore, there are so many distractions and things in this world, so many excuses we make, that pull us away from dining with our Father in heaven.

Excuses are not something new. In the garden of Eden, we find the first excuse for not following God's commands. **Genesis 3:12-13 (NLT)** - *The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it." Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What have you done?" "The serpent deceived me," she replied. "That's why I ate it."*

Just think of how many excuses Moses offered up to God, explaining why he could not be the one to lead Israel out of bondage. **Exodus 4:10, 13 (NLT)** - *But Moses said to the Lord, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue... Oh, my Lord, please send someone else."*

And Jeremiah? **Jeremiah 1: 5-6 (NLT)** – *God tells Jeremiah, "I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my prophet to the nations." "O Sovereign LORD," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!"*

And then there is Gideon. **Judges 6: 14-15 (ESV)** - *And the LORD turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house."*

Throughout scripture, throughout history men and women have made excuse, and throughout God has responded in different ways.

- With Moses we hear, Exodus 4:14 - *"Then the anger of the Lord was kindled against Moses..."*
- With Adam and Eve, God kicked them out of the garden.
- With Jeremiah and Gideon, God told them that they would go and do what God commanded them.
- With the Rich Young Ruler and with the many disciples in John 6 who *"turned away and deserted [Jesus],"* Jesus simply lets them go.

In Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet, the Master becomes *"furious,"* lets those who have their excuses go ahead and miss out on the great banquet prepared; instead, the

Master sends His servant into the “*country lanes and behind the hedges*,” urging anyone who wanted to come and feast at His home.

Never are excuses good or acceptable behaviors, nor are they listened to by a Holy and Righteous God, who calls us to follow Him.

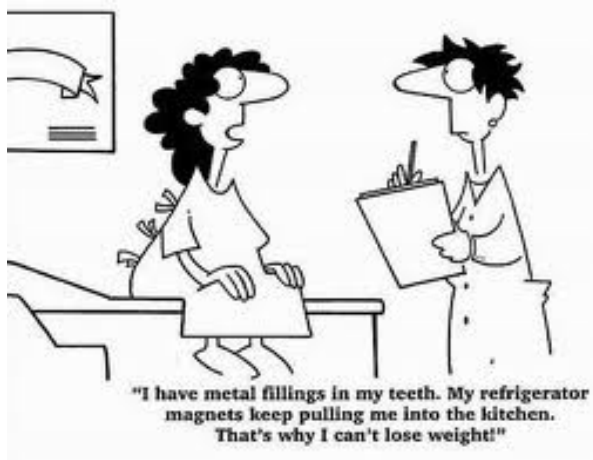
Paul writes in **Romans 1:20 (ESV)** - *For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.*

Luke 9: 59-62 (ESV) – *To another he said, “Follow me.” But he said, “Lord, let me first go and bury my father.” And Jesus said to him, “Leave the dead to bury their own dead. But as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Yet another said, “I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.” Jesus said to him, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”*

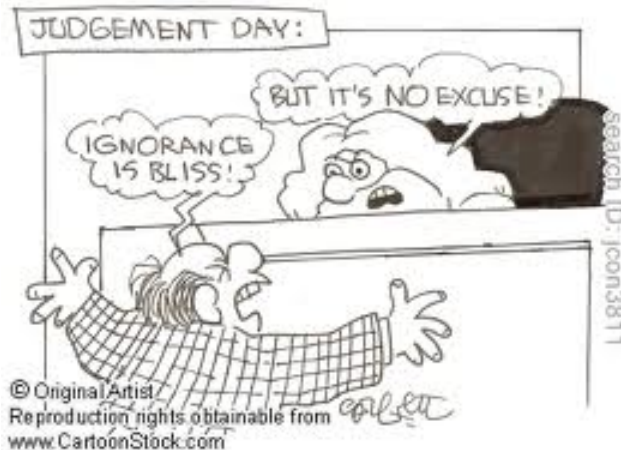
In other words, Jesus is saying “**No Excuses**” (*Mention shirt from Woodbridge Soccer – “No Excuses” written on back – theme for season – went on to win Southern Division*)

Unfortunately, like those throughout the scriptures, throughout history, at times we are quick to make excuses.

I love this cartoon I found:



These excuses can have eternal consequences, as the following cartoon shows:



Excuses can not only have eternal consequences, but can affect one's relationship with Jesus Christ and with others today. Excuses can cause us to miss out on the abundant life one can have here on earth as one walks with Christ and lives out their purpose.

Jesus replied with this story: "A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, 'Come, the banquet is ready.' But they all began making excuses. One said, 'I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I now have a wife, so I can't come.'"

First, **our excuses stand in the way of our COMING TO CHRIST.**

Charles Spurgeon, in his sermon, "A Straight Talk," writes, "*It is not merely a supper that you will lose when you say, 'I cannot come.' To lose a supper would be little and might soon be set right when breakfast-time came around. But you lose eternal life, and that loss in time can never be found in eternity. You lose the pardon of sin, reconciliation to God, adoption into the family of love – these are heavy losses. You lose the joy of faith for life, and you lose comfort in death – who can estimate this damage? Lose not your immortal soul! Oh, lose not that! For, if you gain the whole world, it will not recompense you for such a loss. Lose what you will, but lose not your soul, I pray you!*"

I'm not ready...I don't understand...when I get my life together...God couldn't possibly forgive me...you don't understand...I have things to do...

When our hearts are nudged, touched, for those we love who do not have a relationship with Christ, may we cry out, "*Please, Lord...help them stop making excuses...*"

But Jesus' parable is also for those who know Christ, who have accepted Him, who come here most Sundays and worship, believing in Jesus, but at times are easily pulled out by the undertows of this world. In other words, Jesus' parable is for you and me.

