Dinner with Jesus Peace Presbyterian Church

Luke 14:15-24 Summer Parable Series

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This is the last in our summer series on the parables and in addition to thanking our last parable group for an excellent job in presenting this parable, I’d like to remind you of where we’ve been with Jesus in his mysterious stories. The Good Samaritan taught us not only to care for our wounded and stranded neighbors along the journey but also that the neighbor we least expect to be helpful may well be the person we need most, the one most generous in caring. With the Sower and the Seed, we learned to broadcast seed indiscriminately because we do not know how the mysterious of God may take root. In the Parable of the Lost and Found, we saw how God welcomes us home and celebrates our being found, proving the abundant love of our God. In the Parable of the Rich Fool, we remembered that building bigger barns is futile, and traveling light allows us to be generous like Christ. We learned the value of humility with the Pharisee and Tax Collector. No matter how good or bad, right or wrong you have been, humility is the key. And last week, we saw in the Parable of the Talents that taking a risk with what we have been given is our charge.

So now as we come to the Parable of the Great Dinner, it helps to remember that Christ did some surprising things at mealtime. He turned water into wine. He invited four to five thousand men and who knows how many women and children to eat at the last minute and assumed there would be enough to feed them all. He invited himself to the cheating tax collector Zacchaeus’ house for dinner and by doing this, transformed Zacchaeus into a generous and honest man. While eating with his disciples, just before his death, he strangely said that the bread was his body and the wine his blood, and he invited them to share this meal in remembrance of him. After he was raised, he ate fish with the disciples and while eating challenged Peter with the question, “Do you love me? Then feed my lambs.” He told this parable while at the dinner of a Pharisee. He first reminded the guests of the Pharisee that they should always take the worst seat at the house, as an act of humility.

He said to the host of the dinner, when you are having a dinner, do not invite your friends and wealthy neighbors and family members, but invite the poor and the weak – the people who can never pay you back and you will be repaid at the resurrection. Hear the scripture as we pick up there…

**Luke 14:15-24 (NRSV) The Parable of the Great Dinner**

**15**One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, *“Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!”* **16**Then Jesus said to him, *“Someone gave a great dinner and invited many.****17****At the time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, ‘Come; for everything is ready now.’****18****But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, ‘I have bought a piece of land, and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.’****19****Another said, ‘I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.’****20****Another said, ‘I have just been married, and therefore I cannot come.’****21****So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and said to his slave, ‘Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.’****22****And the slave said, ‘Sir, what you ordered has been done, and there is still room.’****23****Then the master said to the slave, ‘Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled.****24****For I tell you, none of those who were invited will taste my dinner.’”*

So sitting with Pharisees, who were very particular about rules of dining – what you could eat and with whom you could eat, Jesus challenges all of that. In Judaism and early Christianity, the banquet was a metaphor for the heavenly feast with God. Sharing a meal was also an important expression of faithful hospitality. Table fellowship demonstrates value and inclusion. Genuine acts of kindness are those that carry no expectation of reciprocity.

Richard and I had a summer church dinner group at our house on Friday night. One family, who will go unnamed, forgot to come. That’s okay. They lead busy lives with active children. It did give us a chuckle as we thought of the parable. Another family from Peace, whom I invited on Wednesday never saw the email, or were not free. That’s okay too. But you know what I never even considered? Going out into the street to invite a bunch of people I do not know. That might seem kind of strange in our culture. Yet when we were first starting Peace, I remember some parties at your houses when you invited all your neighbors.

We simply built friendships with people, most of whom never decided to come to church with us, but that’s okay. I wonder if we should have more meals like that. Last weekend I had the opportunity to supply 100 hot dogs to a crowd of people whose names I do not know, people whose resources are less secure than mine. I could have easily ignored the opportunity. There was no obligation. I only know the pastor and a few of the congregation’s members. This is the Nuevo Camino congregation at Beth-El Farmworker Ministries. They were having a welcome back to the new year meal after church, kind of like our hot dogs today. Eating together is a very good thing, especially when we take time to build relationships – asking good questions and listening well. The Musicians at Peace (about 40 of us) met Wednesday to share a potluck. One of the best things about being in Montreat for a conference is eating three meals a day together. Anyone interested in going to the racism conference in October, please talk to me today.

When Richard and I were young and fresh out of seminary, we went to Montgomery, AL to co-pastor a new PCUSA church there in 1990. We quickly learned of the Friendly Supper Club that met on the first Monday of every month at the local cafeteria. It was started in 1982 by an anonymous person whose aim was to get blacks and whites eating together as a bridge-builder across racial lines. This Friendly Supper Club is where we were privileged to get to know Johnnie Carr, the unsung hero of the Civil Rights Movement who was a close friend of Rosa Parks and who with Martin Luther King, Jr. led the Montgomery Improvement Association and fought for the end of poll taxes and the successful integration of schools. If you google Friendly Supper Club, you will find a video interview of her conducted by one of our youth in the Immanuel Presbyterian Church.

I am feeling called by this parable and this memory of the Friendly Supper Club and this season in our country to form something like a Peaceful Dinner Club, where the only agenda is building friendship. As Dr. King said, ““Morality cannot be legislated, but behavior can be regulated. Judicial decrees may not change the heart, but they can restrain the heartless.” So we work to change hearts.

It is that middle part of our mission statement, Peace Church. *Our mission is to make God known by growing as disciples of Jesus Christ, building a community of peace, and caring for the needs of others.* Building a community of peace takes building friendships across all divisions. This is the purpose of our Family Fun Fest, which also raises funds for organizations trying to mend the gaping hole between rich and poor.

Several years ago…I think it was 2015, we had a “friendly supper” with the local mosque, hoping to build bridges of understanding between us and our Muslim neighbors. We may not be able to measure the good that was done in that time of building a community of peace, but I am convinced it was worthwhile. Are there other ways to invite those who are different from us or on the margins of life or feeling threatened by poverty or hatred into friendship through meals in in this church? In your home? In local restaurants? Or at turquoise tables? Have you heard about them? Turquoise picnic tables have spurred a front-yard revival of neighborly behavior all around the world. Their motto is as the poet Yeats said, “There are no strangers here; only friends you have not met.”

For the love of Christ, what will YOU do to welcome more strangers, friends you have not met to the grace-filled table of human community? It is not time to make excuses. It’s time to make dinner and invite all people to Christ’s feast of plenty. For there’s a place at the table for all of us! Both at the table of fellowship and at Christ’s mysterious table of sacramental glory.