

First Presbyterian Church  
Bozeman, Montana  
Jody McDevitt, co-pastor

September 1, 2019  
*22<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time*  
Luke 14:1, 7-14

### The Topsy-Turvy World of Divine Hospitality

If you were here last Sunday, you may be doing a little “double take,” wondering why I’m up here again and why Dan is not. In more than 22 years as co-pastors, both of us have been remarkably healthy on Sunday mornings. Yes, there have been times when the tail end of a cold has caused a cough or two. But the front end of a cold is much worse, and that’s why yesterday afternoon Dan reluctantly agreed that it would be better for me to pull a last-minute sermon together than for him to risk being a public speaker this morning.

Which is one way of asking for your understanding in advance, because my words this morning will not be well-researched or lengthy. I know that no one ever protests brevity. Can you imagine, “Pastor, I wished you had preached a longer sermon today!” And, providentially, though I’ve spent little time preparing a sermon on today’s topic, I have spent time this summer experiencing what Dan entitled “The Topsy-Turvy World of Divine Hospitality.” So it’s not a tough topic for me to talk about.

Two weeks from today you will be blessed to hear from seven members of our youth group and three adults who traveled together on our summer youth mission trip to San Diego. I hope it will intrigue you this morning to hear that their theme will be “A Place at the Table,” and that for three weeks following, we will continue to explore ways that God’s welcome fuses radical hospitality with the pursuit of divine justice. Reading these verses from Luke, along with the wise words from Hebrews, sets the table for that conversation.

Maybe you’ve noticed how much eating and drinking goes on in the Bible. It begins in Genesis and lasts through Revelation. In the first chapter of Genesis, God gives humans and animals plants for food. In the last chapter of Revelation, Christ says “let everyone who is thirsty, come and take the water of life as a gift.” Abraham and Sarah welcome three strangers by the oaks of Mamre, providing a feast for them, and they turn out to be angels. The early church, as described in the book of Acts, “broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts.” The psalmist proclaims “you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies, my cup overflows.”

And then there’s Jesus, the foodie, who eats and drinks throughout the gospels. He makes wine out of water at a wedding banquet. He is criticized and called a glutton and a drunkard because he eats with tax collectors and sinners. He tells stories about banquets when he is the guest at meals, and somehow the guest becomes the host. He takes bread, and blesses it, and breaks it, and feeds thousands at a single sitting. And after all those meals with his disciples, he takes bread one more time, blesses it and breaks it, and gives it to them saying “remember me each time you do this.”

In this story, at the table of a leader of the Pharisees, Jesus takes the experience of eating as a starting place for lessons in humility and hospitality. Maybe this is why it’s so difficult to get church people to go first through the potluck line—they are worried that they will look greedy and self-important. And all who exalt themselves will be humbled, while those who humble themselves will be exalted! Jesus is reminding his first listeners, and us, too, of wisdom found in Proverbs: Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Prov 16:18)

But it is the second part of his teaching that turns conventional wisdom upside down. It’s easy to invite one’s relatives to the table. It’s easy to invite one’s friends. It’s not so easy to invite strangers,

especially when the strangers are strange. It's not so easy to invite those who are poor, who may only bring a bag of chips to the potluck, or nothing at all. It's not so easy to invite those with disabilities, who may need a wheelchair ramp or someone else to go through the potluck line for them. It's not so easy to invite someone with dietary restrictions, who may require a special menu. It's not so easy to invite children, who can be disruptive, or persons who challenge conventional thinking about gender identity, because what will we talk about. It's not so easy to invite someone who speaks another language, or who smells different, or who doesn't seem to know the conventions around our tables. The list of people we are afraid to fully welcome, fully embrace is so long. So why is Jesus telling us that these are exactly the people whom we should start inviting?

Because that's exactly whom he's inviting to the great banquet, the feast of love and justice, the eternal table of God's radical hospitality. In two weeks, our youth will be telling you how they experienced a taste of God's welcome in the community of Sierra Service Project, and how they lived that welcome by serving strangers whom we saw as neighbors and soon as friends. They will tell you how diversity and inclusion were actually not that hard, but gave us opportunities for joy and laughter, friendship and learning. They will tell you how great a contrast we saw between the community we were experiencing and the border wall we were next to, where we knew desperate and needy people were on the other side, hoping for a chance to eat at a welcoming table.

The kingdom of God is here, and yet not fully here. Divine hospitality, which is ours to enjoy, is not for us to keep to ourselves.

Every time we share in the Lord's supper, we have an opportunity to be reminded of divine hospitality, the open arms welcome of God in Christ which invites us regardless of who we are, despite our brokenness and shame, our poverty of spirit or our arrogance, our status in the world or our abilities. Every time we come to his table, we receive Christ's grace, which says that no matter how society labels us or judges us or excludes us, we are welcome here. Every time we gather as a community of saints, we are also a community of sinners, and every time we gather, we should be thinking about who is not at the table with us, and how we can make a place at the table, and invite them in. For that is the way of our Lord and Savior, the host at this table, Jesus Christ.

What's so topsy-turvy, counterintuitive, and surprising about Christ's way is that it brings great joy with it. Instead of being afraid of others, we find out what a delight it is to learn about different ways of being in the world. Instead of being bound up by rules and conventions and societal expectations, we discover the freedom of unrestricted love. Instead of worrying about not fitting in, we find that there's a place at the table for each one of us, even me.

Scripture tells us that people will come from east and west and north and south to sit at table in the kingdom of God. What a blessing it is that Jesus gave us this sacrament, showing us with real food and drink the eternal spiritual reality of God's realm!

May we receive Christ's welcome, and be Christ's welcome, to the banquet table of God's eternal love.