

Series: Life!

Sermon: Don't Make Excuses

Luke 14:16-23 (NIV)

16 Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

18 "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

19 "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

20 "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

21 "The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

22 "'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

23 "Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full.'

Sermon

The General went out to find that none of his G.I.s were there. One finally ran up, panting heavily.

"Sorry, sir! I can explain, you see I had a date and it ran a little late. I ran to the bus but missed it, I hailed a cab but it broke down, found a farm, bought a horse but it dropped dead, ran 10 miles, and now I'm here."

The General was very skeptical about this explanation but at least he was here so he let the G.I. go. Moments later, eight more G.I.s came up to the general panting, he asked them why they were late.

"Sorry, sir! I had a date and it ran a little late, I ran to the bus but missed it, I hailed a cab but it broke down, found a farm, bought a horse but it dropped dead, ran 10 miles, and now I'm here."

The General eyed them, feeling very skeptical but since he let the first guy go, he let them go, too. A ninth G.I. jogged up to the General, panting heavily,

"Sorry, sir! I had a date and it ran a little late, I ran to the bus but missed it, I hailed a cab but..."

"Let me guess," the General interrupted, "it broke down."

"No," said the G.I., "there were so many dead horses in the road, it took forever to get around them."

We all like to make excuses, don't we. We've all given them, we've all heard them. At it's core, an excuse is a reason given for unwanted results. A reason for unwanted results. You're late at work, and you give a defense for your actions. You get picked up for speeding, you give a defense for breaking the law. Here are a couple

from the our very own State Patrol: "I was in a hurry because I have to go to the bathroom. Response : "OK, Give me your license and I'll follow you, when you get through in the bathroom, I'll issue you your ticket." Speeder : "Just give me the ticket." 2) I am almost out of gas and was trying to get to the gas station. (Very common excuse) Response : "OK, then you better shut your car off while I write the ticket. 3) Cop came up to the car, seeing kids screaming and fighting in the back. The driver only said, "I was trying to get away from the noises in the back. No ticket, original excuse. 4) You can't give me a ticket, don't you know who I am. (I didn't) I'm a Senator. (UH, he was.) He was also wrong about me giving him the ticket, but he didn't have to pay it. (I lost a day for that one.) 6. I wasn't driving, He was. (There was no one else in the car. I gave her a ticket, quickly, and sent her on her way to la la land.)

I'm sure all of us have had times in which we had to give an excuse, real or fake, to account for some behavior.

Our scripture is an story that is chock-full of excuses. Jesus was telling a story about a man who was throwing a big party. The invitations had gone out. This was a big deal. This person had some prominent friends. It was going to be a big shindig! Now, in the tradition of the times, there were two invitations that were given. The very first invite told everyone the date, place, time and occasion for the party. Everyone would put it in their day-planners and I-phones. You would also RSVP to the host telling them that you were going to make it. The second invitation would come when the party was ready. The crier would go through the streets and tell everyone who had RSVP to come on in, the party's starting. Wouldn't that be nice? Have you ever needed another 30 minutes until everything was ready before people started showing up? You could have done that centuries ago in Palestine. You would have loved it back then. Everyone knew roughly when the party was going to take place, but they wouldn't come until you called for them. And one by one, they start to give their excuses. We know that these people were well off by the excuses they gave. Now, these are people who had promised that they were coming. The first excuse was about land. "I just bought some land, and I need to go look at it." Terrible excuse. Who buys land without looking at it first? The second excuse, "I just bought 5 yoke of oxen, need to try them out." Another horrible excuse. Everyone knows you try out the oxen before purchasing! And you had the party on the calendar! What happened. Same with the guy who got married. Can't go, just got married. Bring her along! These are all lame excuses. They really didn't want to go to the party, they just came up with excuses so they wouldn't be involved. I remember this guy who asked another guy for a loan of \$20. The guy said no. The would-be borrower asked, "Why not?" The wise man said, "Because I don't have enough rope." "What's rope got to do with it?" "When you don't want to do something, any excuse will do." This morning, I want to take a look at some of the excuses we make today, and explore what they really mean. Excuses are lies we tell ourselves to avoid dealing with unpleasant truths. But as long as we buy into those excuses, we can never move past them. Excuses inhibit us from living a life of integrity. Instead of addressing the underlying problem, we merely hide the symptoms. I would guess that one of the more important steps in personal growth is to uproot excuse-making and confront the real issues behind our excuses. And I am just as guilty as anyone else when it comes to making excuses, so here are a few that I sometimes struggle with.

