

06.16.24
At This Table
Luke 14:12-24

INTRO (5 mins)

I love food. This is no secret. All types of food, too, and all types of flavors! Tacos, thai, pasta, pizza, burgers, brats... breakfast sausages! I made chicken Shawarma in my oven a few weeks ago. I make a mean charcuterie spread. And, I am a firm believer that food made FOR you just tastes better. Mmmm... If it's food, I'm in. In some ways you can say that I have the same palette as a hobbit from LOTR. What about second breakfast? Elevensies?

While the food itself is so good, what I love most about meals is the rich refreshing community that comes from sitting around a table with people you love and who love you engaging in fun, laughter, and deep conversation. It's a chance to connect, catch up, slow down, and to reflect on life together.

Food is something that I believe God gives to us as a gift. It's a regular rhythm that forces us to stop and be present with one another. As much as some people would like to package mealtimes into a pill and get all the nutrients necessary for healthy living, I just don't think that is what God intends for life.

Around my table we sometimes do what I call a "check-in." This is something I learned from close friends who live in NC, and it's simple. You check-in with one another by sharing a burden or a blessing. What is something that you are particularly thankful for? Or, what is something that is weighing heavy on your heart? Then we take time to share, discuss, and pray.

Another way to maximize mealtime is using something like this little question starter deck of cards.

Pull on from the deck – read aloud, then give congregants 60-90 seconds to respond

SABBATH MEAL and HEAL

Today we find ourselves where Jesus is at the home of a prominent pharisee sharing a meal on the Sabbath.

Luke 14 One Sabbath, when Jesus went to eat in the house of a prominent Pharisee, he was being carefully watched. ² There in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling of his body. ³ Jesus asked the Pharisees and experts in the law, "Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?" ⁴ But they remained silent. So taking hold of the man, he healed him and sent him on his way.

⁵Then he asked them, “If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?” ⁶ And they had nothing to say.

Notice a few key points in the text. First Jesus was at the home of a prominent pharisee. He had presumably been invited to eat in this religious leader’s home, to share a meal together, to dialogue, to grow, be challenged, stretched, to enjoy each other’s company. But this was not a happy invitation on this occasion, because as we read in the text, Jesus was being **carefully watched**.

Not surprising. Everywhere Jesus went, people followed. Some to learn from him, some out of curiosity, some to oppose him. Jesus’ ministry in the gospels was often a lightning rod of controversy, particularly when it came to doing things on the Sabbath. Jesus taught on the Sabbath. He healed on the Sabbath. He picked grain to eat with his disciples from a field on the Sabbath. Jesus announced that he was the fulfilment of OT prophecy about the messiah who they were waiting for... on the Sabbath. And the Pharisees and teachers of the law were losing their minds over it. Why?

For those of you who need a little refresher course on the Sabbath itself remember a few things.

1. The Sabbath is a God idea. God instituted the idea of Sabbath from the beginning. God worked for 6 days in creating everything, and on the 7th day he Sabbath, or RESTED from his work (Gen 2).
2. God was so serious about this day for his people that he included remembering the Sabbath as the 4th of 10 commandments to Moses and the Israelite nation after he had delivered them from Egypt (Ex 20). “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.” Stop your work. Rest and delight in me.

Jesus was coming to this prominent pharisees’ Sabbath day meal understanding their worldview about Sabbath law. No work was to be done on the Sabbath. But Jesus had throughout his ministry been redefining the meaning of this law. “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). It’s sole purpose was and still is for God’s people to stop the busy-ness of life and the toil of work and to delight in God. The pharisees saw Jesus’ practices, his way of life, and it was an affront to their worldview. It was offensive to what they believed to be true of the life God had called them into, so much so that at this point in the narrative “...the Pharisees and teachers of the law **began to oppose him (Jesus) fiercely** and to besiege him with questions, waiting to catch him in something he might say (Luke 11:53-54).

So Jesus is at this meal on the Sabbath at the house of this prominent Pharisee and in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling, probably dropsy, or in modern day medicine, edema. Now, it would’ve been customary for the most important people at the meal to be seated in the most important places surrounding the table and for everyone else in the house and even others in the community to be on the outer edges

eating and listening in to whatever conversation was being had. But in this instance, **“there in front of him was a man suffering from abnormal swelling...”** How convenient, right? This would not have been NORMAL. THIS WAS A SABBATH SETUP!! Let’s put this man who is suffering from a medical condition in front of Jesus, who we know does work on the Sabbath day and see what he does. Not very subtle.

A couple weeks ago my nephew was trying to get his mom to sit on an all-too obvious prank he had set up. A whoopie cushion. Mom, you need to sit down here (giggles and delight for his joke to land all over his face.)

