

C Lectionary 22 8.28.22

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Jesus invites us to be both host and guest.

One summer in seminary I worked as a leader for Serving Christ in the World, a program that brought high school students together from across the country for three weeks of theological education and cultural immersion. The goal was to create community among the students while exposing them to a variety of experiences, helping them think theologically about those experiences so they could be leaders in their communities when they returned. The seventeen kids in the program were from every background you could imagine. In my small group alone was a boy from the south side of Chicago who'd never been north of the loop, the daughter of an ambassador who'd been raised in embassy schools around the world, a band geek from suburban Phoenix, a cheerleader from Dallas, and a girl from inner city Milwaukee, my overarching memory of whom was her incredible terror of any and all insects. There must not be bugs in Milwaukee or I don't know how this kid functioned but anyway, I digress.

Sometimes, we formed community. Like when the gangly six-two white kid with a quick mouth and a Mountain Dew addiction and the chubby, five-six, soft-spoken African American kid with glasses tried to convince a TSA agent they were brothers, and the TSA agent had mercy on us visibly exhausted group leaders and let them go through security anyway. Mostly, however, we tried and failed to call balls and strikes for grumpy, overtired, undercaffeinated teenagers struggling to process so much new information without the emotional development to hold it.

The high point of the experience was taking the group to spend seven days at the Lutheran Center in Mexico City and a partner center in rural Cuernavaca. We were going to learn about the ELCA's model for mission, a process known as accompaniment, where the ELCA walks alongside communities they seek to serve, letting the communities take the lead in what the needs are and how best those needs can be met. Given the accompaniment model and the fact that we were playing the long game with these kids, our goal being that they would return to their communities changed so they could eventually change their communities, this meant that we were going to Mexico not to serve but to learn. This was something the kids, despite knowing in advance the point of the whole program, could not understand. Every day they'd ask us, what are we doing today, who are we helping, what project are we going to work on. And every day we'd tell them, we're not doing any projects while we're here. You're not here to do anything, you're here to listen and learn.

This was SO HARD. Every day, "is today the day we're building the playground?" For some reason the rumor got out that we were building a playground, no idea why. Every day, no. No, we're going to this neighborhood of illegally constructed houses to learn why they felt this was their only option. No, we're going to the local market to see what's available. No, we're meeting with artisans to learn about how fair-trade practices. We didn't come to Mexico to help them. Mexico invited us here to teach us. You, we, are the project.

Part of what made this trip hard, for them and for us, was the vulnerability it forced us into. We were not there to help anyone, we were there to learn. To sit and to listen, and to let

them teach us. To recognize the limits of our experience and to be open to change. An experience, fun fact, that no one really likes, no matter how old you are.

Our Gospel reading for today finds Jesus doing what Jesus does in Luke, at a meal. This one at the home of a leader of the Pharisees. In the interest of time, the lectionary skips us over a few verses where Jesus healed a man with dropsy because of the similarities of last week's story of Jesus healing a woman on the Sabbath. What's important to note in those skipped verses is that in addition to simply healing the man, Jesus used this as an opportunity to once again point out the contradictions in the social order. "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath," Jesus asked. And the Pharisees remained silent because there was no right answer. To heal on the sabbath was to break the restriction of the sabbath as a day of rest. But to not heal someone when you could was to withhold service to a neighbor, itself a violation of the law. Jesus healed the man, chided the Pharisees for their poor hospitality, itself a breach of hospitality, it not considered good manners to put down your host, and thus removed himself entirely from the conversation on social maneuverings.

And having thus exempted himself, Jesus looked out at the rest of the gathering, still eagerly jockeying for the best seats at the table, and offered what at first listen sounds like good advice for social climbing. When you are invited to a banquet, sit at the lower place, so that the host has to come and invite you to a higher place, and you both look awesome, you for being so humble and them for honoring your humility, "for all how exalt themselves

will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” At least, it could be a message about a better method for social climbing, except for one little word buried in verse ten, “honored.” The word translated as honor here is the Greek word *doxa*, and it does mean honor. But a very specific type of honor, *doxa* means the glory, the honor of God. The presence of the word *doxa* here tells us that honor, true honor, comes not from worldly maneuverings, not from any social climbing or recognition. True honor comes only from God, from being seen and known by God exactly who you are and as you are.

And when you have that, dear people of God. When you know who you are in God’s eyes, how God sees you, who God knows you to be, it becomes possible, not easy by any means, but possible, to let those outside expectations slip past you and just be you. Because that, at the end of the day, is humility. Humility is knowing yourself, your strengths and weaknesses, powers and faults, and holding them lightly as the blessed and broken, saint and sinner, beloved child of God that you are.

And it is from humility that true hospitality comes. This was the lesson of Serving Christ in the World, that we tried, and likely failed, to impart to high school kids that summer. You cannot serve others until you know them and know yourself, or else you don’t fully understand who or how you are serving. Service without humility can all too easily become its own form of social climbing, look how great I am helping those less fortunate, when you don’t know if the one’s you’re helping want or even need the help you’re providing. And as the reading for today goes on to address in Jesus’ words to the hosts, community and

sharing life and bread is too sacred, too holy, to be manipulated for such private advantages.

This sort of give and take hospitality is something we certainly strive for all the time at Trinity, but the one time I think we get there is Under One Roof. Consider this your first commercial for the event, coming back Fall 2022, mark your calendars now. 😊 For those of you not familiar with the event, or who don't remember the details, Under One Roof is a celebration of all of the ministry that takes place under one roof at 2055 E Columbia. It is not Trinity hosting Co-op, or Co-op showing off an event for Trinity, it us all of us coming together to be community in the space and give thanks for all this roof has sheltered. It's a potluck, which means no one hosts and everyone hosts, everyone is both host and guest. We're all just there, our own vulnerable messes, laughing, eating potluck, and giving thanks to God for bringing us all together in this place, all the complex and beautiful community of saints and sinners that we are, humbled and exalted, and beloved of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.