Excuse #1: I don't have enough time. Whenever you hear yourself making this statement, you know deep down it isn't the truth. When we say, we don't have enough time, we are really saying, "That just isn't important enough to me compared to everything else." I don't have time to exercise. I don't have time for a relationship. I don't have time to start my own business. I don't have time to volunteer. Of course you have time. You have as much time as anyone else does, and other people are already doing these same things. I have time to exercise, I just prioritize something else in my life as more important. Like family or working or TV. The difference is that they make it more of a priority in their lives than you do. You aren't a victim of circumstances. If you don't like your circumstances, change them. It's amazing that people who say they don't have time somehow find plenty of time for something else. If you don't have time to exercise, then surely you don't have time for Youtube. Such people are really saying that exercise simply isn't important enough to them. It's easier to blame the problem on a lack of time, but the real problem is a lack of will.

Excuse #2: I don't know how. I love this one. I don't know how to make a web site. I don't know how to write well. I don't know how to get a better job. Are you capable of learning? Did you stop after learning to crawl, complaining, "I don't know how to walk?" The truth behind "I don't know how" is "I'm unwilling to learn." In our family, and maybe this isn't the best way of doing things, is do it until you figure it out. Any project I don't know how to do at the house will take 3 times longer than it should, and cost 3 times as much. But I'm going to figure it out! Now, if you're a surgeon, please don't follow this advice. But it works for other things. Not too long ago, someone was complaining to me about oil changes and how it costs anywhere between \$40-50 and you could wait forever. Why not learn how to change the oil? It takes you 20 minutes tops! Figure it out or ask! Another friend never balances their checkbook. They know if they have money if their debit card gets denied. Well, figure it out!

Excuse #3. I don't have the money. If there's something you want, "I don't have the money" is no excuse for not getting it. Every single one of us gets money somehow. You can earn the cash or find a way to get the item at reduced cost. The truth behind "I don't have the money" is "I don't want it badly enough." Earning the money you need is only a matter of time, and we already know that not having enough time is no valid reason for giving up, nor is not knowing how to earn the money. If you want to buy something out of your price range, you're fully capable of setting it as a top priority and then putting in the time to learn how to earn enough to acquire the item. If I want something bad enough, then I'll figure out a way to get the cash. Or sacrifice on other things to make it happen. But its hard. I get that.

The last excuse I'll use today is this: "But you don't understand. I grew up in this kind of household, or I have this/that." Now, maybe that sounded a little cold. But each and every one of us grew up in dysfunctional families. If they had people in them, they were dysfunctional. Yes, maybe we had a bad childhood or maybe we have a medical condition or a mental health label, but if that is who you are, then go with it. I believe that each and every one of us has something in their life that they could use as an excuse for not making it today. Maybe it's the fact that we didn't grow up with a silver spoon. Maybe it's because we didn't get into that college if at all. Maybe it's because life dealt us a bum hand. And I also believe that if we continue to use the crutches available to us, we will never really know how to walk on our own and be happy. What we're really saying with this excuse is, "My life is not my fault." What that attitude and outlook generally translates to is: Not much of a life.

Of course, the story that Jesus told was not about a dinner at all, but about accepting the call of discipleship. How is your Christian walk? Sometimes my Christian walk feels more like a Christian Crawl. Sometimes it feels like a Christian run! And other times, I feel like I'm still on the couch thinking about getting up. But Christ calls all of us to walk with Him. To grow from him. To learn from Him. To lean on Him. To become more like Him. With no excuses.

Can we pray together? Heavenly Father, only you can change our hearts, we lay our burdens and our yolk upon you for you to carry with us, we give you our fears and our regrets and our sorrows and also our excuses, for Lord, we want to become more like you. And we ask that whatever hinders us in our daily walk of faith, help us to overcome these obstacles for your glory. And the family of God said, Amen!

Opening:

Here we are, down at the Courthouse this morning. This is the third courthouse of our city. The first was built in 1850, but burned to the ground twelve years later. For a few years, the government was housed in rented rooms in the downtown area before building the second courthouse on this spot. It lasted around fifty years before wear and tear made it necessary to build a new one. With a grant from the PWA, this building was constructed in the Great Depression. Art Deco style. At the corners, you might notice the All Seeing Eye. Or the eye of Providence. Originally the Eye of Providence was a Christian symbol, and the earliest examples of its

use can be found in religious art of the Renaissance period to represent God. An early example is Pontormo's 1525 Supper at Emmaus. It was invented as a sign of God's compassionate watchfulness over humanity. You can find it on our money, and in places where Justice is given, someone is always watching.

