



Date: August 25-26, 2018
Speaker: Trish Haq – Pastor of Community Care
Scripture: Table Talk - Luke 7:36-50

This is our final week of our summer series, Table Talk, and it's been quite a journey, as we've explored the Kingdom value of sharing a meal together around the table. I hope you've enjoyed the series, and it's been our prayer that you would be inspired and encouraged to enter into more intentional hospitality as an expression of your faith. We've looked at the role of hospitality within our families, our community, and our neighbourhoods, and we've been challenged to extend our hospitality beyond our comfort zone, to welcome those who are different from us around the table...the marginalized, the poor, and the broken.

As I reflected this week on all that we've learned so far this summer, I was reminded of the video Paul played for us just a few weeks back. It was an ad campaign for PC's #eattogether, and it told an emotional and inspiring story of a group of neighbours, stepping out of their isolation and away from their devices to gather around a table in the hallway of their apartment building to share a meal together. It's a heartwarming commercial, and even as I watched, the sense of pure joy that the video conveyed was contagious. A smile briefly crept across my face, but then something happened....in my mind, I imagined myself at that table. With those people. On the outside, it looked so welcoming and fun, but my honest first thought when I tried to put myself in the scene was this: wow that would be awkward.

I'll confess, part of my reaction has to do with the fact that I am an introvert, so joining in on a meal with an entire hallway full of people I don't know very well sounds totally exhausting. But if I'm being honest, it's more than that. How do you get a great conversation going with a group of strangers? Would there be any common ground? Some neighbours you may know a little better, and that

would help, but some of them might be people you've only ever held the elevator door for, or had a few polite conversations with in the hallway. Some of them might be complete strangers, and maybe you'll hit it off beautifully. But maybe you won't.

Maybe it'll be a meal full of awkward silences and failed attempts to make conversation. Maybe you'll be across from the couple who frequently keeps you up at night with their loud music blaring through the walls. Maybe you've heard the mom beside you on a bad day, yelling at her kids, and you wonder if she's aware that you've heard her. Maybe thanks to the guy at the end of the table, you've had to keep your sliding glass doors closed since he moved in 3 months ago because of the cigarette smoke that finds its way from his balcony to yours. Maybe some of these people are kind of awkward to be around, or maybe you're worried that you're kinda awkward, and you won't enjoy the meal at all because you'll spend the whole time worrying about what to say. Maybe the meal will go pretty well, but the girl who brought the salad has a few boundary issues, and you're going to have her knocking at your door every day for the next month.

Now, don't get me wrong, I still think it's a great idea. There is profound value in gathering together for a meal, and the scene that this PC commercial depicts is a scene that we know is close to the heart of God; to see people from all walks of life, different ages, ethnicities, and social classes, welcomed and included around the table...it's beautiful. It's beautiful, but it's also HARD. We've spoken this summer about the incredible things that happen when we eat together, the way it brings people in close. But it's easy to idealize this idea of everyone gathering around the table together. The truth is, it's messy. And I think you know, I'm not just talking about the extra dishes.

When we come around the table, we open ourselves up to the risk that things are going to get complicated. It might simply be awkward; it might even get uncomfortable. If you get the wrong set of people around the table, it could be downright explosive. It's why engaged couples spend so much time fine tuning the seating chart for their wedding. It's why many of us dread the holidays, because it means we have to get together with THAT side of the family. It's why we're often so careful about who we invite to share a meal with.

As we've gone through this series, maybe you've found yourself warmly remembering a great meal that you shared with others. Or you've found yourself longing to bring some people together to create a meaningful moment of welcome and friendship. Today, we're headed in a different direction, and I'd like you to reflect on this question...have you ever sat through an awkward meal? I know I have....

Early on in our marriage, Imraan and I had an interesting dynamic when it came to our anniversary. He has never been one to love marking yearly milestones of any kind. If he had his way, his birthday would come and go without much fuss, and we used to joke that the best gift I could give him was to pretend I had forgotten it entirely. When I think about it, he has been far more gracious to me than I have been to him about this. He's always been willing to go the extra mile to celebrate my birthday because he knows it's important to me. Meanwhile, I have continued to belligerently mark his special day with birthday plans, except of course for the year that I actually DID forget his birthday! So when it comes to our anniversary, despite his thoughts on these yearly milestones, Imraan has been pretty great about it. Each year, we plan for a nice dinner out to mark the occasion, often taking the opportunity to reflect on the year that has past, and look forward with anticipation as we set a course for the year ahead. I like to believe that he's come to enjoy these yearly moments of celebration. But, on one particular anniversary, in a season of life we affectionately refer to as BC (Before Children), we started the week knowing that our anniversary was happening, and discussed the plan that we would go out for dinner. Little did we know the disaster that lay ahead?

