

Primary Texts: Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

*That Jesus...* He always seems to be eating. And he's got no table manners! He's like a four year old eating with his mouth full. Or worse – it's like you invite your boss over to your house because you're going after the promotion and your ten year old tries to start a food fight.

*That Jesus...* Last week he was breaking the rules of church, way worse than running around the sanctuary, Jesus had the audacity to heal on the Sabbath. But today he's eating in our home with no table manners.

It's been noted that the entire book of Luke is one meal after another. And the supper table is where most of the action is in Jesus' ministry. It's where Jesus seems to break all the rules.

In fact, I invite you to go home this afternoon and just skim Luke's Gospel. In nearly every chapter, Jesus is eating... not to mention, he's getting in trouble with his table manners. And this Jesus *and his table manners*, come to one great meal around the 24<sup>th</sup> chapter – it's just after he's been crucified – one might argue – for those bad table manners... It's when those two disciples are on their way to a village called Emmaus and Jesus is at the table with them, and he takes bread, blesses it and breaks it and gives it to them...

And we're told "their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and Jesus vanished from their sight" (Luke 24:31). But if that reading is the dessert, the reading for today is just the appetizer... and Jesus seems to serve up *bad table manners*. And it all starts when the guests pick their places at the table.

I read this week about a sports stadium, which is getting to be more and more the rule for sports stadiums. Plush, leather seats down at courtside or right off the field. A middle tier with slightly less comfortable seats, not a bad view. And then, the majority of the seats, are no frills, as we say "in the nose-bleed section."

Jesus says, when you go to a sporting event, take the nose-bleed section. For it's better to be invited down to court-side than it is to be told you don't have a ticket and get kicked out of the game.

He's got a point. It's more fun to practice humility than it is to be humiliated... but what if you never get asked to the courtside? What's this Jesus up to after all?

For this labor day weekend and also as we talk about humility, Helen Keller is quoted as saying, "I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish humble tasks as though they were great and noble. The world is moved along, not only by the mighty shoves of its heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker."<sup>1</sup> Pastor Arley offered to me another quote that taps into this practice of humility: "Humility is a sane understanding of your gifts." But I think the author Helen Nielsen puts it best when she says, "Humility is like underwear; essential, but indecent if it shows."<sup>2</sup>

I think it's important to note that *Jesus does not encourage humiliation* – the world dishes that out on a daily basis. We're not called to practice lives of humiliation, we're called to grow into lives of humility. But, we ask, how do we do this?

Well, Jesus says, it's not too hard, start with something easy... If you're used to sitting in the front, try sitting in the back for once. If you're used to racing to the front of the line, try waiting for others to go first. It's not about being humiliated, it's about learning that you...as sacred and important as you are...are not the only sacred or important mouth that needs to be fed at the table.

You...as holy and as loved as you are by God...are only part of what makes this universe holy and loved by God. You with your pain and suffering...as genuine your suffering and as real your pain...are not the only one in this world with wounds that beg for healing and brokenness that cries out for wholeness.

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<sup>1</sup> Quote found at: [www.wisdomquotes.com/cat\\_humility.html](http://www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_humility.html)

<sup>2</sup> Quote found at: [thinkexist.com/quotations/humility/](http://thinkexist.com/quotations/humility/)

Jesus says, if you want to be healed, try healing others... If you want to be loved, try loving others... If you want to be first, try to be last... If you don't want to be humiliated, try practicing a life of humility... It's a radical message of radical table manners.

But it's not where the lesson on table manners ends. Jesus continues on with the lecture. Jesus says, when you give a dinner party – don't invite your boss so you can get promoted. Don't invite your friends who already love you. Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. Invite people who can't repay you.

If a plate of practicing humility was the first course, then the second course of the meal Jesus serves up today is the practice of hospitality.

“Don't abandon showing hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained messengers of God without knowing it...” says the author of Hebrews. And then in the next breath, “Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.”

If you feel comfortable doing it, I invite you to close your eyes for a moment and imagine that you are in a prison. And I don't want to hear the jokes about how you *already feel like you're in prison when I preach...*

Those who have worshiped at St. Dysmas, our partner prison ministry near Sioux Falls might have an advantage in imagining what it's like; but consider for a moment that the average cell size is somewhere between 5-8 feet by 8-11 feet.<sup>3</sup>

You can open your eyes if you haven't already, but when you go home this afternoon, after you skim Luke's Gospel for stories of Jesus eating, get a tape measure and figure out how many square feet are in your bedroom.

The author of Hebrews doesn't say anything about first figuring out how the person got in prison before you remember them, just “remember those who are in prison, *as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured.*” Would

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<sup>3</sup> Figures found at: [faculty.nwc.edu/TOConnor/111/111lect12.htm](http://faculty.nwc.edu/TOConnor/111/111lect12.htm)

we think differently about prisons in America or places like Guantanamo Bay or Abu Ghraib if we took the bible seriously?

I invite you now to try something different... something that has become a ritual here at Custer Lutheran Fellowship. Usually when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we join hands with those who are next to us. You don't have to stand up, but – if you feel comfortable – join hands with the person next to you, whether it's your parent or your sister or your husband or even somebody you've never met before today.

It takes you just a little bit out of your comfort zone doesn't it? This, says Jesus, is the practice of hospitality – it pushes the edge of your comfort zone just a little bit, puts your feet in the shoes of someone else... puts you in the shoes of someone who's worshipping at this church for the first time... or puts you in the shoes of a prisoner or the bare feet of someone who's being tortured or the skin of someone who's living with cancer or the mind of someone who suffers from depression or... the list goes on.

If you haven't already, you can let go of your neighbors hands, but let us not forget this morning the table manners of this Jesus. As we move to the font, let us not forget and let us not let go of these manners which reach out to those around us in humility and in hospitality. As we move to the table, let us not forget these radical table manners that claim that *all are welcome, wherever you are on your journey of faith.*

And as we are sent out, let us not forget the table manners of this rule-breaking God who dares to break the *very first rule of being a God* – “Don't mingle with humans. Don't suffer for humans. Don't suffer with all of creation.”

We thank God this morning for this God who we continue to come to know in Jesus, with bad table manners and all.

Amen.