And you are watching us today. Thank you. We hope that you find a blessing in today's service, for we are blessed that you are here. Here are this morning's announcements!

Children's Time:

Hey kids! Will you help me plan a party? This is just for fun, an imaginary party. What would be at the greatest party ever?

Where should we have the party? At the library? Probably not. Disneyland? That would be a fun party. What if we could have a party on the moon? That'd be fun, very little gravity. Or maybe at the beach, or swimming pool. We've had a lot of different kinds of parties at some pretty cool places over the years.

What kind of food should we have at our party? Should we have cake, or ice cream? Hamburgers or hotdogs? Maybe just some sandwiches? I'd love buffalo wings. That'd be a cool party.

What kind of games or activities should there be? Outdoor games, indoor games? Made up games, board games? We like pinata's at our house. One year we had a Darth Vader pinata, and the only place we could hang it was at the church we were at. A Darth Vader head over the altar, filled with candy was pretty cool. And maybe sacrilegious, but it's what we had.

Oh, who SHOULD we invite to our party? Should we invite our family? Aunts and uncles and cousins, maybe grandma and grandpa? Or should we just invite our friends? Oh, who shouldn't we invite? Are there people that you don't want to come to your party?

Jesus once told a story about a party. There once was a man who wanted to share his food and have a great time of celebration. He sent out invitations to those he wanted to come to his banquet. He sent his servants out with the invitations and the guests said they would come to this man's Great Banquet. But when the party time came, no one came. Not one of his invited guests came to the party! They all had different excuses, but they stayed away.

How disappointing! I've thrown a party or two where very few people came. What did the guy do? He had all this food ready for people! He told his servant to go out into the streets and alleys and invite the poor, handicapped, blind and lame to come to his banquet. They came! And there was still room! The man said to his servant, We have more room! "Go outside the city, go up and down the roads in the country and invite all to come to my banquet so that my house will be full.

Earlier we came up with what we thought would be a great party that we would want to be invited to. This parable teaches us that we all have been invited to the Greatest Event ever! Jesus is teaching us that God has sent out His invitation for salvation to all. We are a church that loves others, values everyone, for everyone is invited to this party! Thanks for stopping by!

Prayer:

Lord, we come here today in fellowship with one another setting aside this time solely for you. To offer you praise and worship, to hear you speak to us, and to leave here shaped a little bit more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. So we come humbly and quietly before you, praying, Lord, in your mercy...

O God, we thank you for those times this week where we smiled and laughed, those times of friendship enjoyed, of meals shared, those times when we appreciated the beauty of nature, when we felt a peace in our hearts, when we paused to be grateful for the life you have given us. For all of these, and so much more, we know that we are blessed. And in gratitude and joy, we pray, Lord in your mercy...

For our days of difficulty and struggle, for the times when we have been less than our best, we give you thanks that you do not turn away from us and that we are never alone. In confession we come to you we pray, Lord in your mercy...

Lord, we lift to you our church. We want OCUMC to be a strong and vital church in our community. We want to be used by you to make a difference in the lives of others. The need for hope, acceptance, love and compassion is great, and you are the answer to those needs. Help us to show others the way to you through our programs, through our ministries, and most of all through our lives and example. Lord, in your mercy...

Lord, for those who are sick, suffering, lonely, misguided, or just in need of your presence, we ask that you would touch them with your healing, with your guidance, with your peace. You have those on our prayer list for whom we ask a blessing, Lord, in your mercy.

Lord in your mercy, hear our prayers given through your prayer...

With one voice, we join now in praying together: Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done; on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

Offertory:

Welcome to the Offering, our chance to give back. As United Methodists, we support many ministries, within the church, outside the church, at home and abroad. For many years, the U.S. Department of Education designated colleges and universities as "White" and "Negro," based on their majority population. It doesn't sound right, now, does it. The department now uses the term "historically black colleges and universities." Today Asian, Hispanic, white and international students are enrolling in increasing numbers in these HBCU's. In the days of Segregation, Methodists believed not only in education, but in education for all. We have supported colleges and institutions of higher learning for everyone. And back in the day, that also meant we began schools for people of color. Even today, we continue to support the "Black College Fund" (the name was coined 50 years ago). Take a listen:

Thank you, OCUMC, for your gifts that help create the leaders for tomorrow.

Closing:

Someone is always watching over you. As it says in Psalm 121: He will watch over your life. The Lord will watch your coming and going both now and forevermore. Amen!