

Pastor Jon's Sermon from Sunday, August 28, 2022

Whenever I went to my Grandma Ruth's house in Merrill, WI, I was treated like royalty... but so was everyone else who entered her home. I saw how my grandparents welcomed and cared for a new Hmong family that moved in across the street, much like our Good Neighbor Teams today welcoming refugees.

Grandma had the gift of hospitality... of making you feel welcome and safe. I would walk in and the first words out of her mouth were, "Are you hungry? She would go down the list: Do you want a hamburger with fried onions, bacon and eggs, a summer sausage sandwich, or a malted milk?" While waiting for the food, I would take the seat of honor in living room on the Lazy Boy recliner while reading the Wausau Daily Herald. I would wait for the words, "Come and eat!" I didn't realize till later in life, that maybe, just maybe, I could have been in the kitchen visiting with Grandma or helping her with the dishes or cooking.

In our Gospel for today from Luke 14, Jesus teaches his kingdom value of being a guest at another person's house. He also teaches how to be a host in his kingdom.

First, a guest. The first thing we need to notice is that Jesus shows up when he is invited... even to the home of his antagonists. Being invited somewhere is a gift. Take people up on invites when you can. Jesus was invited to dinner at the house of the Leader of the Pharisees on the Sabbath. Up to this point in the Gospel, Jesus has eaten with the Pharisees two other times and it hasn't gone well... once in chapter 6 and once in chapter 11. In chapter 6 after Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath, the Pharisees were filled with fury because Jesus healed on the Sabbath. They discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. They were fearful of this rule breaker and his teachings.

At the meal in chapter 11, after Jesus is called out for not washing properly when he arrived, he retorts, "Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds, and neglect justice and love

of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces.” The Pharisees piety wasn’t keeping the main thing the main thing.

Can you imagine going to a neighbor’s house for a meal and giving them warnings like, “Woe to you for mowing your lawn during no mow May”.

At the meal, Jesus observes the folly of the guests jockeying for the best seats at the table... which was near the host. It was like those beloved mixer activities... you know the ones that are supposed to be team builders... like when you have to organize yourself in order by birthdate without talking. But in this case, it was by how much honor you had in that room. It must have looked like musical chairs, watching them say, “I have more honor than you... that’s my spot.”

So, Jesus teaches a parable about a wedding banquet. That when you are invited to a wedding banquet or to anyone’s home, don’t think that you are above others and take the seats of honor. But instead go and sit at the lowest place. Maybe the bridegroom will move you up, but that’s not your job to decide.

As a guest, Jesus teaches humility rather than self-exultation. He teaches, “For all who exalt themselves shall be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

But aren’t we all guests in God’s creation? Aren’t we stewards and not owners?

I think oftentimes we walk around like we own the place instead of being stewards just passing through. And we humans have a tendency to make groups or categories that lift ourselves up and put others down.

Then there is the Lesson for hosts.

Jesus observed a host who’s hosting was an act by which one person gained power over others... putting them in his debt.

All of us know the ugly face of generosity the binds us... like receiving a gift with strings attached.

A host who expects a return on his invite will **not** offer service or food to those who cannot repay, and so guest lists consist of persons who can return the favor.

But those who embrace and embody the message of Jesus are known by their practices of hospitality to the least and left out. Did you know that the word hospitality has a Latin root that means guest, stranger, sojourner, visitor. It literally means love for the stranger.

Jesus is therefore calling for this kingdom behavior from his church, that is inviting those with neither property nor place in society to our table.

In Luke's Gospel, the poor, the maimed, the lame, and the blind are kingdom people. I see the communion table as one place in the church where we are all equal. Luther wrote a note found in his pocket on his death bed, "We are all beggars, it is true." We are all beggars in need God's grace and forgiveness.

A clear sign of acceptance, and a way of recognizing others as equals, is to break bread with them. As my second child heads off to college at UW Madison, I hope he breaks bread with many strangers as a sign of acceptance and equality with them.

I will leave you with this. Fred Craddock, a great preaching professor, once said, "In the Christian Community, no one is a project." In other words, we are all in the same boat, relying on the grace and hospitality of God our host.

Amen!