



Lakeside Sermons

Lakeside Baptist Church • Rocky Mount, North Carolina
Jody C. Wright, Senior Minister

OCTOBER 4, 2015
WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY

How Many At Your Table? Isaiah 25: 6-10; Luke 14:12-23

There is nothing quite like a wedding feast. It is a happy occasion. The room is filled with one's closest family and friends. The food is delicious and abundant. The toasts are uplifting and hopeful. The table talk is part shared memories, part catching up, and part solving the problems of the world. Wedding feasts are happy occasions.

The tradition is a longstanding one. Feasting has always been special because breaking bread with someone else is a significant experience. To invite someone to share table has always been an act, not only of hospitality, but of trust and compassion. No wonder the host in Jesus' parable was irate when his invited guests turned him down. For one thing, their excuses were rather flimsy. The first one reported that he had to go inspect a piece of land he had bought. Who buys land without first inspecting it? The second fellow needed to test out five oxen he had bought to be certain they were field-worthy. Why buy oxen if you are not sure they are ready to work? And the third invitee blushed that he had just married and could not come to the feast. Was he simply too tired? Each of these excuses is similar to the old standby we guys often heard when asking a girl out on a date. Do all girls really wash their hair on Friday nights? The host was upset because he felt slighted by his invited guests.

Jesus used the occasion of a dinner party to prod the guests seated with him to think about their understanding of hospitality and the reality of God's banquet table. If no one showed up for the party, most people would have turned off the porch light, eaten supper, and fussed and fumed about their ungrateful friends. Yet, the host in Jesus' parable sent his servants out to bring in anyone who could be found because he wanted to have a feast! Fill up the table. If we need more room, we will add a leaf or two.

There is a commercial running on TV these days that features a couple setting up outside for a game day party. As they pull out the picnic table and chairs, more and more people call and text that they will be there so that bigger tables, more chairs, and more food are needed. The excitement builds as the prospect of more friends means more fun.

Artist and former pastor Jan Richardson has created several paintings depicting communion. A few years ago, she painted a scene she titled, "The Best Supper." It depicts a round table set with bread and wine. Around it are seated people with whom she shared table through the years, memorable feasts when they lingered over supper and shared true communion with one another. She also wrote a poem titled, "And the Table Will Be Wide," as a blessing for World Communion Sunday:

And the table
will be wide.
And the welcome
will be wide.
And the arms
will open wide
to gather us in.
And our hearts
will open wide
to receive.

And we will come
as children who trust
there is enough.
And we will come
unhindered and free.
And our aching
will be met
with bread.
And our sorrow
will be met
with wine.

And we will open our hands
to the feast
without shame.
And we will turn
toward each other
without fear.
And we will give up
our appetite
for despair.
And we will taste
and know
of delight.

And we will become bread
for a hungry world.
And we will become drink
for those who thirst.
And the blessed
will become the blessing.
And everywhere
will be the feast.¹

Ms. Richardson reminds us that God's table is wide enough to accommodate us. There will be room for me. There will be room for you. At God's table, we are all welcome. God sets aside a place especially for us. The feast will be abundant so that we will each have our fill. Our aching will be soothed. Our sorrow will be comforted. Our longing will be satisfied. There will be bread enough for our hunger. That is the first miracle of God's table.

The second miracle is that the guests who are invited to God's table also become the hosts who welcome other guests. We become bread to meet their hunger. We become drink to quench their thirst. We who have been blessed become blessing to others. The host in Jesus' story did not waste his feast. He went in search of new guests and invited everyone he could find to come to the table. The door was wide open, the table was set, and anyone who sat at the table was the host's special guest.

