

Isaiah 25: 6-9
Luke 14: 12-14
Creekside COB
September 25, 2005

The Really Big Shew

No one can say for sure when it started or who is to blame. The list of suspects is long, and the changes didn't happen overnight. What is clear is that our culture is crumbling and families have become casualties. I have an ongoing debate with a friend about the event that precipitated the downhill slide. He says the disintegration started when they took the fins off the back of the Chevrolet Bel-Air automobile. I say it started in 1971 when the Ed Sullivan Show was taken off the air. Since my friend isn't here to defend his thesis, I'll give you mine.

From 1948 through 1971, Ed Sullivan brought millions of families together on Sunday night. His variety program had a mission. He sought to entertain *all* the people *some* of the time. Three generations of Bibbees spent many a Sunday in my grandparent's living room watching comedians, impersonators, opera and Broadway singers, rock bands, acrobats, jugglers, poets, sword-swallowers, knife-throwers, plate spinners, the Muppets, Topo Gigo, and my favorite, Senor Wences. I would not have learned to play the guitar if Ed Sullivan had not debuted the Beatles.

On no other show would the Rolling Stones follow an opera star, or ballet dancers follow belly dancers. My grandmother ordered everyone to be quiet when Sophie Tucker sang. I wondered how anyone could listen and not crack up. I got my revenge in the second half hour. I can still hear my grandpa howl when he heard Janice Joplin belt out, "*Take Another Piece of My Heart.*"

At the start of each program, Ed Sullivan said, "Tonight, we have a really big show." And he did. He did something that hasn't

been tried since—he made a show for *everyone*. Millions of families watched it-- together.

Today there is a TV in every room of the house. Each generation, gender, race, and religion has its own network. There is *Spike TV* for men, *Lifetime* for women, *MTV* and *VH 1* for adolescents, the *Cartoon Network* for kids, the *Eternal Word* network for Catholics, and syndicated reruns of *Lawrence Welk* for my mother.

Interests and tastes take people in different directions. We are isolated and insulated from people who are different, and live as though everything we need to know comes from our own little circle. Learning and growing, however, requires venturing into other circles.

The church could learn something from Ed Sullivan. The church of Jesus Christ is a church for everyone-- at least that is what it's *supposed* to be. Today we have *specialty churches*. Fix yourself on the profile and go to the church that matches your niche.

There are churches that cater to twenty-somethings, and churches that target *baby-boomers*, and churches where the pastor preaches the Bible and nothing but the Bible, and churches that don't want anything to do with politics, and churches that try to influence politics, and churches that are into relevant messages, and churches that practice that "old time religion," and churches that follow the strict order of the worship manual, and churches that let the Spirit do the leading, and churches that are totally traditional and churches that are completely contemporary. Do you get the picture? Each one is a church unto itself. Each one does its own thing.

Jesus debuted a program like no other. Until he appeared, the emphasis was on the long arm of the law. The promises of God were reserved exclusively for Israel. But Jesus said it is all about relationship. God's relationship with people isn't about "shalt and shalt not." It's about God's grace and God's great desire to

be in loving relationship with his children. Jesus said that God had a much bigger family than the people realized.

Again and again, Jesus equates the Kingdom of God with a party. A great table is spread with the finest table service. The food is gourmet all the way. There is no head table. The help won't have to eat in the kitchen. Everyone will get an invitation. There will be assigned seating for everyone. No one who comes will be turned away. The distinctions that we think matter will melt into a puddle of nothing.

Millionaires who slept between silk sheets will sit across from the homeless who slept in cardboard boxes. Israeli's will break bread with Palestinians. Roman Catholic priests will share a toast with Pentecostal pastors. People of every color will see past pigment and behold fellow children of God. Sophie Tucker and Janice Joplin with arms on each other's shoulders will lead the singing of the Doxology.

It will be a really big show... a show for everyone. Today is a dress rehearsal. We gather around a tiny segment of a long, long, table, mindful that millions and millions of Jesus' people are doing the same. It isn't something we just wait for. We strive to live it—starting right now. We live it by being sure that Jesus' Really Big Show is for everyone. Now let me leave you with this thought by Henri Nouwen:

Communion with Jesus means becoming like him...communion leads us to a new realm of being. It ushers us into the Kingdom. There, the old distinctions between happiness and sadness, success and failure, praise and blame, health and sickness, life and death, no longer exist. There we no longer belong to the world that keeps dividing, judging, separating, and evaluating.

There, we belong to Christ, and Christ to us, and with Christ we belong to God.