

Sermon
Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene
Second Sunday after Pentecost
June 7, 2026
9:30 AM

Text: Luke 14:7-24

Theme: Pentecost People: A Table Open to All

[prayer]

I have been to a few dinner parties in my adult life, ranging from casual, intimate affairs to formal banquets. The social mores have varied for each, but one rule has always felt universal: It is rude to critique the host or your fellow guests. You may have opinions about the host's choice of hors d'oeuvres or how loudly your neighbor chews their food, but the middle of the dinner party is not the time to air those opinions...especially if no one asked you to.

By those standards, Jesus is not a good dinner guest. In our Gospel lesson, he has accepted an invitation to go "to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath" (Luke 14:1 NRSVue). Jesus is surrounded by lawyers and Pharisees and they are all watching him closely. If he had an ounce of self-preservation, he would have kept his mouth shut. But instead, he decides this meal is the perfect object lesson on the kingdom of God.

In the ancient world, meals were important social ceremonies. The Bible, and especially the gospels, are full of meal scenes. The writers paid special attention to where people ate, who they ate with, and where they sat at the dining table because all these things indicated a person's social position. We don't tend to pay as much attention to seating arrangements except in the most formal settings. But in Jesus's time, where you sat at the table meant a great deal. You wanted to be seated at the right hand of the host, because that meant you were a person of importance.

As Jesus enters the lead Pharisee's dining room, he notices that the other guests are jockeying for the places of honor closest to the host. He calls them out on their behavior and encourages them to approach the table with humility. Honor

cannot be gained by seizing prominence; it can only be given by others. And so Jesus directs the guests to sit not only a few places below their station, but to assume the very last place at the table. That way they will be honored if the host invites them to sit further up.

The Greek word for ‘honor’ is *doxa* – the same root as our word ‘doxology’ – and it is usually translated as ‘glory,’ a word Scripture reserves for God. Jesus is alluding to the truth that true honor and glory can only be conferred by God. And when God’s kingdom comes, God is going to reverse who is typically afforded honor and glory. For “all who lift themselves up will be brought low, and those who make themselves low will be lifted up” (v. 11 CEB). *So start practicing being humble now*, Jesus seems to say.

As Jesus is lecturing the guests, I’m wondering what the host is feeling, sidelined at his own dinner party. Just as the seating arrangement indicated a guest’s social position, the guest list was equally about boosting the host’s status. But Jesus has the audacity to tell the lead Pharisee that he has invited the wrong people to his own dinner party! He should have invited the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. These are people that the religious law explicitly forbids from the priestly class (cf. Lev 21:17-23). Jesus is directly challenging the lead Pharisee’s worldview. He should have invited these people precisely because they have nothing to give and will not be able to return his hospitality. In the kingdom of God, true hospitality is marked by radical generosity and inclusivity. *So start practicing being generous and inclusive now*, Jesus seems to say.

Jesus’s bossy observations have about the same effect as a wet blanket. We can all relate to hearing someone say something uncomfortable and not knowing how to respond. One dinner guest, attempting to alleviate the awkwardness, remarks, “Blessed is *anyone* who will eat bread in the kingdom of God!” (v. 15). This is the pharisaical equivalent of “all lives matter.” I can imagine all those privileged heads in the room nodding in agreement with this inoffensive statement, hoping that they can finally change the subject and get on with their meal.

But to everyone’s exasperation, Jesus decides to continue monopolizing the conversation by telling a parable about a dinner party. (How very meta.) The parable further illustrates Jesus’s point: God’s table manners look different than ours. In the coming kingdom of God, exclusionary and discriminatory social codes

will be exchanged for radical hospitality and generosity. Charles Wesley, in his poem “Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast,” illustrates well the kind of people we can expect to be seated next to at God’s table:

*Sinners my gracious Lord receives,
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves,
Drunkards, and all the hellish crew,
I have a message now to you...*

*Come, and partake the gospel-feast,
Be sav’d from sin, in Jesus rest:
O taste the goodness of our God,
And eat his flesh, and drink his blood.¹*

God is throwing a big party and everyone is invited! God’s coming reign will look like a feast where even the most disreputable among us will be offered a seat at the table. Jesus teaches us that those who are concerned primarily with preserving and promoting their personal esteem instead of inviting as many people as possible to taste God’s grace will exclude themselves from God’s heavenly banquet. The place of the esteemed will be taken by the least, the lost, and the last. Those are the people who will be invited to sit beside the King...and those of us who practice God’s radical, upside down table manners will have a seat beside them.

