



A Place at the Table

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

August 28, 2016

Thoughts for the Week

Scripture – Luke 14: 1, 7-14

I once attend a Building Design Training Class at the Bell System Training Center at Lisle, IL. The class that I attended was made up of approximately 30 "Architectural & Engineering" Types. We were all fairly similar in background: Caucasian, Christian, well educated, professing similar values, being from average middle-class families; we all received much the same training over the years. And yet, when I first came to this Training Center, it surprised me how many different small groups seemed to have formed. It became most evident to me especially in the dining room. It took me a while before I finally found a group with whom I could feel comfortable and find it easy to associate with.

I have often reflected on that on-going experience and I believe it is similar to the experience of many in the human family: Individuals consort with those who seem to have the same background, characteristics, plans for their lives, etc.

Another common trait seems to be **our human tendency to compare ourselves to others & somehow assume that we belong at a higher social, intellectual, even spiritual level than they.** As I mentioned above, the tendency toward cliquishness often arises most clearly when we ask the question – "With whom do you prefer to eat?"

Jesus asks that same question in the gospel for this week. When was the last time we invited "social outcasts" to dinner and ate with them, especially those who would have no way to reciprocate: the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, would our association with them advance or hurt our social standing? In other words **it seems true that the people we regularly choose to dine with have a way of defining who we are or think we are.** Most of us Christians, I imagine, would claim that we espouse diverse values, yet how often do we make a deliberate choice to eat with anyone not of our own racial, political, religious or ethical affiliation? For many of us, that might be an embarrassing question.

Pat Marrin, a columnist for the periodical *Celebration* recently made this point when he wrote: **"We look**

around us in church and if all we see are people like ourselves—our zip code, economic and educational status—have we really heard the challenge Jesus proposes in today's gospel?

One of the scandals of the Christian church is that Sunday morning is still the most segregated time in America."

So, then, what options does Jesus offer us in today's gospel? It all becomes clear when He notices invitees at a dinner each straining to find the most prestigious and important place at the banquet table. Using my own words, Jesus points out that a higher place at table does not make you any more important in the eyes of your associates. Going even further, Jesus suggests that if you are planning a banquet, do not first send invitations to those whose presence you believe will make you look important and invite you back to a dinner in return. No, if you wish to be seen as truly important in the eyes of others, invite beggars, the crippled, the blind and the lame. You should be pleased that they couldn't repay you. You will be repaid in the kingdom of your Father.

Without doubt, this is a challenging gospel; of course, Jesus hardly ever taught us anything that would make us feel comfy and satisfied. Rather, **if after reading Jesus' words we begin to feel a bit embarrassed, perhaps at that point the beginning of the lesson has begun to soak in**, especially for those of us who live in this nice, comfortable portion of the Detroit Metro Area where we seldom encounter the blind, the lame, the crippled or others below our societal class.

Happy Birthday - Pat (8/30)

One **in** Christ Moment

We live in an age that is crying for more time around tables.

This summer, we've been steeped in issues of race, gender, social inequality, and as many opinions on these topics as there are people in our social media feeds. We're on the threshold of an election that hits a lot of nerves. One of the more eyebrow-raising comments I've seen amid spirited election talks is the well-intentioned suggestion that everyone who "truly loves God" make a pact to vote for a certain candidate in an effort to "take the election."

I'm not sure about you, but **I know a lot of people who deeply love God on both poles of political thought**. I know good people who disagree with how a "lives matter" hashtag should start.

The thing is, **if you listen close enough, you stop hearing the issues, and start hearing hearts**. You come to realize the deeply personal roots supporting the myriad opinions we hear each day.

In John 21:17, when Jesus said "feed my sheep," I suspect he had more in mind than tearing into a bag of Lamb Chow and calling it good. I think what he was asking was for us to do on a spiritual level what a good chef does in the kitchen.

I think Jesus was asking us to be spiritual chefs, to "cook up" nourishment for those around us. He wants us to bring something savory to the table: something with an aroma that urges the community to gather, break bread and share.

Yes, it may mean a little more of some ingredients and a lot less of others. **It may mean taking some of our favorite fare off the table for an evening so someone else can eat**.

But it's worth it to get to the really good stuff at the end of the meal — especially if it happens to be a well-prepared lemon meringue pie.