Our excuses might not be standing in the way of us coming to Christ, but **our excuses could be standing in the way of our GROWING WITH CHRIST.**

How many blessings will we miss because of our many excuses:

- *I can't be involved in Bible study right now...*
- *I don't know enough of the Bible....*
- *I can't be involved in a small group...*
- *I'm not good opening up to people....*
- *I can't love my enemy...you don't know what they've done...*
- *I can't get closer to God...my life is too messed up right now...*
- *I can't get involved in a ministry...I don't have those gifts...*
- *I don't have time to get more involved in the church, in my relationship with God, in prayer...maybe when things in my life calm down...*
- *I've never done it that way before...*

Spurgeon writes, “Let me be plain with you and say that you could find time for thought about your soul if you had a mind to do so. To plead that you have no time for religion is a fraud. It is lying unto God to say that you have no time. When a man wants to do a thing, if he has no time, he makes time. ‘Where there’s a will there’s a way.’ Where there is a heart to religion there is plenty of time for it.”

He goes on to say, **“If you still intend to say, ‘I cannot come,’ will you speak the truth now? Will you altar a word, and get near the truth? Say, ‘I will not come.’”**

Will we continue to make excuses and find ourselves in the same place in our relationship with Christ a year from now as we are today? Or will we stop making excuses, jump in and grow in our relationship with Christ and His Church?

Our excuses can not only stand in the way of our coming to Christ and our growing with Christ, **our excuses can stand in the way of our LIVING IN CHRIST.**

I love this cartoon:



Christ literally wants us to follow Him, His commands, His example...to live in Him, in obedience, in word and action, in the every day.

Have you ever heard the Gospel preached, read God's Word, and said to yourself, "*Well, that doesn't apply to me.*"

- God says '***Forgive one another as Christ forgave you,***' but we say "*After what he did?*"
- God says, "***Do not steal,***" but we say, "*The government didn't earn this money, I'm giving enough in taxes...I'm just not reporting this amount.*"
- God says, "***Love your neighbor,***" but we say "*My neighbor is the wrong color...plus do you see the way they act.*"
- God says, "***Whatever is true...noble...right...pure...think about such things,***" but we say, "*I'm just looking a little bit...I'm not hurting anyone...it's just me and the computer.*"
- God says, "***Go and make disciples of all nations,***" but we say, "*Why do we have to go to them, they should come to us...I'm not qualified to speak about Jesus... We have a preacher that can share the message.*"
- God says, "***The book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, you shall meditate on it day and night...***" but we say, "*I don't have time to read my Bible...I'm just too busy...I get enough from the sermon on Sunday.*"
- God says, "***Do not neglect in meeting together...***" but we say, "*I don't have to go to Church to be a Christian...there are too many hypocrites there.*"
- God says, "***Speak evil of no one...***" but we say, "*It's not gossip...I'm just concerned...Anyway, everyone already knows.*"
- God says, "***For all have sinned...***" but we say, "*At least I'm not as bad as that person over there.*"
- God says, "***Give to the one who begs from you...do not refuse...***" but we say, "*They probably will use it for alcohol or drugs...they're lazy...they need to get a job like the rest of us.*"

Through our many excuses, we end up failing to live in Christ. We end up failing to be obedient in our walk; thus, we miss out on a closeness with our Heavenly Father, an intimacy that is only possible through obedience.

I John 3:24 (ESV) tells us, "*Whoever keeps his commandments abides in God, and God in him.*"

Psalms 112:1 (ESV) – "*Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments!*"

James 1:25 (ESV) – "*But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*"

Lastly, perhaps most devastating, **our excuses stand in the way of us WITNESSING FOR CHRIST.**

- When we make excuses rather than attempt, with God’s help, to change our actions and to obey God’s Word each day...
- When our daily decisions, church meetings, marriages, work places, and relationships look no different from those who do not follow Christ...
- When we blame others or blame our environment for our bad decisions and hurtful actions...

When we do these things, it shows the world that we might profess what Christ taught but we don’t really believe it enough to obey when the going gets tough. The world is watching and when our relationships break down, our money gets tight, our lives become overwhelmed, they see us react no differently than those outside the faith.

Such a witness pushes people away from the church and its message of forgiveness and hope, rather than pulling them toward it. We become the undertow for others.

We have been given the freedom and power to choose just like the three men in the parable that Jesus told. We have the opportunity to accept the wonderful invitation Jesus gives us.

An invitation to...

- A relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

An invitation to...

- Grow in our relationship with Christ, walking closer with God and growing into the man or woman we were created to become.

An invitation to...

- A life of obedience and faithfulness resulting in others seeing Christ in us and being drawn to Him.

An invitation to...

- One day hear God say, *“Well done, my good and faithful servant.”*

We have been given the same invitation that the Master sent His servant to declare in Jesus’ parable. God has even told us that, when we accept His invitation, we have the Holy Spirit and Christ Himself to guide us and help us along the journey. We have been blessed with the *“body of Christ,”* the Church, to support and undergird us, to teach us God’s Word. We are not alone on the journey to the Master’s feast.

But like those who were invited by the servant to the feast made excuses, turned away, and the undertow of this world pulled them out to sea, the same can happen to us if we are not careful, intentional, and lean on God and His people for support. The same can happen to us if we make excuses for ungodly behavior, for actions that send a poor witness to the community, for decisions that result in broken relationships, for words that hurt those across the pew from us, for failing to decide to truly give our lives over to Christ.

What will we do? Will we choose to accept the invitation? Will we come to Christ, grow in Christ, live in Christ, and have our lives witness for Christ? **Will we stop making excuses?**