Now, I'm telling you this awkward story, but I don't want you to feel awkward. So, let me just assure you before I go any further, Imraan knows I'm going to tell this story and has given the ok. To this day, I couldn't really remember what started the whole thing. As it turns out, when I asked Imraan about it, the details were vivid in his memory. I won't share the specifics with you today, but suffice to say, we were in a fight. A big one. I remember it was a familiar argument, one of those recurring fights that would resurface in different times and spaces, but never seemed to get fully resolved. We left for work that morning already angry with each other. And when we returned at the end of the day, neither of us had cooled off, and the tension was still thick. Unfortunately for me, during our conversation earlier in the week I had strongly expressed how important it was to me that we celebrate on the actual day of our anniversary, and Imraan decided he was going to hold me to it. At the time I felt that he was just being difficult, but it's more likely he was just doing his best to honour my request, despite the situation that was unfolding. And that is how it came to be that in the middle of the biggest fight we had ever experienced in our marriage, we went out for dinner.

We got ready in silence, and headed to the restaurant, both too stubborn to back down, and admit that we should just reschedule, and celebrate another day. I thought maybe we'd be able to smooth things over in the car, but the conflict felt so insurmountable we couldn't figure out how to get to the other side of it, and so the tension and frustration kept building. We headed into one of my favourite restaurants at the time, Fellini Koolini's, and I don't think we've actually been back there since! We tried to keep our composure as the host brought us to our table. We sat down, I picked up a breadstick, and then the tears welled up.

I couldn't help it. I couldn't control it. And by the time the waiter came to take our orders, the tears were flowing freely...a quiet but steady stream rolling down my face. Thankfully they had the lights down pretty low, so I don't think other tables could see (I hope!), but I'm sure it was evident to the waiter, who took our order in record speed and quickly made his escape. It was SUPER awkward.

Now I'm just going to pause for a minute to clarify a few things... First, it probably doesn't sound like it from this story, but I promise, Imraan and I are quite happily married. I think he is the greatest human being I've ever known, and I am profoundly grateful to be walking through life together with him. Truly! Second, I want to tell you something that we didn't know at the time, but eventually discovered as we learned in those early years of our marriage how to fight well (and I know that might sound like a strange sentence, but learning to fight well is a key ingredient for a healthy marriage!). But here's what we eventually learned: people who are uncomfortable with anger sometimes turn their anger into tears. Apparently, that's a thing, and apparently, I am one of those people, or at least, I used to be. So in case you're at risk of judging Imraan for making me cry on our anniversary, which sounds bad, I know, keep in mind what was actually happening, which is that I was angry with him. But, unable to express it, I could do nothing but let my out of control tears flow. And they did. All...the way...through dinner.

Through tears and half whispered attempts to talk the issue through, we endured the meal. I looked up with puffy, panicked eyes when the waiter asked about dessert. Imraan in his wisdom, said no thank you, just the bill. Then we paid and left as quickly as we could. I thought for sure we'd be heading home in silence, to continue our stalemate. But we got into the car, and Imraan said, with a little kindness in his voice: let's go for ice cream. In that moment, my anger melted, and my heart softened. We were in the midst of this big, horrible conflict, but we were in it together. I knew he was still angry, but we were in it together. I knew he was still angry, and now he was probably also feeling incredibly embarrassed because his wife had just sobbed her way through an entire meal out in public. But he wasn't giving up. He loved me enough to keep trying, to find our way through the conflict. And we did.

Sitting on a curb, eating our Marble Slab Ice Cream, with our defenses finally down, we discovered where we had misunderstood each other, what hurt had been inflicted, and what was needed to set it right. We asked for and offered forgiveness, and Imraan and I came away from that argument not just reconciled, but actually closer. Our marriage was strengthened, and we stepped forward from there

more connected, our hearts more aligned, and our direction more clear than ever before. That night has gone down in the history of our relationship as the most expensive fight we ever had.

It's a little embarrassing to share that story with you today, but it reminds me that although a place at the table holds the promise and hope of acceptance, closeness, friendship, and even forgiveness, whether you're sharing a meal with a table full of strangers, or the person who is closest to you in the whole world. Getting to that place of deep connection is going to take some work. And often, the hospitality that God is calling us to is going to be challenging, and uncomfortable.

