

**Pr. Morgan Gordy – Southeastern Synod**

**Sunday, August 28, 2022**

**12<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost – Year C**

**Gospel: Luke 14:1, 7-14**

**The Holy Gospel according to Luke.**

**Glory be to you, O Lord.**

<sup>1</sup>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.

<sup>7</sup>When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. <sup>8</sup>“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; <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

<sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup>And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

The Gospel of the Lord.

Grace and peace from Our Lord and Risen Savior, Jesus the Christ.

Where to sit?

It's not always clear!

Some people have places pretty well defined –

at home I know which chair I usually sit in... and the one, my husband, Julian usually takes...

But in open public spaces – like church or school.. it can get a little complicated...

It's the beginning of a new school year – on that first day – in your new classroom- or in the cafeteria - where do you sit?

What about at church? How about places around ***the Table in our Nave***? Do some of you have a favorite pew?...your place? Your seat? What if you go in and sit in someone else's place?

Hmmmm.

Anytime I go to a banquet I am always grateful for the little place cards on the table that have people's names on it – that helps me know where to sit...

But occasionally there are no place cards. ... And all of a sudden you have to choose where to sit... and if you choose a place of honor... a seat not meant for you but for someone else, you end up being asked to move...

Sitting in the places of honor... face it there are perks ... you usually are the first to be fed ... you have the best view of the activities ... just by being there you are also considered to have a particular status or importance to the host just by simply have a place at that table....

But taking a place of honor not intended for you could end in embarrassment .....

Jesus had already caught the attention of the religious authorities in his teaching and healing...and for who he was spending time and eating with...

and on this day as *Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.*

Jesus saw how people were trying to get the best seats at the table... and he took this opportunity to teach those who were listening...teach them to choose humility and not to exalt themselves.

Jesus could be reflecting the wisdom teaching about comporting oneself with humility found in Proverbs in this parable today... he certainly knew it...

<sup>6</sup>Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence  
or stand in the place of the great;  
<sup>7</sup>for it is better to be told, "Come up here,"  
than to be put lower in the presence of a noble.

We have been invited to a banquet – and at God's table there are more seats than we can imagine.. and a banquet plenty to satisfy all.. where all are welcome and invited... in the kingdom of God...

We don't have to jockey for the best seat... instead Jesus encourages us... teaches us...instead put our focus on inviting others to join in the feast...

This month during our Churchwide Assembly we elected a new Vice president for the ELCA – Hopefully many of you watched some of the Assembly or at least this part...

the three top candidates – all persons of color – all of them were not raised in the Lutheran church but came to be Lutheran because someone invited them.

I, too, am here today because someone invited me.

It would seem that this welcoming is the norm – certainly the desire of our congregations –

But this has not always been the case... and still is not in some places... where people are not welcomed and invited into churches our because of the color of their skin, their nationality, who they love or their political persuasion..

We have divided ourselves on many fronts in order to define who is worthy of the invitation and who is not.

Who is worthy to sit in our Nave and who is not.

Who is part of our community... who is not...

and over time these perspectives become tradition and understood to be normal and even sometimes codified into law...

Then it becomes *just the way it is...*

But what about when we invite someone who is considered by the community – an outsider-someone ?

or when we try to make changes so that all have an equal or equitable shake at the table or in community – we inevitably enter into conflict with customs and traditions and biases that have lived on in our society and cultures..

In my lived history - up until and even during the Civil Rights movement, people of color were not allowed to drink from the same water fountains and enter or eat in the restaurants with white people. I remember seeing the *Whites Only* signs in many of the establishments in town back during those times..

It wasn't right then... even though it was accepted practice. even law at that time. Those laws and those traditions didn't change without a cost..

Table fellowship is the most conflicting and telling practice within a community in 1<sup>st</sup> Century Palestine...

And in many ways it continues today.

Who you eat with reflected who your people were... your status....

And Jesus blew all this out of the water by eating with sinners.... “especially those perceived by the righteous as sinners”

Jesus has lots to say in Scripture about who is welcome at the table...

He had already crossed many boundaries set by society and his culture.

He'd already broken a law by healing a woman bent over for 18 years on the Sabbath...

*So he was one to be watched...he had their attention..*

*And in this parable – he issued those who were listening a warning...*

*<sup>11</sup>For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”....*

A warning not carved into just that time – but one we too should heed as we think about and live into being a welcoming community – as we strive to live into mutual love for one another...

In the recent years, many of the bills introduced in state legislatures have been directed to exclude or diminish individuals' rights we all hold dear, especially our LGBTQIA siblings and people of color. We have seen how easily things change where some in power assume those whom they choose or identify with deserve a seat whereas others do not.

We forget who makes the seating chart.

It really calls into question on how well we see ourselves within the context of God's community.

Whether we see one another as beloved by God... and part of the human family – siblings – and all children of the Creator.

Or not.

St. Paul reminds us, Jesus teaches us, that we are called to love one another and that love transcends boundaries and the challenges that which separates us from one another.

In my work in Disaster Ministry, it is not hard to see how access to recovery resources are not as available to the whole community on many occasions...

some are not at the Table and unable to access the much needed assistance or have voice in the process that brings healing and stability back to the community.

Equity and access denied

We have to work hard and be intentional about making space and inviting so that all may have what is needed ..so that all may be well..

It may mean that we have to question ourselves about our seating – did I take a seat of privilege – a seat that benefits me, my family – and am I ready and willing to make changes so all may have the benefits I do....even if it means sharing or giving them up myself...?

Face it.. in the human community, especially in this country where hyper independence is seen as a virtue.....jockeying for the top place.. *first place ... a place of privilege is seen as normal...and to be admired...*

Perhaps this flows from a theology of scarcity...there's not enough so I must be first and get mine... it doesn't matter who I step on or climb over or push away... the end justifies the means...

But There is a table large enough for all of us and even more than we can imagine...

Jesus teaches us about a love that is so great that it envelopes all... and encourages the strong to lift up the weak – don't include only those who benefit you... include all...especially those who are outcast or down trodden by whatever this life has thrown at them.

We are reminded this day to do some soul searching and recognize that we may just have taken somebody else's seat or have tried to remove some chairs..

We need to remember – we are not in charge of the seating chart...

Just called to invite. Welcome. Love.

Teachings like this cost Jesus his life.

Because there is a cost when one challenges tradition and power...no matter how wrong headed the tradition or rule might be...

Systems don't change easily .. they actually resist it.

But Jesus gives us life in a new system...in a new structure...

In his Body...

In our baptism....we live life within him and he in us...

In Christ we have a place at God's banquet table...

Spirit led, we can live Christ's love to others and make sure there is room in community and at the table when and where sin seeks to block way for our neighbor, a beloved child of God.

We can strive to live in mutual love...

visit the prisoner as if you had been in prison with her...show hospitality to strangers – welcome them ...stand with the tortured as if you were tortured too... live in solidarity with your neighbor...

When we live this out then the Church will be a more inviting, inclusive and welcoming place...welcoming those who have felt excluded – into the embrace of God's radical love... a love that has always been there for them.

and when we do,

our community thrives and is well and whole...

Sunday, September 11<sup>th</sup> is God's Work Our Hand's Sunday. What will your hands be doing then? How will they invite? How will they break down the barriers?

If we get discouraged or feel that the divisions are too great, that we can't do what is needed to be done. Look to Jesus.

For we can rely on Jesus. He is our yesterday or today our tomorrow. He invites us all to his Table where he feeds us and sends us out with power to be his Body in this place -

May we have the grace to do so with the humility - knowing who we are and whose we are and living Christ's love through our lives...

AMEN