

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

Sunday April 18, 2021. "Come to the table: the community booth"

I Intro.

Welcome to the weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from the message this Sunday. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotional is free-standing and you can still use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. Take as long as you need to dive into this material and feel free to share it. We're deep into 2021 and thankfully, we're still gathering in person. A small but growing group who follow all the safety guidelines joins us at the church. We have opened our children's and youth area also and are seeing a good response. We're so encouraged with your love and presence when you gather with us. If you're still joining us online, we love and so appreciate your presence also. We still are your church family, and if there is ANYTHING you need, prayer, ideas or suggestions you have, please pass them our way. We want to maintain that connection with each of you.

II Recap.

First, a somewhat lengthy, but hopefully useful, recap on the concept of *'tables'* and then we'll dive into Sunday's message. *'Tabling'* is simply creating informal times of gathering, sometimes best over food or drink, in which relationships are intentionally grown deeper and more life-giving through gathering regularly. *'Tabling'* isn't just hanging with friends for fun, (although that can be an important part of it). But for the purpose of growing relationships deeper to cultivate and nurture a circle of close trusted friends who can help us be the best us we can be. And hopefully we do the same for them. So, *'tabling'* is the idea of planning regular gatherings with people we feel safe around, won't judge us, but we can have open, honest, conversations. AND it's okay, in fact encouraged, to have differing views and opinions about issues so there can be strength found in a diversity of opinion. Safety is found in a commitment to each other, and to the relationship itself, rather than the protection of a certain position or agreement on issues. This is VERY difficult to do, valuing the relationship over being right. That's what makes these kinds of relationships so important. And the reason we are to work with everything we have to grow these kinds of relationships in our lives. We give the practice and process of cultivating these relationships the name *'tabling'*.

III Sunday.

We hit our second real Sunday of our **"come to the table"** series. And this particular one dealt with what we're calling 'the community table'. Or basically what it looks like and means to grow meaningful relationships with people outside of our regular church friends. We have to admit, the longer we've been a follower of Christ, the fewer close friends we have that don't consider themselves believers. This is just a reality of life. So there is no judgement for when this happens. Just an honest realization and admission that it's a common occurrence. But because this does happen, our circle becomes really small, and therefore our perspective on life itself becomes very insular. We have a narrow collection of close friends, and therefore our view on the world becomes very narrow.

Our scripture today gives us a kind of antidote for that. So, read this passage, and then we'll dig a little deeper in it. **Read Matthew 9:9-13.**

What jumped out to you about this passage?

At first glance, what did you see that spoke to you about having people close to you outside of your regular circle?

What makes this passage so challenging is not only Jesus judged harshly for hanging out with the 'wrong' kind of people, we see in other passages that he hangs out with the people who accuse him of hanging out with the wrong kind of people. Who does that?! Jesus of course.

So, Kal pointed out that there are several things we as followers of Christ have to be so conscious of in our own lives, to keep us from sliding into a world that only has people just like us in it.

1. Pride. This happens when we allow the belief that being followers of Christ gives us a sense of superiority over people who are not believers or who live differently than we do.. We see this in the parable Jesus told of the Pharisee and the tax collector. Because we follow Jesus we forget that it was grace rather than our own effort, that gave us the ability to live the life we do.

How does pride lead you to believe you are the source of your ability to live the way you do?

2. Legalism. Rules and regulations are easy...too easy. Rather than working out our relationship with God personally, and helping others work theirs out, we fall into the trap of just creating this giant structure of rules and laws. And then we use those rules, legalism, to keep people in line rather than committing ourselves to be in relationship with others.

Where do you find yourself being drawn to just making rules or making people obey rules rather than walk with them as they grow spiritually?

3. Protecting purity over relationships. This is a double-sided sword. We are called to live holy, separated, lives. But the problem is we then place 'staying pure', holy, over the incarnational work of spending time with people who aren't believers. Scriptures tell us that Jesus gave up any rights and privileges he possessed in order to enter into our world. This relational work is sacred and important.

How might this be a tough balancing act of living a holy life and still having relationships with people outside of our religious circle?

4. Placing knowing over doing. We've addressed this issue before, but western Christianity, especially evangelicalism, has emphasized just knowing the answers, having the right positions, over doing the work of Christ. This has reduced being a follower of Christ to simply agreeing to the basic tenets, rather than helping to build this kingdom Jesus traveled around teaching about.

In your life, or church experience, how have you seen an emphasis on knowing over doing?

IV Challenge.

So, this second Sunday, we saw in the life of Jesus the importance of broadening our circle of who we consider friends. Yes, we need to be in community with other believers who share our values and goals. But we also need to commit to having people in our life outside of that group.

What would it look like, what you would have to do, to have a "community booth" in your life?