

## TURNING THE TABLES

(Luke 14:1, 7-14)

Intro: Who is welcome at the table?

- At this table (altar).
- At the tables in Jordan Hall.
- At the tables in our homes.

I. Our Gospel Lesson Asks The Same Questions.

A. Who Gets Invited To The Table?

1. Leading Pharisee had a dinner party.
  - a. Jesus was there.
    - People were watching him closely.
      - #Lying in wait for him.
      - #Keeping him under surveillance.
    - Jesus was watching them closely, too.
  - b. Who was at the table?
    - Friends.
    - Brothers.
    - Relatives.
    - Rich neighbors.
2. Those who could reciprocate.
  - a. First century patronage system.
    - Based on reciprocity.
      - #Benefactor would bestow favors upon the underlings.
      - #Underlings were obligated to reciprocate.
        - \*To return the favor.
          - +When.
          - +Where.
          - +How.
        - =Benefactor decided.
  - b. So it was with:
    - Banquets.
    - Dinner parties.
      - #Those who were invited to the table.
        - \*Were expected to reciprocate.
        - #It was the socially acceptable thing to do.

- B. Where Did The Invited Guests Sit At The Table?
1. That also was an important issue.
    - a. Almost as important as who was invited.
    - b. Who got to sit in the places of honor?
      - At the head table.
      - Closest to the host.
  2. When I was in Wisconsin at my sister's house.
    - a. We were watching a movie one evening.
      - My brother was mostly watching.
      - My sister was kind of watching.
        - #She also had her laptop computer open.
      - I was kind of watching.
        - #I was going through boxes of my dad's books.
          - \*Selecting volumes that might be useful.
          - +To my son Josh.
    - b. Movie was *The Devil Wears Prada*.
      - Starring:
        - #Meryl Streep.
        - #Anne Hathaway.
      - I had seen it before.
        - #It came out in 2006.
      - It's about:
        - #Powerbroker in the fashion industry.
          - \*Meryl Streep.
        - #One of her underlings.
          - \*Anne Hathaway.
            - +Who has to decide if she really wants:
              - =To be a part of this cutthroat business.
              - =To let the business control her life.
    - c. In one scene they are planning an extravagant dinner party.
      - There are seating charts.
        - #Much ado is made:
          - \*Who sits where.
          - \*Who sits next to whom.
        - #It's about:
          - \*Who gets invited to the table.
          - \*Who sits where at the table.

## II. Who Gets Invited To Our Tables?

### A. We Say That This Table (Altar) Is OPEN To Everyone.

1. It is, after all, the Lord's table.
  - a. Shouldn't it be open to all?
  - b. Shouldn't all baptized Christians be invited to the table?
2. It's not true everywhere.
  - a. I know of some Missouri Synod people.
    - Who worshipped at a Wisconsin Synod church.
    - #In Wisconsin.
    - They brought me a copy of the Sunday bulletin.
    - #When it came time for communion.
      - \*There was an announcement in the bulletin:
        - + "Come unto me, all who labor and are heavy laden,"
        - = "And I will give you rest." (Matthew 11:28).
        - That sounds inviting, doesn't it?
        - +But then there was an "however."
        - = "However, if you are not of our fellowship . . ."
        - That doesn't sound very inviting, does it?
  - b. When I was a chaplain in St. Louis.
    - We had an installation service for a new chaplain.
    - #At a Missouri Synod congregation.
      - \*There were folks from:
        - +Missouri Synod.
        - +Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.
    - Vern Gundermann was the pastor.
      - #Vern had been my campus pastor.
      - \*At the University of Wisconsin.
      - #He had preached at my ordination.
    - When it came time for communion.
      - #Vern made a very explicit invitation.
        - \*All were invited to the table.
        - =This at a congregation.
        - Barely a mile away.
          - #From the Purple Palace.
          - \*Missouri Synod headquarters.
    - After the service.
      - #I thanked Vern for including such an open invitation.
      - #But I said:
        - \*"Even if you hadn't, I would have come anyway."
      - #He said:
        - \*"Well, I would have expected you to."
    - Shouldn't we expect?
      - #All baptized Christians are invited to the Lord's table.

B. What About Our Tables?

1. Isn't it wonderful that most of the tables in Jordan Hall are round?
  - a. There is no:
    - Head to the tables.
    - Foot to the tables.
  - b. There is no head table.
    - Unless we call the table with:
      - #Food.
      - #Chocolate fountain.
      - \*Head table.
2. But where do we sit at those round tables?
  - a. I've been watching closely.
  - b. Isn't it true?
    - We often sit with the same people.
      - #We have set with for:
        - \*10 years.
        - \*20 years.
        - \*30 years.
      - Newcomers sometimes are left to sit by themselves.
        - #Be honest.
        - #I've seen it more than once.
3. When we had our Pink Flamingo potluck picnic.
  - a. In June.
  - b. At Cathy Newsome's house.
    - We invited the folks from Bethany to join us.
      - #That was a good opportunity.
        - \*To get to know one another better.
      - But when it came time to eat.
        - #Did you see what I saw?
          - \*Bethany table.
            - +Ascension table.
          - \*Bethany table.
            - +Ascension table.
        - #Not because we had to.
          - \*But because we chose to.
            - +We're more comfortable.
              - =With people that we know.
              - =With situations that we know.
                - That's our nature.
                - That was the nature of the Pharisees.
                  - #In our Gospel lesson for today.