And that brings us to another awkward meal that I want to tell you about today. It's another meal where the tears flowed freely, and it's found in the Gospel of Luke. In 14 simple verses, Luke paints a vibrant picture of a meal filled with awkward moments, judgement, tension, beauty, grace, and forgiveness. The story begins in Luke, chapter 7, verse 36, with an invitation to dinner:

Luke 7:36-39

36 When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37 A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. 38 As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. 39 When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner."

As we've seen this summer, Jesus was known as a 'friend of sinners', often sharing meals with those on the margins of society. But this meal was intended to be different. The Pharisee, who we later learn is named Simon, was a man who had status and power as a religious leader, and he had invited Jesus to his home for a meal. We don't know for certain what his motives were, but as the story unfolds, I think we get a sense of it. He had heard

about Jesus, and although the Gospels often describe the relationship between Jesus and the Pharisees as tense and oppositional, you get the sense in this account that Simon hasn't quite made up his mind about Jesus. He's heard that Jesus is a prophet, and he wants to see for himself, so he invites him over for dinner.

But let's leave Simon the Pharisee for a moment, and turn our attention to the immoral woman at Jesus's feet. Some have mistakenly believed that the woman in Luke's account was Mary Magdalene, but scholars now agree this is not the case. Mary Magdalene is actually introduced later in Luke as a new character, and is described as a woman of wealth and significance, who had been delivered from demon possession. To add to the confusion, all 4 gospels have an account of Jesus' being anointed by a woman. The other gospels tell the story of Mary of Bethany, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, anointing Jesus in Bethany just days before his death and resurrection. In contrast, Luke's account tells the story of an unnamed, sinful woman, anointing Jesus' feet in the home of a Pharisee near the beginning of his public ministry.

At times, these two events have been blended together, confusing the unnamed woman with Mary of Bethany, and then, for some reason, further confusing Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene. But many scholars now agree that there are enough differences to believe that these are two separate events. The anointing at Bethany is a beautiful story that profoundly foreshadows Jesus' death and burial. But as we'll see, the passage we are looking at today tells a different story.

So, let's turn our attention back to the woman at Jesus's feet, unnamed, and known to be sinful by the people in her town. Often it has been assumed that she was a prostitute or an adulterer, but we don't actually know for sure, the text doesn't say. So it's important to be careful we don't make any assumptions. Maybe she was a thief, or a murderer, or worse, a gossip. All we know for sure is that this woman, known to be sinful, heard that Jesus would be eating at Simon the Pharisee's house, and came, uninvited, with an expensive Alabaster jar of perfume, intending to anoint Jesus. She was not welcome. And she did not belong.

I'm sure you can imagine quite easily the awkwardness of it. Not only was she viewed as unacceptable and unworthy to be there, but her actions, and her over the top display of emotion would have been regarded by everyone in the room as inappropriate. Everyone that is, except for Jesus.

We don't know the whole story. We don't know where she was when she first encountered Jesus. Perhaps she had been in one of the crowds that gathered to hear him teach, or maybe she witnessed one of his many miracles. It's even possible that she hadn't even seen Jesus in person before, but had heard the testimony of those who had encountered him and believed that the grace and forgiveness he had extended to others was also for her. One thing is clear: her life had been deeply touched by Jesus, and she was so overcome with love and gratitude that her desire to see and worship Him was greater than her fear of what others would think.

The text says that she stood behind Jesus when she wept at his feet. It's difficult for us to picture if we imagine Jesus sitting at a table the way we do. But Luke tells us that Jesus reclined at the table. This was not uncommon in the Greco-Roman world. They would recline on long couches that surrounded the table, leaning forward and stretching their legs out behind them, this explains how the woman could stand behind Jesus while anointing his feet. She approached him, the Alabaster Jar clutched between her hands. But before she could pour the perfume, she began to weep. So overcome with emotion, the tears began to flow down her face, falling on Jesus's feet, washing away the dust and sand from the day. Imagine being so overcome.

This was not what she had planned, but she couldn't contain the powerful emotions that had welled up inside of her. We don't know all that she was feeling in that moment... They weren't tears of anger to be sure, Maybe they were tears of sorrow and regret, finding refuge at the feet of Jesus in a moment of deep repentance and powerful forgiveness. Or maybe they were tears of overwhelming love, flowing down because she was so moved by her understanding and acceptance of God's forgiveness and grace extended to her.

