



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

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THE TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, AUGUST 31, 2025

SIRACH 10: 12-18; PSALM 112; HEBREWS 13:1-8, 15-16; LUKE 14:1, 7-14

EATING AND DRINKING WITH GOD

LUKE 14:1, 7-14 *[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. When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. "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; 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. 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. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." 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. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."]*

I don't know about you, but I've been invited to a lot of dinner parties lately. Maybe it's because summer is winding to a close and people wish to take advantage of our final, warm summer days. In fact, I was at a dinner party last night and I had a wedding yesterday afternoon. These things helped me think about our Scriptures for today.

I guess I have one suggestion for those of you who are planning to invite some people over for dinner. *Don't invite Jesus.* Seriously, he isn't the best dinner guest. His mealtime appearances often ended in provocation, insult, or scandal. Also, he isn't very polite. He says things. Blunt, embarrassing things no one cared to hear.

This week's reading from the Gospel of Luke describes one of these not-nice scenes. Jesus is invited for a Sabbath meal by a leader of the Pharisees. I imagine that, arriving early, he sits and watches as his fellow guests scramble for places of honor around the table. If I'm imagining the scene correctly, they jostle and shove each other, feigning dignity while still fighting for prestigious spots near the host.

After observing their drama for a while, Jesus calls them out with a parable. Knowing full well the social rules of his day, he shuns them and calls for a revolution. Not a revolution in arms, but a revolution in table manners.

He tells the fancy people to sit in the lowest places at the table. Then he encourages the host to not invite her friends but, rather, the most disadvantaged people in their society, those who could never return the invitation or repay her.

Our reading this week doesn't tell us how Jesus's listeners reacted. I don't know if they laughed in discomfort, shook their heads in disbelief, argued back, or followed his advice. All I know is how I react as I read this story. I feel an uncomfortable combination of surprise, skepticism, and fear. As in:

Really? Is Jesus serious? Does he have any idea what he's asking?

It appears he does. Just as I'm growing comfortable with my faith, a story like this one comes along to mess with my complacency. Ok, I'm not the type of person to publicly exult myself, but I certainly don't seek to inhabit the lowest places. You mean, I shouldn't massage my Facebook page to make my life look perfect? Are you saying that I shouldn't judge my worth (or the worth of others) based on clothes and cars, zip codes, academic accomplishments, or professional titles? After all, I do have six college degrees and use the fancy title of "Canon." You don't want me to maximize my social capital at every opportunity? But I'm a white, upper middle-class, educated male in America – I don't think know how to behave any differently. Jesus, are you asking me to ignore the pecking order — or worse — upend it? Don't network, don't schmooze, don't jostle for attention? Open my heart and home to people who can do nothing for me? People I have no affinity for? People I can't impress or earn favors from?

Why on earth should I do that?

Because Jesus insists on it. Because *this is what God wants from us*. God, the Great Reverser of our priorities, our

hierarchies, and our values. God, who turns us inside out and upside down because there is no end to the miserable human game of who is "in" and who is "out," and God's wisdom knows that our anxious scramble for greatness will lead to nothing but more anxiety, more suspicion, more loneliness, more hatred, and more devastation.

Though we have such a hard time believing it, Jesus insists that God's kingdom is not a kingdom of scarcity; it is one of abundance, where all are already welcome, already loved, already known, and already cherished. The currency of that kingdom is humility, not arrogance; generosity, not stinginess; hospitality, not fear. The table at the center of that kingdom has so many seats — all of them premier seats, all of them honorable seats — that we don't have to scramble and exhaust ourselves to secure a good spot anymore. Because the place of honor is already ours.

But let's face it: humility is a tricky thing. We too easily conflate it with self-effacement and low self-esteem. Even if we manage to define it in healthy ways, humility betrays us; the very instant at which I proclaim that I am humble, I'm not. Worse, very little in our culture

rewards or supports the humble. Whether it's entertainment, politics, sports, or even religion, we in Western cultures have an unhealthy admiration for the loudest, the biggest, and the greatest. Whether we recognize it or not, we are known around the world for idolizing the superlative. What would happen to our discourse if we shunned the words "most" and "best" and replaced them with "least" and "worst?" Madison Avenue wouldn't know what to do with that. What would we have left?

When we dare to gather at Jesus's table, we are actively protesting the culture of upward mobility and competitiveness that surrounds us. There's nothing easy or straightforward about this; it requires hard work over a long period of time. To eat and drink with God is to live in tension with the pecking orders that define our boardrooms, our college admissions committees, our church politics, and that can be tiring. But it's what we're called to do — to humble ourselves and place our hope in a radically different way of being in the world.

Jesus asks us to believe that our behavior at the table matters — because it does. Where we sit speaks volumes, and the people whom we

choose to welcome reveals the stuff of our souls. Favor the ones who cannot repay you. Prefer the poor. Choose obscurity. This is God's world we live in, and nothing here is ordinary. In the

realm of God, the ragged strangers at our doors are the angels. (Hebrews 13:1).



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