

Pentecost C-14, 2007
September 2, 2007
Luke 14:1, 7-14
Title: Power Lunch

Let us pray: Give us a faith filled heart, a rich gospel imagination and an open table. In the name of the life giver. Jesus.

Perhaps you have said and heard some of the following:

“Please put your napkin on your lap.
Keep your feet under the table
Don’t guzzle your milk so fast.
Use the knife to cut your meat.
Elbows off the table, please.
I heard that—no belching or burping at my table
You may not leave until the food is finished, the napkin is in place, and the hostess says you may leave.”

Table etiquette. Sometimes the rationalization for proper eating
Is “Because I said so.” I once heard it said when I resisted
The napkin in the lap: Because one day, you might be invited to
The White House.

And now Jesus comes along with some Gospel table etiquette. From one vantage point the whole Gospel of Luke discloses God in Jesus at table—eating and teaching—at the home of Zaccheus, the Enron Executive of his day—with 5000 hungry whom he feeds, with two bewildered disciples on the way to Emmaus who recognize him when he breaks bread—10 times Jesus’ dining habits are disclosed.

And now in Luke 14 Jesus sups with religious leaders, the folks who have devoted themselves to knowing where the napkin goes, who have elbowed their way close enough to be certain they know the truth, who when you look at them you’ve seen their picture on the cover of Southern Living, Bon Appetite, Wine Spectator—they have arrived to enjoy a Power Lunch and Jesus gives them, us some table etiquette.

Before we go to what he actually does say—put Jesus at your table, in your home. Have him sitting there and you're sitting right next to him

What's he going to say to YOU? Or do?
And what are you going to say to HIM?

I hope what he'd say is David, if you were the only one in this whole wide world, if there was no body else, I'd give my life just for you. Because that's something of the sheer magnitude of his grace, mercy and love.

And for that very moment---burdens and pains would lift, the sheer Joy of living in the presence of such love would erupt in me
And I'd get up in thanksgiving, in the presence of Jesus
And dance, dance the way Miriam danced when
The ancient Isrealites crossed the Red Sea, and kiss
His feet in gratitude, and get up to bear such love to others

I hope that's what He'd say—something about valuing me inspite of me.
And I hope I'd say thank you with all that I got.
How about you?

Here, here's Jesus' table etiquette. First to the guests on where to sit. Don't ask for the court side seat, don't request the sky box seat, take the lowest seat—the upper deck seat, the cheap seat, the one nobody wants seat.

Practically speaking this is quite bad advice.
If we all sit back there, in the upper deck, that just isn't
Going to work. You can't sit in the lowest seat—that's my seat.
Imagine the fight breaking out at church
When you are bruised and battered by the person
Jesus told me to sit down here. You can't sit there.
What do you mean, he told me to sit there. You get up.

Jesus teaches about humility at the table because the table is a metaphor for life. Peaking orders do matter, status does matter. Why give so much Energy to live in the right neighborhoods, to send our children to the right schools, to put them in the right activities—because it does matter.

Getting a right seat at the table of life can stunt our living.

That's what concerns Jesus—at the Pharisees home he
Perceives a table riddled with concern for place. Lives devoted
To negotiating the proper place can become frozen, hardened.

Righteousness can give way to self-righteousness. We can fall subject to our own desire to live well. And it can close off the heart and all we notice are the napkins out of place, not the people needing a place.

Those Hispanics, those Arabs, those inside the beltliners, those farmers, those retards, those nerds, those goths:

For those who exalt themselves will be humbled
And those who humble themselves will be exalted.

In his introduction to the Gospel of Luke Eugene Peterson says

The terrible price we pay for keeping all those other people
Out so we can savor the sweetness of being insiders is a
Reduction of reality, a shrinkage of life. Nowhere is this
Price more terrible than when it is paid in the cause of religion
But religion has a long history of doing just that, of reducing
The huge mysteries of God to the respectability of club rules,
Of shrinking the vast human community to a membership.
But with God there are no outsiders. Luke shows how
Jesus includes those who typically were treated as outsiders.
He would not countenance religion as a club.

Take the lowest seat....especially when you are ready to savor being an insider.

Jesus' table etiquette gives us instruction about where to sit....and about whom to invite. If there is anyone with whom you won't break bread, then we haven't realized what God has in store for the church.

Invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind.
There are no throw away humans. None.
I don't fully understand such Gospel hospitality. But I bet we have
Glimpses of it. I bet if you would go to eat in a nursing home,
Or share a meal with the homeless
You just may see how needy we all are.

All those distinctions that seem to matter holding less sway.
And you'd see that your napkin isn't in place either.

Hospitality comes from the same root word for hospital, for hospice—a healing place.

That's what we are to be... a community in Jesus' name where
We can be loved in our weakness, relax in the blessed love of
Jesus... as if he says to each one as though we were the only one—
If you were the only one here, I'd give my life for you.

And that is the status that really matters.

Brothers and sisters it's right in front of us each and every time
We come to worship. There is no seat of honor at this banquet table.
Here we all come to receive the blessed meal, to feast on Jesus

Yes there is a decorum, a table is set, a order to what happens,
But there are no napkins required,
No forks and knives,
Bread is torn off by hand
And if you aren't dressed properly, if you don't really
Measure up, you are in good company.

The gifts from God in Christ are free who did not intend his church become
a club. A real, power lunch.
Amen.