Jesus obviously can see the motives of these religious elites, and instead of taking the bait asks some table questions to the group.

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?” and **“If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?”**

In both instances the response of the religious leaders was silence. They had nothing to say.

Jesus through his brilliant line of questioning gets right to the heart of this setup. Of course they would pull out their own son or daughter or their ox who fell into a well, even on the Sabbath day. Why? Because the life of those creatures were at stake. They saw VALUE in their children and in their farm implement. They LOVED those things.

How cruel is it that these religious leaders use this man who had been suffering from a medical condition for who knows how long and places him right in front of Jesus. There was no love in their hearts for this man. He was merely an instrument of their cunning and scheming to try and trip up Jesus. A spectacle for those at the meal to behold. But, Jesus being Jesus, sees the man who was suffering, heals him, and sends him on his way. You are healed. You are free. You are loved.

What was meant as a Sabbath day Setup now becomes an opportunity for Jesus to Setup a vision for the Kingdom he has been bringing all along.

Jesus’ entire life and ministry was a new way of life with God. His practices were reflective of the Kingdom he was professing, a “sermon on the mount” vision of life with him. Not a life bound by legalism, heavy burden, condemnation, and shame, rather, one of freedom, grace, forgiveness, and love. It’s what Jesus has been driving to in every interaction, conversation, miraculous work, and message. The Kingdom of God is here. It’s not what you think. I am the way. Follow me.

HUMILITY

⁷When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸“When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. **¹¹For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”**

Jesus now turns the table conversation toward humility. It is human nature to be seen. To be noticed. To desire to be around people of great influence. WHY IS JESUS GIVING THIS PARABLE? Anytime you attempt to make yourself look better than you are, you are actually setting yourself up to be humbled.

(STORY OF GETTING FIRST SPEEDING TICKET)

The summer between my sophomore and junior year in high school I was driving with my parents from a trip we had taken to Michigan, and I was cruising. My mom noticed my speed and gently said, “You’re going a little fast there, don’t you think, Jed?” My response? “Mom, I know how to speed. You just make sure you’re not the first or last in the line of cars all moving at the same rate and you won’t get caught.” You can see where this is going, right? The next morning. The VERY next morning, I was heading into drumline practice going my normal route, and BOOM, cop-lights, sirens, ticket. I was going 11 over and I got humbled. I remember coming home and throwing the ticket on the counter and saying, “Don’t say a word!” She didn’t have to. God allowed me to be humbled.

Pride is at the heart of the matter here. Look at me. What can I do to get a leg up? Climb the ladder? Get in the right circle of influence? Expand my network? After all, I deserve this, so I gotta beg, borrow, steal, claw, scrape my way to the top! Jesus observes the prideful posturing of the guests at this meal, and he is pointing out that the Kingdom of God is not like that. It does not consist of the same human rules and regulations that his hearers were accustomed to. The Kingdom of God is an upside-down kingdom where those who are blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemakers, the persecuted. (again, see Matthew 5 and the sermon on the mount).

Jesus modeled this humility in himself! How he came to this earth to live among those he created, even though he was rejected, mistreated, falsely accused, and ultimately handed over to be unfairly executed. When taking an honest inventory of your life

according to the Kingdom of God we would do well to take the posture of a humble servant rather than an entitled A-lister.

(Southwest Airline Illustration?, Elkhorn Days Parade and kids getting candy?)

HOSPITALITY

Close your eyes for a moment and write out a mental guest list for the next party you might plan to host. Maybe it's a birthday, a wedding reception, grad or retirement party, 4th of July is right around the corner. Who is on your list? Who do you see? Who is included? Who are the automatic invitees? Hold that thought. Let's keep reading.

¹² Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, ¹⁴ and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Why would Jesus say this to his host? Likely, Jesus was observant of who was at THIS Pharisee's home enjoying the Sabbath meal, and I imagine that the people there were in the category of friend, close family, relative, or rich neighbor. Not wrong. Hospitable. Generous. But what happens when you invite your closest friends and family and rich neighbors? The hospitality is reciprocated. It's paid back. You have them over for lunch or dinner, they repay the favor and in a week, month, or the next holiday they host and do the same for you. Again, this is good. It's not wrong. Keep doing that.

But Jesus is EXPANDING the picture of his Kingdom.

Who was NOT there? The poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind? Those not like you? Those who could never repay? Well, there was this one guy who was suffering from swelling, but we all know the motives for him being at the party, and it was not for him to be welcomed and honored.

As you reflect on your mental guest list did it exclude anyone like Jesus described? I don't think Jesus is saying that you should NEVER invite and enjoy the company of your friends, close family, relatives, and rich neighbors, but if that is ALL you do, then maybe God is speaking to you to examine your circle and asking you to open your hospitality to that person? Yes, even that guy.