4. We might criticize the social stratification of the first century.
  - a. But are we so different?
  - b. Don't we have a love/hate attitude toward social distinctions?
    - Have you been through an airport?
      - #When you go to the ticket counter.
        - \*Of most airlines.
      - #Aren't there usually two lines?
        - \*One for the VIPs.
          - +Gold card members.
          - +First class passengers.
            - =Which usually doesn't have anybody in it.
        - \*Another line for us peons.
          - +Which zigs and zags.
            - =Through those black-strapped aisles.
      - #There's probably a part of us that says:
        - \*"That's not fair."
        - \*"Why should they get special treatment?"
      - #There's probably another part of us that says:
        - \*"Gee, I wish I was in that line."
        - \*"I wish I was a VIP."
    - When I went to Greece in 1995.
      - #I told you about my adventure.
        - \*In getting an icon of St. Paul.
      - #There's another part of my Greece story.
        - \*I flew:
          - +From St. Louis to Chicago.
          - +From Chicago to Frankfurt, Germany.
          - +From Frankfurt to Thessalonica, Greece.
        - \*I flew to Chicago.
          - +On TWA.
            - =If that was before Karl Ikahn gutted it.
          - +Or American Airlines.
        - \*I flew the rest of the way on Lufthansa.
          - +I'm pretty sure that in Chicago.
            - =I got boarding passes.
              - For the last two legs of my flight.
          - +But when I got to Frankfurt.
            - =For some reason I checked in at the Lufthansa desk.
              - To make sure:
                - #I was headed to the right gate.
                - #My flight was on time.
                - #My boarding pass was still valid.
            - =Agent at the Lufthansa counter said:
              - "How would you like to fly up front this morning?"

=Did I humble myself and say:  
 -"No, I should sit in the back with the peons."  
 -"Because I'm just a peon, too."  
 =No, I thought:  
 -"I've been crammed on a 747."  
 # "With 300 other people."  
 # "For the last 9-10 hours."  
 -"You bet, I want to sit up front."  
 #Leather seats.  
 #More leg room.  
 #Better food.  
 #Free drinks.  
 #Chocolates.  
 \*Wrapped to look like lady bugs.

#There's a part of me.  
 \*Resents those who get to sit in first class.  
 #But there's another part of me.  
 \*Wishes I could afford to sit up there with them.

-When I was in Wisconsin.  
 #I took a tour of Lambeau Field.  
 \*Home of the Green Bay Packers.  
 #I got my picture taken.  
 \*On the field.  
 \*Wearing my Packers Super Bowl shirt.  
 #Our tour included a visit to one of the luxury boxes.  
 \*One on the end.  
 +Behind the corner of the end zone.

#As I looked out the window of that luxury box.  
 \*I thought about the distinctions:  
 +We create.  
 +We tolerate.  
 =In our culture.  
 \*Places of honor in our stadiums.  
 +Luxury boxes.  
 +Not the cold, hard aluminum bleacher seats.

\*But even on those bleacher seats.  
 +Places of honor:  
 =Closer to the 50-yard line.  
 -Not in the corners.  
 =Closer to the front row.  
 -Not up in the peanut gallery.

#There's a part of me that says:

\*It's not fair.

+Some people have season tickets.

=81,000 others are on a waiting list.

=Waiting on average 30 years to get a ticket.

+Some get to sit on the 50-yard line.

+Some get to sit in the luxury boxes.

#But there's another part of me that says:

\*"I wish I had season tickets for the Green Bay Packers."

+ "In the luxury boxes."

+ "On the 50-yard line."

\*Getting from Tulsa to Green Bay.

+In time for a noon kickoff.

=Would be another issue.

c. Who gets invited to the table in our culture?

-Those with money?

-Those with connections?

C. Would Jesus Be Welcome At Our Tables?

1. We might assume so, as we say in one of our table prayers:

a. "Come, Lord Jesus,"

b. "Be our guest."

2. But how long, honestly, might it be?

a. Before Jesus might take us to task?

-For how we tend:

#To arrange ourselves at the tables.

#To associate mostly with those who are like us.

#To socialize with those who can reciprocate our hospitality.

b. Before we wish that Jesus move on to another table.

3. How long, honestly, might it be?

a. Before Jesus questions what we are doing with his church.

-We say that we want:

#More members.

#More youth.

-I'm not opposed to:

#More members.

#More youth.

-But to we want to include them?

#For their sake.

\*Because we have something so wonderful.

+Faith.

+Gospel.

+Christ.

=We can't help but want to share.

#For our sake.

\*Because we expect that they will somehow reciprocate.

+With their dollars.

+With their time.

+With their service.

- b. We wish Jesus would move on to another table.
  - To another church.

#### D. But Jesus Has A Way Of Turning The Tables.

##### 1. Reminding us.

- a. We are not the hosts.
  - Jesus the guest.
- b. Jesus is the host.
  - We are the guests.
  - #At this table (altar).
  - #At every table.

##### 2. Turning:

- a. Good Friday.
  - Into Easter.
- b. Crucifixion.
  - Into resurrection.
- c. Outsiders.
  - Into insiders.
- d. Insiders.
  - Into outsiders.
- e. Shame.
  - Into honor.
- f. Despair.
  - Into hope.
- g. Fear.
  - Into faith.
- h. Sinners.
  - Into saints.
  - #Again and again and again.

Concl: Jesus invites us:

-We who in one way or another are:

#Poor. #Lame.

#Crippled. #Blind.

-We who can't begin to reciprocate.

-To his table.

#To the banquet.

#To first class.

#To the luxury boxes.

\*In the Kingdom of Heaven.