



After all the stories in the Gospels about Jesus eating at the homes of Pharisees and other leaders- and during the meal upsetting normal customs and expectations, you would think that word had gotten around. Don't invite Jesus- it won't be a pleasant meal. He will do and say the strangest things! And, some of your other guests will be upset. Better by far to steer clear of asking Jesus to your house for dinner unless you need a little shock value to keep everybody talking.

Jesus, once again, does the unexpected. First, he accepts the invitation to eat with those he knows oppose –or at least don't support- his ministry and his understanding of what God is doing in the world. Second, he doesn't support the norms: when you throw a dinner party, it reflects well on you if important people accept your invitation and sit next to the host- showing the importance by where you are seated. Each one of us has probably been to a dinner or other social event where place cards dictate where we sit: how close to the front table or the importance of the other people seated at the same table with us.

There is a whole group of people whose job is to determine who sits next to whom- who sits closest to the host- what gifts are given to whom, what is served at an official function. The Chief of Protocol functions within the US State Department and holds the rank of Ambassador. In today's secular world, the Chief of Protocol helps diplomatic relations flow smoothly. God's realm, though, doesn't need a Chief of Protocol – or at least the rules of engagement for such a function are turned on their head.

Invite those who can do nothing for you, Jesus says. Do not ask those who will repay you by reciprocating hospitality. Look out for the poor, those in prison, those being tortured, and the hungry. Sit at the seat farthest from the host rather than the one closest.

I wonder if that's why so many sit in the furthest back pews. I cordially invite all of you to move to the front!

What bothers me about the notion of deliberately sitting at a "lowly" seat so that you can be invited to move forward is that it smacks of manipulating the system. Won't others be jealous when the host picks me out and asks me to move closer? Certainly not what Jesus means- but what does he mean?

Hospitality is desirable and is to be offered at all times. Hospitality is the friendly and generous reception of guests, visitors and strangers. Hospitality is a frame of mind as well as outward action. It is acknowledging the Christ in each of us. It is seeking a way to be a blessing to each person we meet. Welcome to your table all those in need.

God values each life. God doesn't judge us by what material possessions we have. Rather, God asks that we live out the values of love and justice and peace. That we recognize the inherent spark of the divine that is in each person. Whether we like them or not- whether we agree or not- each person is created in the likeness and image of God. Therefore, every person- whether we like them or not- whether we can truly understand their life choices or not- is worthy of love and respect as someone created by God.

The way we live- the values we evidence through how we live and move and have our being- says more about how we understand ourselves and our place in God's realm than a privileged place at a banquet. Our charge is to live a life that imitates Christ- the Christ that is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. While our understanding of whom Christ is and how we are to respond may change as we grow and mature, the essence of Christ is the same.

Just as we view Mt. McKinley aka Denali differently depending upon whether we are at ground level or at 7,000 ft., or whether we are looking at it from the north or the south-it is still Mt. McKinley aka Denali. Our perspective has changed- not the mountain.

It's all too human to want to bask in reflected glory. "Keeping up with the Jones's" is all about having one's focus on money and material things-not on the things of God. Not on relationships that build up one another.

We preen- inwardly or outwardly- when we think others recognize our importance. Our walls become places to hang the trophies and plaques that tell the world: "Look, I'm important."

Jesus cautions us against this mindset when he admonishes us to free from the love of money. "Where is your focus- or where are your priorities?" he is really asking.

The writer of the Letter to the Hebrews puts it more simply: "Rather, do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it." There's nothing wrong with money, per se. There's nothing wrong with inviting friends and family to dinner. The key question, though, is what is driving the invitation to dinner and have we left out someone who could use a good meal? There's nothing wrong with a nice house or a reliable car. The key question is whether we bought the house to be a safe refuge or to show off our worldly success.

As long as we realize that all that we have comes from God, and that God asks only that we return 10% - a Biblical tithe- to God- we can deploy our resources to support a safe and comfortable life. God asks that we use our resources prudently and respectfully, honoring God's creation. God asks that we continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God-that our lips confess His name.

Where are your priorities? Do you continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God? What's holding you back?

15 Pentecost; Proper 17
Jeremiah 2:4-13; Ps. 81:1, 10-16; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14: 1, 7-14

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