

Sermon: The Spiritual Practices of Jesus: Sharing Meals 4/21/24, **Luke 14:1-6, 12-14**

Opening Story: Harvard Studies

Harvard recently published a study about the benefits of families who sit down to eat with one another. The study found that families who ate meals together around the dinner table not only had developed healthier eating habits, but had healthier relationships. They communicated better, coordinated their schedules, and experienced an increased level of bonding, “regardless of how well the family functioned.” They found that turning off screens and setting this time apart to chat and eat with one another improved the overall physical and mental wellbeing of the family.

Another Harvard Study followed the lives of 7,000 people over 9 years. They found that people who isolated themselves were 3 times more likely to die than those with strong relationships. Even people who had bad habits such as poor eating, excessive alcohol consumption, and smoking lived longer than those who had better health habits but were isolated. One researcher stated that if you belong to no social groups but decide to join one you can “cut your risk of dying over the next year in half.”

Friends, I tell these stories to illustrate the importance of being in community. I tell these stories to show the importance of spending time together, and how the simple habit of sitting down with one another to eat, sharing conversations, and giving thanks to God can change our lives for the better.

Scripture: Luke 7:34 (pp. 66)

³⁴ the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, “Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax-collectors and sinners!”

Luke 14:1-6,12-14 (pp. 77)

14 *On 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. ² Just then, in front of him, there was a man who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, 'Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?' ⁴ But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. ⁵ Then he said to them, 'If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?' ⁶ And they could not reply to this. ¹² He 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. ¹³ But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴ And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

Reflection

“The son of man has come eating and drinking,” is one of the funniest passages in the Bible to me. It basically tells us what many of the religious leaders of Jesus day thought about him. They didn't like his table fellowship and they didn't like who he dined with. Hidden in here is a truth about what many Jewish households of the day thought about sharing meals with others. They only shared meals with people like them. If people were social outcasts, or ritually unclean, or sometimes even from a lower social class, they didn't want to break bread together. They didn't want to have anything to do with them. Jesus offended them because he disregarded many of their rules and regulations and he embraced everyone.

In our 2nd scripture for today, Jesus is on his way to a meal with a Pharisee leader and some of his friends on the sabbath. Just before he arrives a man with dropsy appears before him. Dropsy is a

condition of swelling under the skin that today we associate as a symptom of congestive heart failure. Jesus heals this man to make a point. The point is that some of the rules the Pharisees followed don't make any sense if they are placed above someone else's well-being.

As we fast-forward in the story, Jesus is sharing a nice meal with these pharisees but he is not done teaching them. He says, "When you give a dinner don't invite your friends or your relatives, or rich neighbors in case they might invite you in return, and you would be repaid." He said, "Instead invite the outcast and the poor among you. The poor and the disabled. Invite these people who can not repay you and God will repay you in heaven."

Friends, do you see what Jesus is doing here? He is saying take all your laws about reciprocity and who you "should" and "shouldn't" hang around with and throw them out the window!

Sheldon

How many of you have seen the tv series the Big Bang Theory? In it one of the main characters Sheldon, has a lot of anxiety around gift giving. He doesn't like the premise because he's concerned if he receives a gift, he has to give a gift in return of equal or greater value. When one of his neighbors across the hall gives him a Christmas present, he says this: "I know you think you're being generous but the foundation of gift giving is reciprocity. When you give me a gift, you haven't given me a gift at all; you've given me an obligation." Friends, that's kind of how many of Jesus' fellow Jews felt about sharing meals with others. Many times, it was an overcomplicated process of only inviting those who could pay you back.

What Jesus is trying to do is to show people what radical compassion and generosity looked like. He was trying to show them that their

system of reciprocity was broken and they needed to fix it. They needed to do things the opposite of how they were doing them.

Reflection on Sharing Meals

In the gospels Jesus frequently engages in the practice of sharing meals with others. In Luke's gospel alone there are 10 such occasions. Friends, what does this tell us about Jesus and why was Luke so interested in telling us about it? Well, it tells us that sharing meals with people was important to Jesus. **For Jesus, eating together was much more than about simply sharing some food.** It was a sacred opportunity to be in communion with one another. It was an opportunity to form community. It was a space set aside from the rest of the day. It was a time to share conversations and stories. Sharing meals was a time of ritual. A time to gather together and give thanks to God for life's blessings and to share those blessings with one another.

Friends, Jesus' teachings on sharing your table with others was part of a whole new way of being in the world. It's a way that has too often become secondary in many homes today. How many times do we take our food and eat it in front of the tv? How many times are we on our phones as we eat? How many times do we forget to make space for God with our meals? We live in a busy world full of commitments and obligations. Sometimes it can feel like we're always on the go. It can be hard to carve out these intentional times to spend with God and one another. But I would suggest that taking time throughout the week to do this is important. It helps to create little moments of fellowship outside of the church setting. Because, friends, **our tables become an extension of God's table.** When we set a place at the table for one another we set a place for God to sit with us as well.

Extending The Invitation

Friends, as good as gathering around our tables is, Jesus doesn't want us to stop here. He wants us to extend the invitation to others outside of our families to share a meal. Christian author, Shane Claiborne said, "I imagine a diner invite from Jesus was a little uncomfortable, a little awkward. On one side of Jesus there might be a zealot who hated Rome and wanted to defeat it through bloodshed. On another side of Jesus was a tax collector, who worked for Rome and who any self-respecting Zealot would want to kill. On another side of Jesus was a judgmental religious leader who was worried about following all of the proper table fellowship rules. On the other side of Jesus was a prostitute whom the religious leader would never be caught dead socializing with." Friends, Jesus certainly had a way of bringing people together, didn't he? **He didn't look at how we are all different but how we are all alike.**

Jesus wants that to be our focus too. He wants us, as Shane puts it, to "Build longer tables not taller fences." Friends, who might you consider sharing a meal with that you haven't yet? Will it be with someone like you or someone different? Will it be with someone who can repay you or someone who cannot? The heart of the gospel is loving God with all our heart and loving our neighbor as ourselves. How might simple table fellowship create opportunities to do just that?

Conclusion

So may you remember that our tables are an extension of the Lord's table.

May you make it a greater point of emphasis to gather around the table, free from screens, and eat with one another.

And by extending an invitation to someone new, may you look across the table and see Jesus sitting next to you.

Children's Moment: Sharing Meals 4/21/24

Object: Spoon

Today I brought with me a spoon. What do we use this for? Have you ever helped your parents make anything? What have you helped cook? Cooking can be a fun creative experience that brings us closer together.

Why do we cook meals? So we can eat them, right?

Do you ever sit at the dinner table and eat with people?

That was one of Jesus' favorite things to do. He loved eating, and sharing conversations, and telling stories.

Jesus often ate with all different kinds of people. Some of whom no one else wanted to sit down and eat with? Why do you think he did that? To show them that he cared about them.

At school we have these opportunities too. To sit down and eat with different people that we normally wouldn't sit with. This is a great way we can meet new people and have new conversations.

So next time you are sitting down to eat I want you to remember 2 things. 1. To thank God for the food he has given you. 2. To (turn off your phones) enjoy the company of the people around you.