



"Please Be Seated"

Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost
8:15 and 11:00, Sunday, August 28, 2016
The Reverend Dr. Jack M. Horner, Jr.
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church
Camp Hill, Pennsylvania

Proverbs 25:6-7; Psalm 112;
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

Grace to you and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Some of you might remember that in my previous call I served as Assistant to the Bishop of the Metropolitan New York Synod. I was tasked with working with churches on their mission and evangelism primarily and also with their stewardship ministries. When I would go to visit these churches, they would often describe themselves in the same way. We are a friendly congregation. Everyone said it no matter how big or how small they were. We're friendly. And yet, sometimes I would have to admit I would experience them as not very friendly. If I would go to worship, nobody would really say anything to me. And in some of them I found there was that same small click of people, some even relatives of one another. They were an insulated group, yes, they were friendly to one another, they just weren't necessarily friendly to everybody else. So as I would offer suggestions to them about how they might improve their mission or their ministry, especially their evangelical witness, the response that I got was often the same as well. Though, we tried that before and it didn't work. That was code word for "Thank you for your helpful suggestions, we're not going to do anything different."

Now this is important because it goes to the heart of the things that Jesus cares about. In the gospel of Luke there is nothing more serious than table fellowship. Nothing more serious than invitation and hospitality and generosity toward the other. At meals Jesus often ate with outcasts and sinners. At meals he told his disciples that he would rise from the dead in the resurrection. It's at meals that Jesus fed thousands in what seemed like a miracle. It is in a meal that he celebrated a special offering of his very self in bread and wine in the Eucharistic meal. It was around a meal that the promised Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and the disciples were commissioned for service and ministry in the world. It is through fellowship meals that the church grew as it connected with a culture with various cultures and languages and backgrounds in table fellowship. Meals are important in the church.

One meal that has significance for me as the pastor of Trinity Church is our Community Connections Breakfast where we invite persons who were formally incarcerated are now in rehabilitation or in halfway houses, to come to celebrate breakfast. Our kitchen crews do an amazing job putting together a beautiful breakfast for those who are there. We have a time of music and worship and also bring in a special speaker that inspires every single person that is gathered there, not just the people who are coming, but also us who are gathered.

Often times those speakers are somebody that has already been through the system.

Now find themselves on the other side and are now there to offer their wisdom and advice to those who are going through it currently. There is nothing more powerful than seeing members of this congregation spread out sitting in different places with people who have come to that meal. It is truly table fellowship as important as we when we gather to celebrate Holy Communion.

In the gospel ready for today, Jesus we hear is being carefully watched, it's kind of ominous, isn't it? The Pharisees are looking to find some way, some breaking of the law that they can tag on Jesus. The Pharisees were the watch dogs of the faith. These are the folks who would walk around the community, just waiting to see if they could find someone who is breaking a part of their Jewish law. They're looking for the infractions and they're watching Jesus closely just to see what is he going to do.

Now at those type of social gatherings the host would often have a U-shaped low couches with pillows with a low table in front in which they would place the food. You actually reclined at the meal on your left elbow and then reached out with your right hand to get the food. Those who were at the center of the U was often the host and those who were special guests. It was a place of honor and prestige and maybe even power if they invited a local official to those places. You could imagine as people would come to the meal, they would jostle for position to see who could get closest to the apex. You see as depending on your influence, it kind of went from there all the way down to the ends.

Jesus sees this going on and he decides to share a parable with them. Now it's important for you to remember that in this section of Luke, Jesus is turning things upside down. He's been associating with the wrong crowd, the wrong kind of people. He's touching people who are supposed to be untouchable. He is healing those who are broken and he's calling nobodies as his disciples, calling them into mission and ministry in the world. Now at this time that Luke is writing this gospel the Gentile Christians would have been paying very close attention to this parable of Jesus for they had experience that kind of intermingling between both those who are Gentiles, for example non-Jews, Greeks, or Romans, or other cultures with those who are Jewish Christians. The Gentile Christians know that they have been invited to this dinner fellowship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In a way they recognize that they were the outsiders, but they understood Jesus' invitation into the community of faith to be authentic, and so that even as they experienced difficulty integrating with the Jewish Christians, they knew that the invitation that they had received was from the Lord. And the Book of Acts that chapter 2 if you will, that Luke writes to his gospel tells the story of this integration of non-Jewish Christians and Jewish Christians. At the heart of it though is Jesus and what he is trying to teach his disciples. He wants the church, Jew and non-Jew alike to participate in kingdom behavior. In recognizing that even as they gather for a regular meal they are to exhibit extraordinary generosity and invitation because it is in those table fellowships that God will feed your soul and my soul and the world's soul, and if we do so we honor God himself.

Now we heard that they are looking at Jesus, they're watching Jesus to see if somehow he is going to slip up, but Jesus doesn't care about that because after all it is God who will see our good works. God is the one that we should be worried about of what we do or what we say or how we serve, rather than others. In other words, we are to act as if we are in the presence of God always, and how do we stand before God? How do we stand before God as human beings? Well, as Luther said, as both saint and sinner, we are

incomplete people before a holy God. We are sinners before the one who created us and you and I are no superior than anybody else in the sight of God. And it is our very pride that holds us back from that authentic relationship with God. It is our pride that seeks to push out the generosity of God, and isn't that the whole story of Genesis after all? Us trying to be more than we actually are? Us not recognizing that we're living in the very presence of God in Eden, where everything is complete, and instead we say, let's get a little bit more for ourselves.

Brothers and sisters, if you or I don't grasp our need for God, if we don't understand our need for humility in our lives, if you or I don't welcome everybody, then we miss what God is trying to do in Jesus Christ. It is nothing short then a completely new world order, an order of love and acceptance. It's not just about us being nice to people. Jesus wants to change the world and he wants to change the world through you and through me and through the church that he loves and calls into fellowship. You and I are not a club of the frozen chosen. We are a universal community of saints and sinners on a mission from God. And so as Christians we are called to depend on God for everything. We have been invited to the table to receive his gifts of bread and wine, of grace and forgiveness, and we have been invited, we have been invited to invite others to places of honor at that dinner party of the Lord.

This afternoon we'll have our good-bye summer picnic, another opportunity to invite the community into community, and we get some ice-cream out of the deal as well. But every single Sunday we have an opportunity to invite people into fellowship at that table. This is indeed good news of good Thanksgiving. And as we invite people into our community of faith we do so giving them the best that we have to offer. For anything less is not our best, and everyone is welcome at that table because the table is God's and the invitation is his. Amen.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Copyright © 2016, Jack M. Horner. All rights reserved.



www.trinitycamphill.org