Year C, Proper 17; Sermon Luke 14:1-14; September 1, 2019

Fun fact: “There are in Luke more references to eating, banquets, tables, and reclining at tables than in any of the other Gospels.”[[1]](#footnote-1) Maybe that’s why we like Luke’s gospel so much. For Luke there’s this boiling down, this reduction sauce of the Good News.

So many of these wonderful stories center around the table. But when you think about it, most of our best stories, best memories, best times in our own lives have something to do with food as well. Family gatherings, celebrations always center around food.

Also in today’s passage Luke is still working that theme of Sabbath. We find Jesus healing again on the Sabbath, clarifying what Sabbath time is for as we saw in last week’s passage.

But Jesus, who is being scrutinized by the Pharisees at every turn now, Jesus shows us what else he will do on the Sabbath—accepting the hospitality of those who are watching his every move looking for a misstep.

So here’s a question. Have you ever had to work with someone who had kind of marked you as an adversary? Or have you seen that kind of competition in the workplace over the years? It’s not pretty. And the last thing you want to do at the end of the day is go out with that person for burgers and wings.

But watch what Jesus does in today’s passage. The Pharisees are watching for him to make a mistake. But he’s not writing them off and cutting all ties. He comes to a leader of the Pharisee’s house, basically for Sunday lunch. And while he’s there he gives us all a little lesson on Table etiquette. Answering the question, “What should we do on the Sabbath? And what should we do around this table? And whom should we invite?” Listen for the Word of the Lord from Luke 14:1-14:

1 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.
2  Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy.
3  And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?"
4  But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away.
5  Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?"
6  And they could not reply to this.
7  When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.
8  "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;
9  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.
10  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.
11  For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."
12  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.
13  But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.
14  And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Friends, this is the Word of the Lord; **thanks be to God.**

Invitations, seating arrangements, places of honor at a banquet, even how to handle things when someone is in the wrong seat—strange conversations for a strange dinner. These people Jesus is with have set themselves up against him, and they’re hoping to catch him in a trap. It’s very uncomfortable to be social with people who are out to get you.

And Jesus is talking about these very themes: social connections, honor, humility, hospitality, accepting hospitality, and he shows his own vulnerability by accepting this invitation in the first place. Not many of us would make ourselves that vulnerable—to accept an invitation to Sunday lunch from folks we are contending with. But that’s what’s at the heart of Luke’s reduction sauce of the Good News. Jesus doesn’t write anyone off. Even his adversaries.

And today’s passage always reminds me of Emily Post. We all know that Emily Post was America’s foremost expert on etiquette. Her niece Peggy Post writes about etiquette today. It’s a Post family tradition. And here’s Jesus, playing Emily Post and giving us a little mini-lesson on etiquette.

Now what Emily Post and Peggy Post would tell us is that the principles of etiquette never change. And these basic principles reflect what Jesus lays out in here as well—because they have love and respect at the core. And that’s because the way we treat each other says a lot about us. If we have our heart right, our actions will show it.

Emily Post says etiquette is about respect, consideration, and honesty. And I love that she draws a distinction here and says benevolent honesty is better than brutal honesty. Honesty wrapped in kindness is more powerful than brutal honesty.

Bringing respect, consideration and benevolent honesty to the table helps us deal with difficult situations as well as difficult people, and it strengthens the ties that bind. And isn’t that what Jesus is doing—dealing with difficult people? And strengthening the ties?

Jesus saw each person, whether leper, Samaritan, or Pharisee as precious to God. He may have scolded them from time to time, but he never wrote them off. And by accepting the Pharisees invitation, putting himself in a humble position, he has an opportunity to reach out to them. And at the same time, he takes the opportunity to say again, Sabbath is for healing. Hospitality is for showing honor to others. And honor doesn’t have to follow the world’s standards and the world’s power structures.

What Jesus is saying is that what we do matters. And he’s showing that by example. The writer of today’s passage from Hebrews is also saying that what we do matters. Let mutual love abound. Show hospitality. Suffer with the suffering. Don’t cheat on each other. Don’t love or depend on money more than God.

Both of our passages today, the text from Hebrews and the text from Luke speak to the fact that, yes, what we do matters. How we do what we do matters. All of these are pretty basic ideals to hold on to. All of these things show that you value other people and you value God.

As we go into the week ahead, whether we frame it as good manners, kindness, letting mutual love continue, or just asking the question, “What would Jesus do?” However we frame it, remember love. Remember kindness. Remember respect, consideration and benevolent honesty.

And as we come to this family Table, let us all seek to follow the example set for us by our Lord—the One who poured himself out, emptying himself in obedience. And may we serve with that same spirit. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

1. Robert J Karris, *Luke: Artist and Theologian: Luke’s Passion Account as Literature.* (New York: Paulist, 1985), 47. Qtd. in Rodney S. Sadler, Jr. “Exegetical Perspective.” Feasting on the Word: Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary - Feasting on the Word – Year C, Volume 4: Season After Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ).
 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)