

“Who do we invite to the table?”

Luke 14:1-14

A quote from Anne Lamott in her 1994 book, “Bird by Bird”.

“Here is the main thing I know about public school lunches: it only looked like a bunch of kids eating lunch. It was really about opening our insides in front of everyone. The contents of your lunch said whether or not you and your family were okay. Your sandwich was the centerpiece and there were strict guidelines. It almost goes without saying that store-bought white bread was the only acceptable bread.”

Ruth Chou Simons writes in her 2021 book, “When Strivings Cease” . . .

“ My parents who immigrated from Taiwan didn’t know about Rainbo white bread. They weren’t accustomed to buying peanut butter and grape jelly. They didn’t get the memo on the bologna and sliced American cheese combo that declared to all that your mom and dad were normal, that they were upper to middle class Americans with a minivan, and that they belonged.”

“My parents showed their love, resourcefulness, and belonging by packing a cleaned out and reused Dannon yogurt container with the previous night’s dinner of fried rice. I wanted so badly to be accepted in a new country, to really actually enjoy bologna, to avoid the whispering behind my back and the letter on my chest that let everyone know I was an outsider. Who knew the content of your lunch could reveal that ‘You don’t belong’.”

My wife Danette who has not written a book about doing “lunch duty” at Valley Forge, has told me that since Covid hit in 2020 and lunches became free, very few kids pack their lunch. But they have to take the whole lunch of which they ate the pizza or the burger and

threw away the fruit and the vegetables. Of course! My mom always reminded us to clean off our plates no matter where we were eating because there are kids in Africa starving. It still bothers me to see plates in our fellowship hall garbage cans with food on them. You know who you are!

I also remember the highly segregated dining commons at college. Each fraternity and sorority had its own section of round tables. We filled the inner circle of the commons. If you weren't Greek, you sat in the outer circle. Where you sat revealed your status.

Luke 14:1 . . . ¹On 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.

Jesus had been invited to a wealthy person's house for dinner. He was a ruler who belonged to the Pharisees. They were watching Jesus because his following was growing. The synagogues were filled when he was preaching. The hillsides were filled when Jesus was teaching, healing, and feeding the thousands.

The small-town young man from Nazareth had somehow learned the Old Testament laws and could debate and challenge the Pharisees who had spent their entire lives memorizing and enforcing adherence to the laws of God.

It was a set-up. He had been invited for dinner on the Sabbath. They knew he had already broken their laws and healed on the Sabbath. Before he even sits down to eat, they bring a man before him who had dropsy.

Before the lawyers and Pharisees can say anything, Jesus asks them, "is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" They had no answer. Jesus heals the man and sends him on his way.

Then before they decide whose going to sit where for the meal, Jesus drives home his point. “Which of you have an ass or an ox that has fallen into a well, will not immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day? (Luke 14:15).

“They could not reply to this”.

Then Jesus watches who sits down where for the meal. Who chooses the places of honor? Who would get the freshest bread with bologna and sliced American cheese? Who would get the leftover fried rice? Who would get the pizza or cheeseburger and leave the rest on their plate? Who would sit at the head of the table?

Jesus watched how and where they chose to sit. He watched who chose the places of honor. Then he confronted them with this parable . . .

Luke 14:8-11 . . . ⁸When 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; ⁹and 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. ¹⁰But 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. ¹¹For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Obviously, we no longer have to deal with this at wedding feasts because we have assigned seating. Thank God! Except when the pastor and spouse get stuck with family members that no one else will sit with. Fortunately, that seldom happens.

For me, the key verse to this parable is the last one. “For everyone who exalts themselves will be humbled and everyone who humbles themselves will be exalted”.

How do we exalt ourselves? As I said last week, some Christians believe that the gospel is a recipe for self-improvement. Work with what you got, sprinkle in a little religious effort, add in discipline, strategy, and a healthy dash of likability. This formula isn’t entirely a recipe for disaster and sometimes yields results. It sometimes rewards those who keep on pushing, keep on hustling, keep on perfecting, keep on striving, keep on exalting.

But it’s not the way to salvation. Jesus humbled himself on the cross and in humility we bear our own crosses, we serve anyone in need, we forgive even the seemingly unforgiveable, we humble ourselves in response to our faith in Jesus Christ that we might join him in the resurrection to eternal life. This is what changes everything . . .

Ephesians 2:4-9 . . . ⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us ⁵even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God — ⁹not the result of works, so that no one may boast.

This passage begins with two little words that become the hinge of history – the moment where all the impossible becomes possible in our longing to be enough: But God. But in steps God. Paul didn’t tell us here in Ephesians that God fixes everything, makes us feel better,

or gets rid of our deficiencies. In fact, Paul didn't say much about us at all. Instead, he made sure we would know all about God . . .

- Who is rich in mercy
- Who greatly loves us
- Who intercepted our waywardness
- Who made us alive with Christ
- Who raised us up
- Who shows us the immeasurable riches of his grace and kindness
- Who saves us by his grace
- Who molds us

If there's one passage in scripture that teaches us humility in response to God's grace, it's this one. Everything is fundamentally changed because of the grace of God. The words "But God" are our reminder that we cannot exalt ourselves, but God can.

That nagging feeling we've had all along – that feeling of imperfection, ineptitude, or insufficiency. The world offers endless ways to stuff it down, cover it up, numb it out, compensate, and overcome our inadequacy. But Jesus offers the only true solution that isn't temporary but eternal.

Again Ephesians 2:4-5⁴But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us⁵ even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved.

“By grace you have been saved.” Grace is activated in us through faith. We are here in this church to exercise our faith. We are here in this church to humble ourselves in the presence of God. We serve whenever and wherever God calls us to serve.

Jesus reminds his wealthy host of who he should have invited to his dinner. How he could have humbled himself in serving those in need.

Luke 14:12-14... ¹²He 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. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

This is how we humble ourselves. This is how we respond to God’s grace. We become the body of Christ in the world. We heal. We teach. We worship. We serve. We feed. We invite everyone to the table.

Come to the table and be fed. Come to the table in humility. Come to the table to receive the gift of eternal life.

And this morning in a few minutes, come to the baptismal font, Skylar and Jordan, parents Adam and Stephanie, godparents Cory and Danielle, Tom and Vanessa, as water is poured into the font and then over the heads of Skylar and Jordan as we listen to God’s word proclaiming them his adopted children.

On Rally Sunday, September 11, Sunday school begins anew with new and veteran teachers, with children of every age, with Bible stories taught and learned. We will install our teachers this morning in preparation for their meeting following worship.

Come to the table. Come to the baptismal font. Come to Sunday school where we will learn that the peace of God...

#457 – Waterlife