We don't know if she was panicked or embarrassed by her uncontrollable weeping, or it's possible she

wasn't aware of anyone else in the room at all. For her, maybe this was one of those moments where everything else faded to the background, and there was only her and Jesus.

Drying his tear soaked feet with her hair, she continued with what she had come to do. Taking her perfume, she began kissing and anointing his feet; a profound but outrageous act of adoration and love. From the outside looking in, this was an uncomfortable situation. All eyes were on Jesus to see what he would do. People likely expected that he would pull away from her, and tell her to stop, but he didn't. If Simon the Pharisee had been on the fence about whether or not Jesus was the 'real deal', he now believed he had his answer:

Luke 7:39

"If this man were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman is touching him. She's a sinner!"

His assumption was that Jesus had failed to understand and know her reputation. If he was truly a prophet, he would have known who she was, and would never have allowed her to even come near him. But Jesus quickly proves Simon wrong, and turns the whole thing on its head. Jesus did know who this woman was; he knew not only the state of her heart, but the state of Simon's heart too. And this is where it gets really interesting. Simon hasn't actually shared his thoughts out loud, but Jesus responds, addressing Simon's unspoken words with a parable:

Luke 7:40-41

40 Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. 41 "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, [a] and the other fifty...

A denarius is a Roman coin worth an entire day's wage, so a debt of 50 denarii would have been significant, almost 2 months of wages if you had steady work. And a debt of 500 denarii would have been absolutely crushing, about 2 years' worth of work.

Luke 7:42-44

42 Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43 Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. 44 Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman?"

Just pause and picture this for a moment. Jesus is addressing Simon, but has turned away from the table to look at the woman who has been weeping and kissing and anointing his feet since the moment he arrived. He continues to speak to Simon, but he's looking right at her. I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair.

Luke 7:40-47

45 You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little."

Simon had invited Jesus for dinner, but his hospitality was clearly lacking. For us today, there are common things a host will do to make sure their guests feel welcome. A warm greeting at the door will set the tone. A handshake or a hug, paired with a welcoming smile and an invitation to come in will be given. Some expression of welcome will follow...we're so glad you're here! The host will take their guest's coat and hang it up for them, invite them in, offer a chair, introduce them to those they may not yet know. And finally, the ultimate question that all good hosts will ask: Can I get you something to drink? I've never fully understood it, but for some reason, in our culture, ensuring guests have a drink in their hand is the sure mark of a good host.

In Jesus's time, the rules were a little different. It was common that a good host would supply their guests with water to wash their feet, so they could rinse off the dirt and dust from the day. It was also

customary to greet them with a kiss, and finally, to provide oil for anointing. Though it sounds strange to us today, anointing with oil was common in Jesus' time. Functionally, it provided refreshment to the body, but symbolically, it was a way of conveying respect to a welcomed guest. And perhaps of greatest significance, anointing with oil was also a sacred practice used to consecrate, or set apart people or things for God. Throughout Israel's history, Kings, priests, and prophets were anointed. So the practice of anointing with oil in welcoming guests, might also symbolize a setting apart of these people, for this time together, reflecting the sacredness of these shared moments around the table.

We don't know for sure why Simon held back these expected gestures of hospitality. But it's possible that Simon's lack of hospitality revealed that he was a reluctant host. He may have felt hesitant about having someone so controversial to his home, and by withholding some of the common courtesies normally extended to guests, he could protect his reputation, and hold Jesus at arm's length, not welcoming him in fully. He believed his privileged position allowed him the right to choose who was worthy of a place at the table and who was not. And if he wasn't sure about Jesus, we can be confident that he was certain of his opinion about the uninvited guest at Jesus's feet.

Up until this moment, Simon and his guests must have thought they had a pretty good grasp of the dynamics that were happening around the table. Each player in the scene had a defined position... The host, Simon the Pharisee, in a position of status and power. Jesus, this uncertain figure who needed to prove to them he had a rightful place at the table. And this sinful woman...who clearly did not belong here. But with just a few words, in one of many incredible moments where Jesus reveals the upside down nature of the Kingdom of God, he instituted a dramatic role reversal. Simon, the righteous Pharisee, with all the respect and honour his position afforded him, becomes the un hospitable host, sorely lacking in grace & love. The sinful woman, out casted, despised and rejected for her mistakes, becomes a welcomed guest with a rightful place, affirmed & redeemed, and overcome with gratitude and love. What's worse, Jesus points out

that she has put Simon to shame, stepping in to fill the role he should have provided...that of a generous host, lavishing extravagant hospitality on his honoured guest. And if he had only understood who it was that he had invited to dinner that day. Who was this Jesus? This man that they were trying to figure out; this man who was rumoured to spend much of his time with those on the fringes of society, who leveled the playing field by eating with those that were considered unworthy of a place at the table; this man who taught with authority and performed many miracles, but did so in a way that flew in the face of all that they thought they knew.

