

Title: Room at the Table**Text: Luke 14:7-14**

**A Communion Meditation preached by The Rev. Randolph T. Riggs, D.Min.
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First Presbyterian Church of Lancaster, PA**

Our six-year-old granddaughter, Emma, is always full of questions. Not long ago she was here on the first Sunday of the month, and she asking about the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. She didn't know its formal name. She knows it is important because Mrs. Ressler helps our children to understand these things, but she wanted to be sure she understood. So on the way home from church that morning she asked, "Dad-dad (which is my grandfather name), why do you call it a supper when all we have is bread and juice?" I reminded her about symbols and how we use them all the time. We were stopped at a stoplight, so I asked her what the red light meant, and then the green light. I knew we would be passing a set of golden arches, so I asked her what they meant, and immediately she knew it was McDonald's. *"So when we see the bread and juice, we remember that Jesus had a real body and when he died, he bled real blood."*

Then she wanted to know if it was all right for her to take communion, and I turned the tables on her. I asked her, *"Tell me again, Emma: Who is the host at the table; who invited us to take the bread and the juice?"* Her reply came quickly: *"Jesus."* So I asked her, *"If Jesus is our host, do you think he wants you to come to the table."* And she said, *"Dad-dad, if Jesus is the host, I think he wants everybody at the table."*

Our six-year-old granddaughter cut through two millennia of theological wrangling with one simple sentence: *"If Jesus is the host, I think he wants everybody at the table."*

What she didn't understand, and what we all too often forget, is something that still takes place to this day. There are people who have come here today who do not feel worthy to receive the gifts which Jesus offers. They wonder if, with all the things they have done wrong in their lives, they really belong at the table which has been set for them by Jesus. Then there are still people for whom being seen at the table is more important than receiving the grace which it offers, and that is why Jesus told this parable in the 14th chapter of Luke.

He had been invited to the equivalent of a Sunday dinner, and it turned out that he was the main course. He was being pummeled with questions about his views on the Law and the Prophets, and the questions betrayed the narrowness of the people asking them. So he tells them a story, which was often his teaching style, about a wedding banquet where all the guests were jockeying for position.

Those listening to the story would have picked up on its meaning immediately. There was a hierarchy of seating arrangements which was Jewish custom. The honored guests were invited to sit near the host, while those who were considered less important sat the furthest away. Pride and selfishness were the mark of the day. Jesus said that if they really wanted to follow God's way, ***humility and hospitality*** were the values they should pursue.

Humility

Humility is simply having a right sized opinion of oneself. It is recognizing that God is God and that you are not; that as talented as any of us may be, we are not self-made. We are all dependent on the one who created us as well as those of have helped us along the way. We are who we are because we belong to God, and because we have

people who have stood by us whether we are in the valley of despair or the mountaintop of hope.

The Jewish poet and storyteller Noah ben Shea tells a parable that serves as a valuable reminder of the roles we play in life: After a meal, some children turned to their father, Jacob, and asked if he would tell them a story. "A story about what?" asked Jacob.

"About a giant," squealed the children.

Jacob smiled, leaned against the warm stones at the side of the fireplace, and his voice turned softly inward.

"Once there was a boy who asked his father to take him to see the great parade that passed through the village. The father, remembering the parade from when he was a boy, quickly agreed, and the next morning the boy and his father set out together.

"As they approached the parade route, people started to push in from all sides, and the crowd grew thick. When the people along the way became almost a wall; the father lifted his son and placed him on his shoulders.

"Soon the parade began and as it passed, the boy kept telling his father how wonderful it was and how spectacular were the colors and images. The boy, in fact, grew so prideful of what he saw that he mocked those who saw less, saying, even to his father, 'If only you could see what I see.'

"But," said Jacob staring straight in the faces of the children, "what the boy did not look at was why he could see. What the boy forgot was that once his father, too, could see."

Then, as if he had finished the story, Jacob stopped speaking. "Is that it?" said a disappointed girl. "We thought you were going to tell us a story about a giant."

"But I did," said Jacob. "I told you a story about a boy who could have been a giant." "How?" squealed the children. "A giant," said Jacob, "is anyone who remembers we are all sitting on someone else's shoulders." "And what does it make us if we don't remember?" asked the boy. "A burden," answered Jacob. [Source: Steve Moore, "A Graceful Goodbye" Leadership (Summer 2002), pp.41-42]

Hospitality

When Jesus was through with his parable, he turned to his host with yet another object lesson. The guest list that day was filled with all the right people. It was a who's who of all the "good people" in the day of Jesus, and yet it did not impress Jesus. Why? Because all of the people who were attending were there to be seen as much as they were to honor the one who had invited them. Jesus told his host he would be better off if he had invited the outcast of his world—the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. This is one of those many places in the New Testament where we see Jesus stand for those who have no voice in society; those who have been disenfranchised by the majority. In the mind of Jesus it will not be where you stand in the corporate ladder, or where you rank in the social register, or who you know politically that will make the difference. It is the way you treat the people whom society would just as soon pretend did not exist. It is your willingness to open your arms to those whom society has labeled as outcast which will bring the blessing of almighty God.

I found an interesting story on the internet this week about a young woman named Katie Hosking who broke up with her fiancé just 12 days before the wedding. Katie had reserved a country club for the reception, and club policy required 60 days notice for any

cancellation. This meant the Hoskings were going to be required to pay the full amount. With 150 invited guests, the cost was \$6,200.

The family decided to have a party anyway. In place of wedding guests, Katie and her parents invited the residents of the Interfaith Family Shelter to a country club banquet. More than 50 close family friends joined 40 homeless people, and together they danced and feasted on baron of beef, salmon, shrimp cocktail, fettuccine, and fruit. Strawberry shortcake replaced wedding cake. Afterwards they packed up the leftover food and sent it back to the shelter. It was enough to feed the homeless for several more days.

When it was over, the almost-bride, Katie, said, "We had so much fun! We saw the homeless in a different light, and even though I am sad about the failure of my relationship, I think God used that failure to teach me something about the true meaning of hospitality I would have never learned had I been married that day." [source: The Wenatchee World (6-29-05) (AP story)]

Conclusion

My friends, the good news of the Gospel is that it was a great cost that God paid to make room at the table for you and for me. We are welcome here not because of anything we have done, but because of the mercy of God through the death and resurrection of his son, Jesus. He has paid the price for our seat at the table, and all who place their faith and trust in him are welcome here.