



Sunday August 28, 2022  
Luke 14:1, 7-14 (Twelve Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church  
Pastor Tony Acompañado

Mealtimes are a special event in our family. Not so much because there's anything particularly exciting or extravagant about our meals – but because both my wife and I grew up in families where mealtimes were considered a family expectation – where everyone was expected to be present. So, despite having to juggle multiple school, athletic, activity, and work schedules, on most days our family still finds time to sit down and have dinner together.

It's a time to catch up on all the activities of the day, as well as to just take a break from the busyness of life. There's no cell phones or other electronics allowed, and we don't even watch TV during this time...well, that's mostly true, unless it's March Madness. It's just always been important for us to hold on to this sacred time with one another.

When our oldest daughter comes to visit or our older son is home from college, the noise level is a little louder and multiple conversations are usually taking place at the same time. Generally there's lots of laughter and if one of us has a good story or joke to share, then all of us tune in. Sometimes we spend time cooking together and other times we're commenting, both positive and negative, on a new recipe or takeout restaurant we decided to try. Sometimes we use this time to plan a family activity or vacation, or get caught up on something new, exciting, or difficult in one of our lives. The bottom line is...for a variety of reasons, mealtimes are important to our family.

Jesus, too, seems to take a special interest in mealtimes as well. Jesus loved the gatherings around meals; at least, that's what we're led to believe in the Gospel of Luke.

In today's Gospel, Jesus is at a banquet and tells a parable about the meal setting, which is followed up by another story about another banquet. Apparently, he can't seem to get enough of what happens at meals. However, despite the neat and tidy image we want to hold on to, the truth is, Jesus wasn't always known for his politeness...especially around the dinner table.

Although the Gospels record him receiving and accepting many dinner invitations, those mealtime scenes usually ended in some type of provocation, insult, or scandal. Once, a woman of questionable reputation caressed his feet under the table. More than once, he interrupted a meal to heal sick people on the Sabbath. He often ate with dirty hands, shared a table with those who were less than desirable, and we're even told that he drank more than his enemies considered respectable. But worst of all, he said things – blunt, uncomfortable, and challenging things that no one cared to hear.

And this week's Gospel describes just such a scene. Jesus is invited for a Sabbath meal by a leader of the Pharisees. Arriving early, he sits and watches as his fellow guests scramble for places of honor around the table – jockeying for position, and faking dignity while still fighting for prestigious spots near the host.

After observing their drama for a while, Jesus calls them out with a parable.

"When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor," he urges his fellow guests. "Go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.'" "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."



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If that isn't counter-cultural enough, Jesus then turns to his host and continues, "When you give a luncheon or 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. Then you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you."

We're not told how Jesus's listeners reacted. I don't know if they laughed in discomfort, shook their heads in disbelief, questioned Jesus's sanity, argued back, or followed his advice. All I know is how I react as I read and re-read this story. I feel an uncomfortable combination of surprise, skepticism, and fear. As in: Really? Is Jesus serious? Does he have any idea what he's asking?

It appears he does. Every once in a while, just as I'm growing comfortable with my faith, a story like this one comes along to mess with my smug satisfaction. Don't praise myself. Don't distort my social media pages to make my life look perfect. Don't judge my worth, or the worth of others, based on financial status, clothing size, zip code, accomplishments, or professional titles. Don't maximize my social capital at every opportunity. Ignore the pecking order. Don't jostle for attention. Open my heart and home to people who can do nothing for me. People I have no affinity for. People I can't impress or earn favors from.

But why would I want to do that? Because Jesus insists on it.

Because this is what God wants from us. God reverses our priorities, our hierarchies, and our values. God turns us inside out and upside down because there's no end to the miserable game of who's "in" and who's "out". And God in his infinite wisdom knows that our anxious scramble for greatness will lead to nothing but more anxiety, more suspicion, more loneliness, more hatred, and more division.

Though we have such a hard time believing it, Jesus insists that God's kingdom is not a kingdom of scarcity; it's one of abundance, where all are already welcome, already loved, already known, and already treasured. The currency of God's kingdom is humility, not arrogance; generosity, not greed; hospitality, not fear.

Jesus' whole life is centered on inviting into the presence of God those who neither expect nor deserve such an invitation. And he expects us to do the same. Jesus asks us to believe that our behavior at the table matters – because it does.

What would it be like to live into the freedom to stop calculating our social standing and stop worrying about what others think and simply be kind to everyone around us, particularly those who aren't often the recipients of kindness. What would it look like at work, at school, and at the places we shop or play sports or socialize, to look out for those who seem to be cast off to the margins and to invite them into the center by inviting them into our lives?

My friends, where we sit speaks volumes, and the people we choose to welcome to places of honor matters. "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." Thanks be to God. Amen.