The Parable of the Great Banquet

¹⁵ When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "**Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.**"

Amen! This is a true statement. Those who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God are indeed BLESSED! And for a foodie like me, I can't wait. When I picture this feast I can't help but wonder if it will look like something out of the imaginary meal scene from the 1991 box office hit, *Hook* with Robin Williams and Dustin Hoffman. Or a great banquet hall with tall ceilings, long ornate tables, plenty of room and fancier than anything I've ever experienced. I don't know exactly how it will be, but I bet there will be an ABUNDANCE of good food, choice drink, incredible conversation, laughter, stories, dancing, singing, tales to tell, and Jesus himself. If I had a ticket to this feast I would treat it like Charlie Bucket in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. "I got a golden ticket!" I have been invited! I am on the list! I wouldn't miss it for the world.

¹⁶ Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. ¹⁷ At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

¹⁸ "But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.'

¹⁹ "Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

²⁰ "Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

A great banquet, many guests invited, but those on the guest list who said they would come were too busy. Something more important had come up. On the surface it would seem that these reasons for not being able to make it were, in fact, reasonable. But listen to what the commentary of my study Bible says,

"It was customary to send two invitations to a party – the first to announce the event, the second to tell the guests that everything was ready. The guests in Jesus' story insulted the host by making excuses when he issued the second invitation."

It's not like the reasons that were made were necessarily wrong, they were simply rude. The guests who had been invited had already said they could make it. It'd be like RSVPing to a wedding reception for you and your family at \$25 a plate then on the day say, actually I just bought this new property, and I'd rather go take a look. Or, actually I just got this new package from amazon delivered, and I gotta try it out, like today. Like now, now. Sorry about the inconvenience to you and to your party. Send me pics! Tell me how it goes! Or, I know you sent a save the date and I said I'd be there, but I just got married and on our honeymoon. It was offensive. The one throwing the party had alerted them to the date and time and invited them to be there, they could've said, "no thank you, I am already committed to something else. Thank you for the invitation, but I need to pass. Don't include me in the head count. But they replied "yes, I'll come." And now that the party is ready, on the day, AFTER the preparations had been made they decided, "Nope, I'm too busy. I've got other more pressing matters to attend to. Sorry, not sorry."

The commentary continues,

“In Israel’s history, God’s first invitation came from Moses and the prophets; the second came from his Son. The religious leaders accepted the first invitation. They believed that God had called them to be his people, but they insulted God by refusing to accept his Son.” (NIV Study Bible note on Great Feast Parable).

Jesus is using this parable as an illustration to the host and his closest friends that the party they’d said yes to was in fact right there in front of them, and they were refusing to show up. You are God’s chosen people. You are zealous in your practices of the law and keeping watch for the promised messiah, and now the kingdom of God is right here! But you are missing it. You are missing me!

²¹ “The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, ‘Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.’

²² “‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’

²³ “Then the master told his servant, ‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. ²⁴ I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.’”

The owner of the house. The banquet is going to happen.
You will be surprised at who is there and by who is not there.

At this Table Song

During the song, take time to do some work with God. And ask yourself one of two questions. One, have I responded to God’s invitation to the banquet? Have I recognized that I am on the list?

At this table, everyone is welcome. At this table, everyone is seen. At this table, everybody matters.

No one falls between.

At this table, you can say whatever. At this table, you can speak your mind. At this table, everything’s forgiven. There’s enough for everyone.

So come as you are. Remember that the door is always open. Yes, come as you are. The perfect gift that you could bring is your heart. So come, come as you are.

At this table, there will be no judgement. At this table, mercy has a seat. At this table, we’re all sons and daughters. There’s no place I’d rather be.

So come as you are. Remember that the door is always open. Come as you are. The perfect gift that you could bring is your heart. Come, come as you are.

At this table, everyone is welcome. At this table, everybody cares. At this table, everybody matters. So come, pull up a chair.

RESPONSE

I think this song captures the heart of God's Kingdom well. Everyone is welcome. Everyone is seen. Everybody matters. So come, pull up a chair.

If that's you today, I want you to know that Jesus longs for you to surrender your heart and place your trust in him. He longs to have you join him at the table he has been preparing. He wants to include you among those who are blessed, because they eat at the feast in the kingdom of God. You can do that today. You can send in your RSVP by surrendering your heart to Jesus and saying a simple prayer like this.

"God, I realize that I need you, and I want to have a place at the table you are preparing. I want to be in your kingdom and I place my trust in you. Thank you for your forgiveness. Thank for your invitation. I give my life to you."

Or maybe you are someone who God is asking to expand your hospitality and to invite others to your table in hopes that they too can hear the good news of Jesus through your life?

PRAY and CLOSE