Simon and his guests may very well have come away even more puzzled about Jesus than when this whole thing started, but with four simple words, Jesus did reveal the truth of who he was.

"Your sins are forgiven".

This was a scandalous thing for him to say. It sent Simon's guests reeling, and asking each other a profound question:

"Who is this who even forgives sins?"

Jesus's declaration of forgiveness was shocking because only God can forgive sins. By extending absolute forgiveness to this woman, Jesus was assuming a divine task that only God could accomplish. But the truth of his declaration was clear. Those who have been forgiven much, will love much. And there could be no doubt...this notoriously sinful woman was so filled with love for Jesus, she could not contain it. From the overflow of her grateful heart, came an outpouring of extravagant love.

Luke 7:50

And Jesus said to her: "Your faith has saved you, go in peace".

But those who have been forgiven little, will love little. And Simon's love was certainly little. What goes unspoken, but certainly hangs in the air is the question of whether Simon has experienced forgiveness at all. His lack of hospitality towards Jesus, and his utter contempt for this woman reveals the deficit in his heart. In order to receive forgiveness, we have to have eyes to see our need

for it. And so, Simon had no sense of forgiveness, because he had no sense of his need for it. Maybe this encounter would change all that. The thing about dealing with people that we find difficult is that they often expose our hearts. Sometimes the reason we find it uncomfortable and unsettling to engage with people who we see as broken, is because it compels us to see our own brokenness. It requires us to drop our defenses, abandon our positions of power and privilege, and allow ourselves to be vulnerable. And so often, the personality traits and behaviours of others that grate on our nerves the most, are traits that ultimately expose our own flaws...impatience, judgement, pride, perfectionism, or selfishness.

As I've pondered my reaction to the apartment hallway dinner in the PC commercial, and my sense of dread at the thought of inserting myself into the scene, it's got me thinking about what it would require of me to interact with these imagined people with grace. What do my list of worries reveal about my own heart?

To face the stressed out mom whose been yelling at her kids would require me to face the ways that I also fall short as a parent...to admit that being a mom is hard sometimes, and that I often worry I'm failing my kids in one way or another. To melt away the hostility I feel towards the couple that blasts their music at night, I might need to overcome the difficulty I have with asking for what I need, and rather than making them out to be my enemy, or passive aggressively banging on the wall to get them to turn it down I may simply need to learn how to kindly and lovingly let them know that their loud music has been keeping me up. To enjoy the meal and really engage in the conversation, I'd have to stop censoring every thought before speaking, to let go of my need to be well thought of, and stop obsessively worrying about how I'm coming across to others. And knowing that there will certainly be people around the table who are different than me, I'll need to leave my unfair expectations behind, and come ready to accept them all where they're at, the same way Christ has accepted me. Gathering around the table with these imagined people would reveal my heart, and challenge me to change. And if I can manage to allow God to transform my heart, perhaps those who gather around the table with me will come away changed too.

If we return to our story one last time, we can easily see that the presence of this sinful woman who anointed Jesus's feet certainly exposed Simon's heart that day. He was disgusted by her presence and found her actions offensive. But it was the state of his heart that was in need of repair, not hers. She understood her need. And she had embraced the grace and forgiveness that Jesus extended to her. But he was so wrapped up in his own sense of self-righteousness, that he was blind to the truth of what was happening right in front of him...immune to this beautiful, grace-filled moment, and unable to see his own brokenness and need.

Luke doesn't tell us if Simon had a change of heart. In fact, you may have noticed that there are many things left unsaid in this story. Maybe it is because Luke is inviting us to see ourselves in the narrative. Even the sinful woman was unnamed, leaving room for us to imagine ourselves in her position. Her many sins could never stand in the way of God's radical grace and forgiveness, and neither can ours. The sin in our lives...the faults and mistakes and regrets that we carry, are never beyond the reach of God's grace and forgiveness. It's difficult for us to grasp the truth of it. Forgiveness towards others and even towards ourselves is often so difficult for us. We have to wrestle our way through our hurt and anger. Sometimes we withhold forgiveness because we want the person who wronged us to earn it. And even when we want to forgive, it doesn't come easy. But it is not like that with God.

