



## SUNDAY SERMON

# Supper With Jesus

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*The Gospel according to Luke, chapter 14, verses 7-14*

*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. When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "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; 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. 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. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." 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 or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

### DATE

The Fifteenth Sunday  
after Pentecost  
Sun., Aug. 28, 2016

### PREACHER

The Rev. Ledlie I. Laughlin

### READING

Luke 14:1, 7-14

After hearing today's Gospel, I'd think twice before inviting Jesus to come have supper at my house. He might just spoil the party.

This Pharisee invited Jesus and, given that Pharisees were religious and civic leaders of society, we can picture a fairly swell crowd – intellectuals, dignitaries, the upper echelon. As guests arrived, they gathered on the terrace, greeted one another and chatted amiably as a steward offered a glass of wine, perhaps a canapé. But then while moving into the dining room, Jesus, a visiting rabbi of some renown, challenged the seating arrangement, pointed a finger and called out those who were jostling to sit near the host or near choice guests. He went through the charade of making it a story about guests at a wedding, but they knew he was speaking to them.

Ouch! Not just awkward, downright rude. In the silence, as guests stopped midway to their envied seat, Jesus continued, "and look who's here, all the local hotshots – who've no doubt been invited because of what they each can give in return – connections, referrals, prestige, glitter. You really ought to have invited those who've never had a feast like this, that beggar just outside the front gate on the sidewalk, or some of the little urchins who sleep under the bridge; those who are hungry, isolated, desperate."

I tell you, if I'd been a guest that night, I'd have gone home with a hot swirl of feelings – indignant, outraged, fueled with a pinch of shame. "Who does he think he is, questioning who invites whom to their own dinner party?!" I might build up a pretty good head of steam about it because I don't like being called out, having my inclinations revealed, a mirror held up – especially when my motives are indeed a bit self-serving... even if hadn't really been conscious of my selfishness.

But I expect that as I sat with Jesus' words, I might realize that in the end he wasn't asking all that much. He wasn't asking me to do something heroic or costly or be a saint or something. All he really asked is that I mix it up a little when I invite people for supper, that I sit down and break bread with folks who aren't from my side of the tracks, with those who have little to eat. He didn't say, do it every night; just give it a try.

*Continued*

Supper was important to Jesus. He talked about it a lot. From Jesus' perspective, when we share a meal with people, it gives us a pretty good look at the life and love God intends for us. Supper for Jesus is a foretaste of what is to come, a foretaste of the fellowship possible even in this life, the beloved community.

I invite you to take a moment now and call to mind some of the supper tables you've shared during the course of your life, and how those circles of community have shaped you. Hard times, emotionally challenging supper tables, as well as good times; easy, joyous. The table at your grandparents' house with your family – and your place therein; at a school cafeteria – laughing easily with friends or awkward with the treachery of school dynamics; around a camp fire with sounds and smells of the wild; as a guest in a foreign country with foreign food and foreign language, at a conference center with colleagues from work, with our neighbors here sharing lunch in the Water Ministry, in your own kitchen last night, around the different altars where you've been fed with bread and wine, body and blood.

When it's up to you, who do you invite into your life? Who do you make time for, to be with and to get to know? And to what end? The tables we've shared and the company we keep when we gather for a meal shapes the values we embrace and the values we live out in our lives.

Whoever you are, wherever you find yourself on the journey of faith, you are welcome at Christ's table. During the course of my ordained ministry I've served with six different churches. In each one, this teaching was at the heart. In one, we hosted a shelter and ate supper each winter night with those who were homeless. In another we invited our neighbors, gathered and cooked breakfast together on Saturday mornings. In another we offered groceries and fresh produce; hundreds came; we thought of it as one of our principal worship services – breaking bread together as the body of Christ. Just this week, several of you have been scrubbing the kitchens here in eager anticipation of welcoming our neighbors in the water ministry.

During the course of all the meals I've shared in each place – the people I met, the stories they told, the conversations we shared – the lasting gift for me is a sense of gratitude, humility, and a clear sense that we're all in this together.

I don't know why Jesus called them out at their dinner party; I can only imagine that those Pharisees and their guests were stuck, blind to their own behavior; they could not see the path they were on. That never happens to me, I never need anyone else to point out that I seem to have gotten off course, now and again. Those closest to me, the one's who love me... they never have to call me out or help me see.

Jesus' teaching today is so simple, we might miss it.

But it's so important, we're called to practice it every day.

You see, there are two paths. On one path we ask, "what's in it for me?" Which prompts the answer, "if I am well, all is well. If my needs are met, all is well." On this path, I am the center – and I am climbing the ladder and getting ahead the best I can. On this path, the way to salvation is between me and God; I can get to the top and be saved all by myself.

On the other path, I don't begin with me; I begin with you, I begin with the community. I ask, "how are you? Is all well for you?" For on this path if all are well, then – and only then – I am well. Until your needs are met too,... until you're fed too, and we're all at the table, this is not salvation. Until we're all in heaven, ain't none of us in heaven.

One is the path of personal salvation. The other is the path of universal salvation. Across the centuries, in Christian practice and teaching and in biblical interpretation, robust arguments have been made for each path. But in Jesus' teaching today and indeed in all his supper teachings, he is teaching the path that begins not with me; he is teaching the path that begins with you, with the community. For the supper feast of God is given for all. Take, eat, and be glad. Then take and offer to another, and another, and another, to all who hunger, until all are fed and we are gathered together. Amen.