Our world is obsessed with power and esteem, with winners and losers. We hear that language regularly emanating from the highest seat in our government. But this is not the language Jesus uses to describe God’s kingdom. God does not reject anyone from His table. Jesus regularly ate with sinners and outcasts as a prophetic act demonstrating the depth of God’s love, the wideness of God’s mercy. With his actions Jesus was telling us that the people we think are the least fit to sit beside him will, by his grace, enjoy the seat of honor.

There is freedom for us, as Christians, in following this Way of Jesus. We can stop running the rat race of power, wealth, and esteem and instead focus on what God is calling us to do: Creating communities of hospitality and grace that reflect the

¹ Charles Wesley, *Redemption Hymns* 1747, pp. 63-68, The Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition, Duke Divinity School.

kingdom of God. The kingdom is coming, so now is the time to practice living kingdom values. Now is the time to practice radical humility, generosity, and inclusivity, to overthrow discriminatory practices, to accept the marginalized and outcast as our equals or even, perhaps, as honored guests who we have the great privilege of serving in Jesus's name. Jesus is watching to see whether his disciples are practicing humility, generosity, and inclusiveness in our relationships with each other and our neighbors. He promises that when we do this, we will be rewarded in "the resurrection of the righteous" (v. 14 NRSVue).

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Our call to worship today was from Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. This passage is the basis for the tradition we call the Lord's Supper. In the early church, communion was part of a larger meal and celebration that included prayer, reading and teaching Scripture, and singing hymns. Think like our worship service but also with a potluck! The practice of communion, of breaking bread together, was and remains a ritual enactment of the gospel message – that through the body and blood of Jesus we have been reconciled with God and now we are called to be reconciled with each other. For "there is neither Jew nor Greek; there is neither slave nor free; nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28 CEB). At the table of our Lord, all the walls of enmity have been torn down.

And yet the context of Paul's letter to the Corinthians is a church where the rich were refusing to share the community meal with the poor. The rich would go ahead and eat without waiting for the entire congregation to gather. Paul warned the church that those who took the sacrament of communion but excluded their poor neighbor from the table of fellowship heaped judgment on themselves. Their neglect of the whole body of Christ was as sinful as if they had crucified Jesus themselves (1 Cor 11:27-29).

Paul commands us to "discern the body" of Christ (v. 29). By this, he means that we should always be looking to see who is not yet seated at our table, looking for who is presently excluded from the body and then work to include them in our fellowship. In The United Methodist Church, we maintain an open table, which means that anyone who seeks to live in peace with God and with their neighbor can eat the bread and share the cup. Our open table reflects Jesus's open table.

And yet, there is still work to be done to make sure this table is truly open to all. There are people missing from our fellowship. We must continue to discern the body by recognizing where we have done harm, even unintentionally, and then make amends and continue practicing radical humility, generosity, and inclusivity so our table fellowship will truly reflect God's kingdom.

Gathering for communal, sacramental worship is core to what it means to be Pentecost People. When we gather for the Lord's Supper, we are participating in a sign act of the coming kingdom of God where God will host a feast open to all. This sacrament is at the center of our identity. Since the beginning of Lent we have taken communion every Sunday and the Coeur Team has decided that we will be making communion a weekly part of our liturgy rather than reverting to celebrating the sacrament on only first and third Sundays. This decision brings our practice in alignment with the teachings of both Jesus and John Wesley, as well as the formal doctrine of our church. But more importantly, this sacrament is a tangible reminder every week of who we are – a people gathered by God's grace around the table – and what we are called to do – proclaim the good news of God's coming kingdom by extending the table to all.

Amen.