



A Seat at the Table

The Rev. Liz Williams

Proper 17 Year C

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, September 1, 2019

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

Our gospel begins this morning with Jesus going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath. It is the Pharisees at this time who are watching Jesus and his actions and looking for something they can use against him. We hear that “they were watching him closely”. During Jesus’ time, the act of sharing a meal with someone was a sign of respect. A way to be in relationship with another; to have fellowship. Then, as now, we are known by the company we keep.

Jesus had a tendency to dine with those who were on the margin of society. He also tended to heal on the Sabbath. We did not read the verses between Luke 14:1 and 7, Luke 14:2-6, but in them we hear:

² There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body.³ Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” ⁴ But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

⁵ Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” ⁶ And they had nothing to say.

Now the Pharisees didn't like his claim over Sabbath activities; Jesus and the disciples picked grain and were accused of violating the Sabbath by working. Jesus shows today the freedom and the gift that came out of Egypt and honoring the Sabbath command from Exodus. He shows this when he sits with the Pharisee at table, sharing food and cup.

We also must understand what a wedding feast like this would look like before we speak about the parable Jesus tells. The male guests would recline on couches, and the center couch would be the place of honor, the occupants chosen by their wealth, or the power they held or by an office they occupied. The placement of guests was based on this and if someone more wealthy, more powerful or with a higher office came later, the one with lesser status would be asked to move to a place away from the couch of honor.

When Jesus tells the parable, he says,

“. . .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.”

Luke 14:10-11

We are reminded that in the kingdom of God, each one of us has been extended an invitation to receive a blessing by living into the person God has created us to be; to understand what we need to let go of to invite those not like us to our table. To give everyone a ‘Seat at the Table’. To let go of the fear of the differences, of the fear of being in the presence of the other or perhaps to let go of the conditions we place on those we invite; like, you must believe like me.

John Pavlovitz in his book, “A Bigger Table” speaks of noticing the holy in the ordinary and that if we do this we can create a life “saturated with an awareness of the Divine.” God with us.

I want you to think of special days and holidays and who gets the seat of honor? Do you expand the table to fit everyone? or are some relegated to the kid’s table in another room? I recently attended an event called “Feast in the Field” at The Abundant Table. The guests sat at rectangular tables set end to end. No matter where you sat, you were in a place honor, seated with people who supported The Abundant Table. The tables were long enough to fit 197 people!

Sitting in the middle, I could barely see from end to end.

I believe this is the table that John Pavlovitz speaks of. There was holiness in the ordinary and it was a time “saturated with an awareness of the Divine”. We sat as the title suggests, in the field. In God’s creation, even with God’s creatures; ants crawling up the tablecloths and our legs. Much of the food we ate came from the field in which we sat. The tables in our homes should expand like this so that we might show others the “ever expanding hospitality of God right in our homes.”

Pavlovitz, p57

We have a table right here in our church, an altar at which we welcome others. Who does Jesus tell us to invite? Sinners, prostitutes, tax collectors, the lame, the crippled, the blind and the poor; those on the margins of society. Why? Because all are children of God. We are meant to share a meal with others as Jesus did; on a hillside feeding the 5000, on the beach with fish and bread, or in a room with his disciples.

How should this look? All at one table, each treated with dignity. Each with a “Seat at the Table”. Another meal I recently attended was at Catholic Charities

where St. Paul's and volunteers feed our hungry neighbors. We don't ask for names or addresses or for what they do. We extend an invitation to come and eat. Be fed not just with food, but with the hospitality and fellowship of others whose desire is to serve those who normally are not served. This last time serving we had 25 volunteers; the most I have seen in my time here. It was heartwarming to see individuals young and old understand the call to serve others in the name of Jesus. For Jesus and for us, the table is a place to connect, to listen to one another in order to understand; recognizing the other and knowing we don't have to agree on everything to be kind. How do we find our place at the table **and** make room for others? To be a blessing and to receive the blessing of serving? Jesus tells us we will be blessed, because they cannot repay us.

We remember our creator; the one who made us, who knows us by name and when we do, we know we have enough to share. We can put our faith into action by supporting The Abundant Table and the migrant workers in our area. You can do this by purchasing locally sourced produce from the market or a CSA box full of fresh fruit, vegetable and herbs. And you can support our Family First Sunday Event this month by taking part in the Inter Faith Harvest at the Abundant Table, Monday, September 2, 2019 from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Please see me after service for more information.

On this Labor Day weekend, may we remember all those who labor so that our tables may be filled with the goodness of the field.

Let us pray the prayer for Labor Day BCPp.241

Almighty God, you have so linked our lives one with another that all we do affects, for good or ill, all other lives: So guide us in the work we do, that we may do it not for self alone, but

for the common good; and, as we seek a proper return for our own labor, make us mindful of the rightful aspirations of other workers, and arouse our concern for those who are out of work; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.