

Today we join Jesus as he does something he does a lot in Luke – share a meal with friends – and, perhaps, break bread with folks who are *not* his friends – in a home not his own.

As Jesus continues his travels to his destination city of Jerusalem, a leader of the Pharisees in the town through which Jesus and his friends are passing invites them to his home for sabbath dinner.

After the dinner is well underway, in modern terms, somewhere around the time dessert and coffee are served, Jesus tells his host and all the guests a parable – a short story with a punch. Throughout the evening, Jesus has been noticing the manner in which the dinner guests have been seating themselves. The guests have been arriving at various times. As new guests arrive, they quickly assess the social “pecking order” in relation to both their host and to one another – and the seating is adjusted accordingly. This means that up until the point of the last guests’ late arrival, people are routinely having to get up and shift their seating whenever anyone of higher social standing comes to the table.

In the honor culture of Jesus’ day, this was normal, even expected behavior. Everyone knew his or her social ranking, and everyone more or less stayed there.

Jesus has a larger, more liberating message than routine social etiquette for the hosts and guests of his day. Jesus’ parable is not about an ordinary kind of dinner party. Jesus’ parable is about a wedding banquet – which is another way of saying *God* is hosting this parable’s lavish feast. As host, *God* is the one assigning places of honor. The guests clearly have no intrinsic idea of their worth by *God*’s standards.

When left to their own devices, the guests in the parable seat themselves in perceived relation to one another. But *God* has a reality very *different* from human social standards. So *God* goes around re-assigning seats – the proud, who have seated themselves in places of honor near *God*’s host table, are being shuffled farther away, while the humble are moved up closer.

It is important to understand that Jesus speaks about *God*’s feast to his friends and his new acquaintances in terms they can understand – which are the customs of an honor-shame society in which social status is very fixed and very scripted. We look at

things differently today, and that different view expresses itself right here around this altar – this table of the Heavenly Banquet which is Holy Eucharist. I want to suggest to you today that God’s great meal is in the round even if we are seated in rows. There *are no* higher or lower places around this banquet table. (In fact, I think Episcopalians tend to do this in reverse. The seats in the *back* seem to be the most coveted, not the ones in the front!)

Regardless of how our church is oriented as a gathering space, the reality is this: As daughters and sons of God through our baptism into Jesus Christ, we *all* have a place of equal honor around the table. We are *each* honored and cherished, no longer friends or guests – but family.

Our worth is not determined by how we perceive ourselves in relation to others – better, smarter, thinner, richer, poorer, fatter, duller, or lower. Indeed, we can let all our anxious comparisons go! At *this* Table, we are liberated into the true nature of our worth, as beloved Children of God.

This brings with it an awesome **gift** – but also a significant **challenge**. The **gift** is that we begin perceiving one another not according to who’s richest or poorest or whitest or blackest or...whatever. We honor the gifts of all – which means you can be anything you want...you don’t have to have a pre-existing place in the “pecking order” to take your place in the work that is nourished by this Table and its banquet.

But there is also the **challenge**.

In very particular ways we are challenged by what we do *with* this nourishment. There is an accountability for the things we do and the places we go and the people whose lives we touch once we leave this Table – which means you are not the sole author of your life. You may get to be whoever you want without respect to what color your skin is, what nation you hail from, or how much money you have in the bank.

But you *do* have a responsibility for what you do with these gifts, these blessings. You can’t just come here and “soak in” the blessings – you have a duty, a stewardship, a responsibility, to take this feast out from here and do something with it.

So I want to suggest that as we participate in today’s worship around this table, we keep our eyes and hearts wide open with expectation as to what that’s going to mean for who we are and what we’re about tomorrow and the next day and the remainder of this week. Some of that has to do with how open our eyes are right here and now:

- Notice who is at this feast, and just how varied and vivid God's family really can be.
- Notice how people with brown hair and black hair and *no* hair and gray hair, kneel near one another with hands outstretched to receive the nourishment of Christ's body and blood.
- Notice how people with magnificent homes and modest homes and perhaps no home at all celebrate and are fed together.
- Notice how the quiet and the boisterous all shine like the sun from the deep joy of shared worship.

Then, when the offering plates, along with the bread and wine, are brought forward, think about what you lay at that altar by way of your own prejudices, your own social discomfort, and offer that up: Leave behind whatever will keep you from making this Feast the prime fulcrum around which your week revolves, whether it's anxiety, resentment, awkwardness or pride – offer such problematic thoughts and feelings to God's transforming, redeeming love, and then...let them go.

After you are nourished with the body and blood of Christ, go forth remembering in a lively way the life implications of this Holy Feast.

- Leave here seeing afresh those around you, and *act* on that refreshed sight.
- Open your eyes and hearts to the liberating, mutual joy of *noticing* and somehow *including* in a new and compassionate way at least *one person* who has been on the periphery of your vision or your life.

And, whatever you do hear afresh these words from today's Epistle passage from Hebrews: "Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God." When we do that, we become open to the poor, the lame, the disabled, the blind...and any of a thousand other human realities. For when we show *that* hospitality, *that* joy, we truly may well be entertaining angels without realizing it.