

“Everybody’s in”

August 29, 2010

Text: *Psalm 103:1-5, 8, 10-13, Luke 14:7-14*

I.

What’s *in* and what’s *out*? For marketing experts and people employed in advertising, it’s important to know.

In fact, if you page through any magazine, the magazine ads will not only tell you what’s *in* and what’s *out*, they will try to persuade you that it’s important to know the difference.

This past week was the first week of school. All across America, our children and youth were displaying what’s *in*—through what they wore and what they carried with them. And because of all this, who knows what friendships and alliances were made, many of which might well last throughout the year and beyond.

For example, I’ve heard that *Toy Story 3 lunchboxes* are *in*. Anybody have a *Toy Story 3 lunchbox* for their child? I also read that *X-Men lunchboxes* are *out* (they’re, like, *last year*) and that *Superman lunchboxes* are even further *out*.

According to our church secretary—who has a son in the third grade—the *DSI* is *in*. Anybody know what a *DSI* is? I had no idea. It’s apparently a toy with the capacity to play all kinds of video games. You can also take pictures and even text with it.

Speaking of texting, *texting* is apparently *in* big time. With the younger generation, I’m told, texting is more common than phoning or emailing. I wouldn’t know, of course. I think I’ve texted once in my life and that was only with the help of someone half my age.

Also, word has it that the *ipad* is *in*. The *ipad* has the latest technology in music storage and book reading. You can download all kinds of music from the internet and play it and it’s super for reading virtually any book.

The *iphone* also is *in*. I know a little more about this because my wife, Yvette, bought one right before we went to France. She loves it to death ... uses it all the time. How many of you have *iphones*? You can email from your *iphone* as well as access the internet. In fact, there’s not much you can’t do with an *iphone*. I may have to sign-up for one of these!

II.

When we think of some of the recent trends in our daily living, increasingly, newspapers, for example, are not *in*. In fact since we returned from France, we haven’t renewed our subscription to the Miami Herald. I got so used to checking the internet for news that it

doesn't seem to make sense ... although, I'm discovering that I do miss my *glance over* the sports page routine every morning. I'm not sure I'm ready to give that up yet.

Something else that, increasingly, is not *in* is the landline telephone. With both of us having cell phones, Yvette and I discovered that we were never using the landline and, so, what was the point of the monthly expense? How many of you no longer have a landline phone in your home?

Having what's *in* or *out* can be a matter of consequence as we live out our lives. Often times, having **what's in** or *out* translates into **who's in** or *out*.

Think of a sports club membership or season tickets to anything. Memberships and season tickets can have a lot to do with whom you interact and socialize on a weekly basis. Again, friendships are made, alliances are formed. Being *in* or *out* can make a difference.

III.

In Luke's gospel, only a few verses before our reading—in chapter 13—someone came to Jesus and asked, *Lord, will only a few be saved?* In other words, who's going to be *in* and who's going to be left *out*?

In Jesus' ministry, this is not an isolated incidence. All the time, the disciples and others are wondering where they stand with regard to some final judgment or *sorting out*.

There's something in us, isn't there, that wants to know how we're doing in the grand scheme of things. In fact, not only do we wonder, *are we IN*, we wonder, *aren't we a little MORE IN than* this person or that person?

In part, this was the situation in Matthew's parable of **The Workers in the Vineyard** in Matthew 20. At the day's end, the workers who arrived early got paid the same as those arriving late in the afternoon. *How could that be*, they protested, *aren't we a little more deserving—a little more IN—than they?*

People with status—with wisdom, money and fame—think like this all the time—whether it's stated or unstated: *Aren't we a little more deserving, a little more IN than these others*. We human beings are like that aren't we?

1. Like when we have box seats at sports or theatre events ...
2. when we fly first class in our air travel ...
3. or perhaps when we're a long-standing member of a church or a long-standing member of anything.

Aren't we a little more deserving, a little more *IN*?

IV.

Many of the good Jews of Jesus' day had a sense of the end of history as a *great banquet* where the rich, the powerful and the wise would have *preferred status* on the invitation list. This guest list tended to be exclusive:

1. No room for women or people on the margins ... or for those who had been nicked up by the blows that often times come our way in life.
2. No room for the wounded, the sick, the downcast, the victims of whatever life-misfortune.
3. No room, in other words, for those who had been *broken* by the journey.

In our reading from Luke, Jesus proposes a different kind of banquet.

When you give a banquet, he says, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed.

At Jesus' banquet, there are no petty calculations of who's *in* and who's *out*. His guest list has no barriers, no exclusions. There is no hierarchy of who's *in* or *out*. At Jesus' banquet, ***everybody's in***.

Imagine that! ***Everybody's in***. That's the vision of our Christian faith that reflects the best of our faith traditions. ***Everybody's in***. No one is excluded, shunned, rejected, turned away or sent packing.

V.

In sorting all of this out, Jesus exhorts us to assume a humble posture. *If you're invited to a wedding banquet, he says, don't sit at the place of honor because, later, if a more distinguished guest arrives, you'll have to move down* (this was the tradition, or accepted protocol, in first century Jewish Palestine).

*Rather, says Jesus, when you're invited, go and sit at the lowest place so that when your host comes, he'll say, **move up higher**. Then you'll be honored in the presence of others. ... for those who humble themselves will be exalted.*

What this story of humility and hospitality teaches us is that everybody is welcome ... and that God's welcome comes to us as a gift. **Everybody, indeed, is in**. It's not a matter of calculation or strategy or maneuvering to achieve a better position. **We're all in**.

At the banquet of Jesus, it's not a competition to see who has the most toys or the best retirement or who knows the most people in high places. **Everybody's in**. And if we want to experience that and really know it in our heart, we're invited to make humility

our starting point: *take the lowest place*, Jesus says. *Forget all the scrambling for status* and for trying to get into the *who's who* of today.

Our name is on the invitation list ... everyone of us. We don't have to spend our lives grasping and grabbing and jockeying for better position all the time. Our name is on the list.

What God wants us to do is to accept the welcome. No matter anything about us. That's why our denomination, *the United Church of Christ*, has as our motto, which I announce at the beginning of every service of worship,

No matter who you are or where you are along your life-journey, you're welcome here. And we mean it.

VI.

And so friends, on this ***Blessing of The Growing Place Sunday***,

- we pray God's blessing on our children. That they might be raised up in ways that tell them again and again that they are loved, valued and esteemed ... more than words can tell. They are the future. They are the bearers of our hopes and dreams.
- We pray that not only will they come to know in their heart that **they are in ...** but they will come to know that every other little boy and girl is *in* as well.

And how will they come to know this?

1. They'll learn about it in the classroom, to be sure.
2. But they'll learn it mostly from us, their parents and grandparents. We're their models. We're the ones they're looking at everyday to see what we do and don't do. Trust me, they're looking and they're noticing.
3. We are the ones who teach them the value of human life ... that ***everybody's in***. That everybody is invited to the God's great banquet. We teach them by the way we live our lives.

That no matter anything about us ...

- No matter what our last name is or the color of our skin ...
- No matter what religion or Christian denomination we are ...
- No matter whether we're Republican, Democrat or Independent ...
- No matter our gender or sexual orientation ...
- No matter our socio-economic class we're in or where we live ...

We're all children of the ONE Creator God of all that is ... the God who called the world into being and set the earth on its course ... the God whom we call by many names ... the God whom, as the **Psalmist** reminds us:

*Is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.
Who does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our
iniquities. The God who has compassion for us til the ends of the earth.*

For this God, through God's infinite mercy and grace, **Everybody's in**. That's the good news. May it be so!

All praise be unto God! Amen!

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