When we humbly recognize our brokenness and acknowledge our need for Him, his forgiveness is quick, and it is complete. Have you experienced the life changing power of God's forgiveness in your life? Or can you better relate Simon...always holding back. Keeping Jesus at arm's length, cause you're not quite sure about Him yet. Maybe eager to avoid difficult relationships and uncomfortable people. Or quick to see where others are falling short, but not ready to see what kind of renovations are needed in your own heart.

N.T. Wright describes it like this:

The Pharisee has never come to terms with the depths of his own heart, and so doesn't appreciate God's generous love when it sits in person at his own table. (Luke for Everyone)

Would we recognize Jesus if he sat across the table from us? Or are our hearts so closed that we would miss it? Maybe it's time to come to terms with the depths of our own hearts. To allow Christ to step into our lives and do a dramatic reversal. To invite him to transform our hearts and our relationships so we can gather around the table with those he sets before us with freedom and grace, and together, responding to his outrageous forgiveness with outrageous love. Let's pray.

God, we pray this morning, that you would help us to grasp the depth of love and forgiveness that you offer to each one of us. Open our hearts to sense your gracious and powerful love in a new way. We pray for the areas within each of our hearts that need to be changed. Lord, take our bitterness, our anger, our resentment, our pride, and our unforgiveness, and give us instead a posture of humility and grace. Help us to persevere and not give up in striving for reconciliation in the broken relationships in our lives. Help us to see those that we find difficult to love with fresh eyes. Show us how you see them, and allow us to learn how to love them well. Change us from the inside out, and help us to respond to your grace and forgiveness in our lives with an outpouring of extravagant love. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen!

Communion

The table is set, and I can't think of a more perfect way to finish off our series this summer than by gathering around the communion table together. These past 2 months, we have talked about how we can learn to extend hospitality to one another, and to open our tables and our hearts to those around us. In many ways, this mission of hospitality we have embarked on is a mission that inevitably helps us to become more and more like Jesus. He is the ultimate host, the one who welcomes us with perfect love, who extends extravagant grace, who promises that whoever comes to him will never be hungry, and whoever believes in him will never be thirsty. The description of hospitality found in the passage from Luke that we studied today reminds me of another passage of scripture, Psalm 23. Well known words that paint a stunning picture of the kind of care and hospitality that Christ offers to us all. I'd like to just read them for you now:

Psalm 23

*The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
3 He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.
4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.
5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.*

These words provide a beautiful reminder of God's heart of hospitality towards us. He invites us to rest. He prepares a table for us. He anoints our head with oil, and fills our cup to overflowing. As we share in the Lord's Supper today, I pray we would sense God's gracious provision for us, and ready our hearts to extend that grace outwards to those he calls us to share the table with.

Benediction

Today I asked you to consider the question: If Jesus was sitting across the table from you, would even know it? I realize it sounds like an unlikely scenario, but the truth is, God has said that whatever we do to the 'least of these' we do to him. So every person we meet, every interaction we have, every meal that we share, is an opportunity to express our love to God, through the way that we love one another.

So as you prepare to leave this place, may God fill your hearts with a sense of his extravagant love, and may the overflow of his grace in your life empower you to step boldly into moments of uncomfortable hospitality and radical love. Go and be a life-giving and transforming presence in your families, communities, and the world. Amen!

Points to Ponder

Table Talk ~ Luke 14

Uncomfortable Hospitality

1. Have you ever had the experience of sitting through an awkward meal? What can you learn from the experience?
2. As you reflect on Luke 7:36-50, in what ways do you relate to the sinful woman who anointed Jesus? In what ways do you find it a challenge to relate to her experience? Can you think of a time in your life that you experienced radical forgiveness? What was your response?
3. What about Simon the Pharisee? In what ways can you relate to his experience? Have you ever kept Jesus at arm's length? Do you find it difficult to acknowledge a need for Jesus in your life?
4. Is there a challenging relationship in your life that is in need of God's grace and healing? What steps can you take to move towards reconciliation?
5. Do you sense God inviting you to step into some moments of uncomfortable hospitality? Are there people that you feel God calling you to share a meal with? What might hold you back?
6. Reflecting on the Table Talk series as a whole, are there any messages, stories, or ideas that have stuck with you, or that you have found challenging or meaningful?