This past August, a Turkish couple celebrating their wedding amidst all of the turmoil, violence, and despair in the Middle East decided to use the monetary gifts they had received to throw a feast for the Syrian refugees who had crossed the nearby border, seeking safety in their small city of Kilis. The refugees numbered about four thousand. *The Huffington Post* reported that the couple, dressed in bridal gown and tux, served each guest. Moved by their generosity, their friends indicated that they might do the same at their upcoming weddings. The reporter closed her article with the wish that such acts might become an altruistic trend.²

It was a wonderful gesture, a terrific kindness, a generous blessing to Syrians who are homeless in the worst way. But that kindness is nothing

¹Jan Richardson, "And the Table Will Be Wide," © Jan Richardson. janrichardson.com; available online at : <http://paintedprayerbook.com/2012/09/30/and-the-table-will-be-wide/#sthash.JemDmr77.dpuf>

²Katie Sola, "Turkish Couple Throws Epic Wedding Feast For Syrian Refugees, *The Huffington Post* (August 4, 2015); http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/turkish-wedding-refugee_55c1249ce4b07146e2fe8c0f.

new. It is the same welcome Jesus spoke of and practiced when he walked this earth. It is the same welcome that has been offered for nearly two thousand years around this table—this wide table where all who will come are fed and nourished.

Imagine the fun we could have, the barriers that could be overcome, the relationships we could build if we practiced what Jesus preached! Next week we will hear Clark Olsen talk about the murderous events that surrounded the March from Selma to Montgomery in 1965. Imagine what might have happened if instead of clubs, whips, rocks, bottles, and guns, the marchers crossing the bridge had been met with knives and forks and spoons! If blacks and whites—most of whom professed faith in Jesus Christ—had dared share the table in 1965, how much bloodshed, hatred, oppression, and delayed progress might have been spared?

How wide is our table? Is everyone truly welcome here? Jesus invites us to a wide table. Do we except? Or are we “busy” with other things? There is a place reserved for each of us, but the invitation is open to all who will come. If we refuse to share the table with all of God’s children, it will be our loss.

I suggest that we widen our table—and in so doing, broaden our minds and enlarge our hearts. There is plenty of room. Amen.

October 4, 2015

Prayer of Thanksgiving and Intercession

Gracious and merciful God, we are gathered in your presence to celebrate and remember the greatest of all gifts: the grace you have poured out abundantly through the coming of Christ among us. When he took on human form, he was despised and mocked, yet he loved and accepted all he encountered. When he walked among us, many rejected him from their tables, yet he invites all to feast at his table. When he taught us of life in God's kingdom, he was accused and put to death, yet he offers pardon and abundant life to all who will receive him.

As we prepare to gather at the feast that is set before us, we confess to you, Righteous God, that we have not extended the same compassion and hospitality that has been granted to us. We have feared or refused the stranger because we have believed our resources too meager. We have stereotyped the stranger as suspicious or dangerous or inferior because we did not make the effort to understand. We have been too busy trying to impress our important guests, thereby serving our own needs, instead of demonstrating welcome to the ones who could not repay our kindness. We have overlooked the beauty in those who speak a different language or wear different clothing or hold different beliefs or opinions and have often failed to recognize your image within them. For these and all the times we have rejected those we have been called to love and to serve, thereby rejecting you, have mercy on us, O God.

Make us worthy, we pray, to sit at Christ's table as his friends. In this meal we will share, let our weary hearts be revived and our hungry souls be fed, that nurtured in your hospitality, we may feed others both with physical nourishment and with the bread of true friendship. Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, may Christ live in us and we in him so that we may welcome others and in so doing, receive you. Amen.

Elizabeth J. Edwards
Associate Minister

Table Blessing
Jan Richardson

To your table
you bid us come.
You have set the places,
you have poured the wine,
and there is always room,
you say,
for one more.

And so we come.
From the streets
and from the alleys
we come.

From the deserts
and from the hills
we come.

From the ravages of poverty
and from the palaces of privilege
we come.

Running,
limping,
carried,
we come.

We are bloodied with our wars,
we are wearied with our wounds,
we carry our dead within us,
and we reckon with their ghosts.

We hold the seeds of healing,
we dream of a new creation,
we know the things
that make for peace,
and we struggle to give them wings.

And yet, to your table
we come.
Hungering for your bread,
we come;
thirsting for your wine,
we come;
singing your song
in every language,
speaking your name
in every tongue,
in conflict and in communion,
in discord and in desire,
we come,
O God of Wisdom,
we come

Prayer © Jan L. Richardson from *In Wisdom's Path:
Discovering the Sacred in Every Season.*

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<http://paintedprayerbook.com>