

## The Dinner Table

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Year C: Pentecost 12: **Luke 14:1,7-14**

<sup>1</sup> On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

<sup>7</sup> When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup> “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, <sup>9</sup> and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. <sup>10</sup> But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. <sup>11</sup> For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

<sup>12</sup> He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers and sisters or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup> But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup> And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

*We are not to think too highly of our status or ourselves. But see each person for who they are; a child of God. Before God, our only status is by God's righteousness, not our own. Praise God!*

My best friend in college was a PK, the daughter of a pastor. I enjoyed numerous dinners at her parents' house. On holidays, especially Thanksgiving or Christmas, a family friend was always included. This man didn't have the education of a pastor. He'd been a bachelor all of his life. His income was limited and he didn't drive. What I always noticed was that he was treated with incredible kindness and grace. If he wanted a third plate of turkey and stuffing, the rest of us had fun conversation and waited patiently while he enjoyed his Thanksgiving dinner.

Humility. Inclusion. Hospitality. Children of God.

Jesus was to eat a meal in the home of a religious leader, a Pharisee, on the Sabbath. They were watching Him. The word used for watching is actually ‘interested and sinister espionage.’<sup>i</sup> They were watching him closely for any irregularity and his behavior. He was under major scrutiny.

To eat a meal on the Sabbath, one had to cook the food on Friday. And then if it was to be served hot, one had to figure out a way to keep it warm, without it cooking anymore!

For food to be kept warm, it “could not be put into oil dregs, manure, salt, chalk, or sand, whether moist or dry, nor into straw, grape skins, flock, or vegetables, if these are damp, though it may be if they are dry. Food may be, however, put into clothes, admit, fruits, pigeons’ feathers, and flax tow.”<sup>ii</sup>

It is no wonder that Jesus found this kind of expression of faith, suffocating! From his point of view, they were all too eager to maintain their sense of purity, hence, earning favor in God’s eyes.

So Jesus tells this parable about the dinner table seating chart. In his day, life was about status. How you were seen in your community was very important. People with power and influence knew they had it and people who didn’t have power and influence certainly didn’t pretend to have it. Jesus’ advice is, don’t flaunt your own importance, take a seat farther down from the host. Then if you get invited closer, you will be honored.

Professor Rolf Jacobson tells his own story about meeting the poet Dr. Maya Angelou. He was invited to join the luncheon during the National Lutheran Youth Gathering with Dr Angelou. There were two round tables. Maya was sitting with the ELCA bishop and other church dignitaries, and even though there were some empty seats, Rolf went to the other table.

Then near the end of lunch, the dignity of the church was up front, talking, getting ready to present Dr Angelou with her gift. To Rolf’s surprise, she got up from her table, turned her back towards the person speaking, and came to sit down right next to him. she said, “Tell me about you. I’d like to know who you are?” Rolf was just out of seminary, a man in a wheelchair, and in his own words, he says he had never been so honored in his whole life.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/1039-twelfth-sunday-after-pentecost-ord-22c-august-31-2025>)

Part of the meaning of this story is a re-ordering of the community with humility. Inclusion. Hospitality. Jesus says don't invite the people that could repay you back with a dinner invitation. Invite the people who can't pay you back. Invite the people that never get an invitation. Include them and honor them and see them as God's children.

Jesus' listeners would've also heard a larger narrative in this parable. There were thousands of non-Jews in St. Luke's day that had become Christian. In other words, they had entered into the "dinner party prepared by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."<sup>iii</sup> Many Jewish Christians as we read in the New Testament, found this unacceptable. They were so eager to maintain their status as God's chosen people, they could hardly abide anyone who was not from their group.

Speaking of groups, do you remember when we were much younger, how much courage it took to walk into a new middle school on the first day? The lunchroom was particularly agonizing. Our eyes skirted and scanned the room quickly looking for our group. But for the new student who has no group yet, those minutes of looking for an empty seat, any empty seat can be paralyzing. "Will anyone invite me to sit down? Will I be included?"

Particularly during our tender teenage years, being accepted is so important. We need a group. And it's human nature to hang out with people that are like us. It's most comfortable.

Yet we cannot escape Jesus', very clear and direct command to invite people who are not like us. Within Jesus' command, is an invitation to walk with the eyes of faith and not the eyes in our head. How can we train ourselves to see every person as a child of God? A child of God that is honored and included and loved and lives in God's grace as much as any of us.

How can we do that? We do that by remembering the scripture verse, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.

Whatever we have achieved in life, whatever successes we have had along the way, we can only accomplish through God. And when retirement comes or after the eulogies are spoken, life moves on without us. There might be a building named after us if we're really important. But...God alone gives us the ability to accomplish and be successful.

We also look to Jesus; the one who lived without sin. The son of God who endured what you and I will never endure. And in that comparison, our lives, successes and our pride are put in their proper place. We can never live up to Jesus' purity. His love. His compassion. His holy anger and passion at injustice. Our self-satisfaction pales in comparison to the Son of God.

Darren in Zimbabwe – feeding the hungry outside the grocery store – story – faces of God – picture of heaven

When we come to this dinner table, this great party, it is only at Christ's invitation. The bread and the wine are the great levelers of all of us. There is not one person more important than another at this table. That is our saving grace.

The day laborer equals royalty. Those educated on the streets are as honored as those educated at university. People who sleep with their heads on silk and pillowcases, are viewed by Jesus, just the same as those who sleep with their heads on newspaper.

For all have fallen short of the glory of God and all are made right through God's righteousness. Now that's a dinner party I want to attend. Do you?  
Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> The Gospel of Luke. Revised Version. William Barclay. Westminster Press. Philadelphia. 1975. Pg 188.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid. Pg 187.

<sup>iii</sup> Luke for Everyone. NT Wright. Westminster John Knox Press. Louisville, Kentucky. 2001. Pg 175.