

First Reading: Proverbs 25:6-7

Second Reading: Hebrews 13:1-3, 5-8, 15-16

### **Gospel: Luke 14:1, 7-14**

1On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

7When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.

8“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. 10But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

12He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

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This past week I took Solomon to his preschool screening with the Bloomington Public Schools. Although he went with the teacher on his own for the screening, I got to be in the room with him and overhear some of their conversation and the questions he was asked. “When I run I go fast, when I walk I go \_\_\_\_\_” “Slow!” Solomon answered. “The stove makes food hot, the fridge makes food \_\_\_\_\_ “cold!” I have to admit that it was a proud parent moment for me. Opposites are not something I’ve

intentionally worked on with him a lot at home, and maybe he's done them some at childcare, but there's a good chance he picked them up through our daily lives together. And, as much as that makes me proud, it also makes me a bit nervous - what else is he picking up on at home that I'm not intentionally teaching?

In our Gospel lesson today, we hear about Jesus sharing a sabbath meal with the Pharisees at one of their leaders' houses. When he notices that they're preoccupied by wanting to be the most distinguished guest, he doesn't shy away from offering these religious elites some teachings about their own religious tradition and God's priority towards humble hospitality. It's a bold move. And while what he says is, indeed, important, I wonder if what Jesus models in saying "yes" to sharing this sacred sabbath meal with this particular group of people in the first place, says even more.

The story says that the Pharisees "were watching him closely." So, I'm guessing there may have been ulterior motives for the Pharisees to invite Jesus to this meal. Maybe they wanted

to continue to try and figure out or judge Jesus up close. Perhaps they want to invite him over for dinner because they wanted to get more dirt on him in order to belittle his movement. Perhaps there is something less sinister going on - maybe it's simply a curiosity about him as he's gained a following. And yet, Jesus, knowing that this group of religious elites are not the people who have been the most excited about what he is teaching, knowing this is a group of people whose lives contradict the very heart of his movement, says yes to their invitation.

While I was in seminary my contextual education site was a congregation just outside of the tenderloin in San Francisco. Our largely wealthy and white congregation appreciated a formal liturgical culture, good quality classical music, intellectually stimulating preaching, and progressive values. My second year of seminary was during the Occupy movement and like many 20-somethings at the time, I spent some time participating in the protests against big banks and supporting the camps of people occupying public spaces. So, when I learned that one of our key

leaders at church worked for Bank of America, I really struggled to make sense of it all. I worried about the fact that I knew and liked someone who worked at one of those evil banks - what did that say about me? I wondered how we, as a congregation, could honestly proclaim to have the values we stated we did - values of justice and peace, of inclusion and the dignity of all people - when we also supported people who were a part of the system we were protesting against.

I remember talking to my supervisor about this struggle and being completely unsatisfied with her insistence that this wrestling was all my own to do, that she wasn't going to answer these questions or solve this problem for me. Obviously, what this wrestling showed me is my own inclination towards a clear-cut, black and white understanding of the world and my own desire to put people into buckets of "good" or "bad," including myself. A set of opposites I hope I'm not implicitly teaching my children. Could I still be "good" if I knew, liked, and even provided pastoral care for someone who I had deemed "bad" based on where they worked?

My concern for making sure I was situated at the “right” spot around the dinner table of life may not have been about the hierarchical structures of status and prestige, and yet it really wasn’t any different than the Pharisees in our story for today.

And yet, Jesus doesn’t write them off as not worth his time and every nor given up on them completely. He could have said no to this sabbath dinner invitation, but he didn’t. Even these status-seeking, hierarchy-loving religious leaders are worthy of Jesus’ time and attention. Even they are capable of being moved by Jesus teachings so that they could be a part of dismantling the empire that harms. For Jesus, even the Pharisees are worthy of hearing God’s good news.

Sometimes, I think we make God’s love, and our understanding of what it means to live within it, more complicated than it needs to be. Even in communities like our own, where there is a genuine commitment to God’s love and justice in the world, we can get distracted by a different set of hierarchies - hierarchies based in having the correct analysis or knowledge,

based in always being right or on the correct side of a situation and understanding it in the correct way.

There can be a temptation, especially for those of us with race, class, or gender privilege, to want to make sure we know or understand all the right things before we take any action upon our convictions. Do I *know* enough about racism to participate in the ACTION Project and not look like a fool? Do I *know* enough about the spectrum of gender identities to make sure I don't screw up and potentially cause harm? And while this good and earnest desire for knowledge, comes from a place of desiring to love, sometimes they can actually hinder or get in the way of our *acting* in love.

This preoccupation can cause us to forget that the whole point all together is to love as God has taught us to love, knowing that we will continue to learn and grow along the way. And that loving doesn't only mean knowing, believing, or saying all the right things, but also simply showing it to whoever it is that we get to call our neighbor, whoever it is that ends up around our dinner

table in need of nourishment. It's one thing to be able to say or articulate all the right things about God's love, it's another thing entirely to simply live with God's love without saying anything at all.

One of the commentaries I read in preparation for today was titled, "Be Present at Our Table Lord." And, although much of the commentary went in a different direction than I have been feeling led with this text, the sung table prayer it's title alludes to has been stuck in my head. Because when it comes to God's love, when it comes to a longing or desire to live with hospitality and humility around God's table of grace in everyday life, there is no better prayer. For we cannot possibly do our lives or share God's love with others without the promise of God's presence, of that endless love and grace that guides our hearts, our minds, and our actions in the world. May this be our prayer today, and everyday, as we live in God's uncomplicated love.

I invite you to pray with me. If you know this sung table prayer, sing along. If you don't, pray with your listening and presence in this community. The words go like this:

Be present at our table, Lord.

Be here and everywhere adored

These mercies bless and grant that we

May strengthen for thy service be.

Amen.