

Luke 14:1, 7-14 Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. ⁷ So He told a parable to those who were invited, when He noted how they chose the best places, saying to them: ⁸ "When you are invited by anyone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in the best place, lest one more honorable than you be invited by him; ⁹ "and he who invited you and him come and say to you, 'Give place to this man,' and then you begin with shame to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ "But when you are invited, go and sit down in the lowest place, so that when he who invited you comes he may say to you, 'Friend, go up higher.' Then you will have glory in the presence of those who sit at the table with you. ¹¹ "For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." ¹² Then He also said to him who invited Him, "When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. ¹³ "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. ¹⁴ "And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just."

I don't know how it works in your families around the holidays when relatives gather together to eat. At least in my family, there just isn't enough room at the nice kitchen table for all of the relatives to sit. So the adults sit at that kitchen table and the kids sit at a card table set up somewhere else in the room or the house. When you get old enough, you finally get to make the transition up to the normal kitchen table. It is almost a right of passage in my family. We know that whoever is at that table is very important.

Today in our text, our Lord also talks about tables and the importance of who is sitting at those tables as well. Let me read to you again the part of the text for the day that we will focus on, verses 12-14. "He said also to the man who had invited him, 'When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.'" As you can tell, our Lord is very concerned with who is at our tables.

In our text, our Lord was reclining at the dinner table with a group of Pharisees. Realize that at this time, who was at your table was even more important than in our time. Jesus was always getting in trouble for dining with the wrong kind of people. You see, it was assumed that your reputation could easily be determined by who sat down with you at dinner. If you ate with dignitaries, you were likely a dignitary and if you ate with

“sinners,” you were likely a sinner. If you ate with the religious Pharisees, you were likely just as outwardly righteous and respected as they were.

Before we consider specifically Jesus’ Word is our text, first we must understand the setting in which he spoke them. Just before He gave these instructions something had happened that really ruffled the feathers of the Pharisees Jesus was dining with. As they are dining, a sick man came into the house filled with Pharisees. This man did not come hoping to find a meal. Rather, he man sought to find the One who had the power to heal his disease. The religious Pharisees went crazy. Not only was a sinner in their presence at this time, but it was the Sabbath. What did he expect? Did he really think Jesus would hop up from the table and heal him on the Sabbath? Yes, that is exactly what he hoped for and exactly what he received.

No doubt, Jesus has several reasons why he healed this man. He did it to have compassion on the man, to teach about the real meaning of the Sabbath, and also to cause the Pharisees to think about who they welcomed at their tables. And today our Lord calls for us to do the same.

No, this is not a simple question of who literally sits at your table on an average evening. In this day and age of rushing, that question might be irrelevant anyway, since many meals are eaten in cars and on couches rather than at tables. The real question is not “who is at your table” but who do you associate with? Who do you welcome into your life? It is easy to scoff at the Pharisees in our text who seem to be so cold hearted. But then the question hits us, who is at our table? Who do we associate with regularly? Who do we invite to our social gatherings? Listen to the list of who the Lord says should be at our table: the poor, the lame, the crippled, and the blind. We could easily from scripture add widows, orphans, or any group of people that have special need. In our own context we likely should add the homeless, the jobless, the ones suffering from diseases like Alzheimer’s, depression, and the list could go on and on.

God has always encouraged his people to help those who really couldn’t pay them back. We could say that it is one of His favorite ways He encourages us to serve Him. He yelled it through the prophets, modeled it through Jesus, and speaks it again today through me. And each time He speaks this message, He promises that those who serve Him in this way are blessed indeed in their service, for they will receive their reward from God Himself on that last day.

So who is at your table? If we are honest, we like to sit with those people much like ourselves just like the Pharisees did in our text. To get involved with other types of people can be very time consuming, not to mention uncomfortable. Yes, we feel rather comfortable with our friends who are just like us around us. We like to invite people over that might invite us back, loan to people that might be able to repay, and help people that might help us some day.

But today we are called to see that such inviting is not what our Lord has called us to do in our text. It is not that we must forsake our friends, but rather we must take special care to not forsake others around us who might need our help or friendship. As we examine our lives today, the Lord's words to the Pharisees will likely convict us also, and bring guilt into our own hearts. For, we recognize that we have also excluded people from our fellowship that might have needed acceptance in that fellowship the most.

Jesus indeed modeled for us perfectly what he was talking about as He sat down regularly to dine with the outcasts of His society. But truly, we need not look beyond ourselves to really see how Jesus welcomes the helpless to His table. For, we are the very sinners whom Jesus has invited to His table. We are the ones who needed to be forgiven and welcomed into our Lord presence despite our sinful ways. And because of His death and resurrection, we are welcomed at the table where each of God's children dine even now. And one day we will also sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob at the great wedding feast to come. Yes, Jesus today forgives and welcomes us to His table even though we at times have not welcomed others. Indeed, He forgives that very sin in our lives again this day.

When we gather around our Lord's altar later today here in this church, we have an illustrative picture of the Lord's Table above in heaven. We should not be surprised that here also in His house the people at our Lord's Table are those He told us to invite to our tables. Yes, His table is filled with the spiritually lame, the blind, and the outcast. He table is filled with people like us who are quite helpless by ourselves. Yes, His table is full of sinners in need of a healing touch. And there He reclines with us. He is not concerned about getting a bad reputation by eating with people like us, but rather is concerned about healing our sin-sick souls. He is the Great Physician who came to seek and to save the sick, not the healthy. Our Lord loves to be with people who realize that they are in utter need of someone other than themselves.

And so again today, Jesus tells us find a place at his table. Yes, even after we have realized that we have not always had the right people at our table, we find ourselves at our Lord's Table. And there He serves to us forgiveness, peace, and life eternal. He invites us to eat at His table to our full. And then as we finally leave His table to go about our lives, He says, "Now do as I have done. I invited and fed you knowing that you can never repay me. Now go and do the same in your lives."

Yes, new invitations to our tables must go out. Not because we feel guilty about our past of inviting the wrong people, but rather because we have experienced the great feeling of being served by our Lord, and can't wait to pass that feeling along to those in our lives. Therefore, we send out invitations to those around us who could never repay us, but nonetheless need to be served with the love of Christ. We invite the needy to share in our abundance. We invite the sick to be blessed with a simple visit to say hello. We invite the hopeless to share our never-ending supply of Jesus-supplied hope. The ways we act will not seem spectacular at times, but know that our Lord is well pleased with our simple ways of serving and that he will repay us at the resurrection of the body. So, go and welcome to your fellowship this week people that others have cast aside as not worthy of such hospitality. For in this way, your table will begin to look more like the table of our Lord. And we know how good His table is. Amen