

Table Manners Luke 14:1,7-14

When Tripp and I first started dating

—I remember watching myself very closely
around his parents, Kathie and Claude.

Not because they aren't
the most amazing, gracious and generous people,
which they are...

I was just super self conscious
about impressing them, of course.

So my table manners were really important.

I didn't want to appear like

I didn't know how to eat like a lady.

You know I want to help set the table correctly;
take small bites.

Act like I can't possibly finish all my dinner
—though I learned

the tenor of Davis dinner table
is really about seconds and thirds,

so, you can always

eat everything on your plate

with no shame.

And so thinking about my manners

and paying attention to them

was constant.

This isn't problematic

when you are having

grilled chicken and penne pasta.

But you know when it is problematic?

When you eat ribs.



I avoid ribs at all cost.

This not because I don't like BBQ,
I just can't handle
eating super messy food with my hands.

Some of you like to lick sauce off your fingers
—this, like seeing a snake,
it makes me shudder.
The rib sauce in my finger nails,
like I can't.

And I know what you're thinking,
that's what the little moist towelette is for!
That tiny towelette is dead to me
—it does nothing.
I need a whole pack of baby wipes, please.

And so one night,
when Tripp was in town
and we had planned to eat dinner
with Kathie and Claude,
what do you think we had?

You got it.
Claude proudly announces we are having ribs.

I get this look of terror.
Internally I'm like Molly Ringwald
caught in John Hughes 80's movie,

(play song first like 8 secs)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yKOP1Bk8Cx4>

I don't know what to do next.
People make fun of you
if you eat ribs with a fork.
I'm not really sure
how to eat ribs gracefully
without also inwardly freaking out
about how messy they are.

Luckily they were ribs
with a dry rub—but I'll be honest
I still think I tried to eat them with a fork.



"I can never remember. Does the mobile phone go on the left or the right?"

For most of us
things like good manners, matter.
We are in the midst of teaching
our children about table etiquette.
That you can't talk
with your mouth full of food.
That you put your napkin in your lap;
we are explaining how to hold your fork,
and that you can't lay down
while we are eating dinner
...we have a church pew
that serves as seating on one side of the table.
How we act at the table is important.

Even Jesus thinks so:

(Scripture)

“On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely.

⁷When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. ⁸“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; ⁹and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’;

then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. ¹¹For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” ¹²He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. ¹³But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. ¹⁴And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

At first glance this passage
honestly sounds more like instructions
on manners and etiquette
than stories at a dinner party.
It's hard to understand
the insistence on these table directives.
And how is this not about
just simply avoiding embarrassment
when you are choosing a seat
when invited to a dinner?
Or how come Jesus gets particular
about a guest list for a banquet?
Inviting the poor, the lame, the crippled, the blind?
I'm not sure I've been to many meals
the way Jesus describes it.



I have to think
that this is driving
to something deeper.
That it isn't just about
what to do and not do,
as though it were a checklist somehow.
Sandals? Check.
Water bottle? Check.

Bible? Check.
Extra cloak? You won't need it.
Okay, now let's go make more disciples!

Jesus doesn't strike me
as a check list kind of person.
But he is a storyteller
and so of course he has a parable.
Remember that parables,
"challenge us to look into
the hidden aspects of our own values, our own lives.
They bring to the surface unasked questions,
and they reveal the answers
we have always known
but refuse to acknowledge.
Our reaction to [parables]
should be one of resistance
rather than acceptance."¹

The lectionary skips over the verses
where we learn
that the first-person Jesus encounters,
before he even gets to the dinner
is a man with dropsy.
We might think of dropsy today as
edema (uh-dee-ma).
Which likely meant
his breathing was labored,
his face, legs, feet, and hands
were swollen because of
a cardio-pulmonary problem
that caused fluid to build up
throughout his body.²
So it's likely he looked awful.

¹ Amy-Jill Levine, Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi (HarperOne, New York, 2015) pg. 3

² Scott Hoezee, Luke 14:1, 7-14 https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-17c-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel

And remember, Luke says
the Pharisees were watching him closely.
That man is the kind of person
that wasn't invited to the dinner.
What would Jesus do?
Of course Jesus heals the man,
and it was the Sabbath.
I think those short verse are the build up
to this dinner theater
that Jesus performs.



This isn't just about table manners and etiquette;
this story of feasting and banquets,
of seating order and guest lists
should challenge us.
This story brings to the surface
what we already know;
that our commonly held ideals,
like the ones described by Jesus:
the inviting of certain people
so, they will in return invite us
quid pro quo
—our society's *this in exchange for that*³—
or the notion of who is important to God and who isn't,
like a well-respected religious expert
and a diseased man;
this parable should challenge us
to think about these stories
show something important
not about table manners
but table fellowship.⁴

³ Karoline M. Lewis, God's Pro Quo, <http://www.workingpreacher.org/craft.aspx?post=4700>, 2016

⁴ Palmer Cantler, Table Etiquette, <http://day1.org/8419-palmer-cantler-table-etiquette>, 2019

Everything that happens
in these parables Jesus tells,
disrupts what we think
about grace and love and God's kingdom.

Jesus heals a bloated, miserable man
on a day when that could have
been considered work
and therefore, defiance before God.

Yet he does it, with a biting reminder
that the Sabbath is about liberation
and in him liberation
isn't something in the past or future
but for right now.

Jesus's life and his gospel
are a live performance
in their embodiment
of this topsy-turvy, upside down nature
of God's kingdom.

We are caught off guard
when Jesus says things like,
*blessed are the poor in spirit
for theirs is the kingdom of God.*

Or when he says,
*the first will be last
and that last will be first.*

And when he embarrasses everyone
at the dinner table saying,
*all who exalt themselves
will be humbled
and all those who humble themselves
will be exalted.*

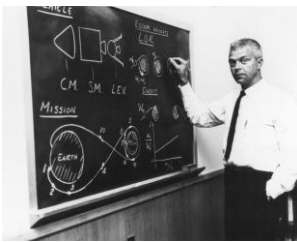
It is an abrupt reversal of our innate nature
to be rich in all things, to be first and
our want to be exalted.

God's great reversal
that Jesus mentions over and over
is the foundation of the kingdom.

And the kingdom must often
be glimpsed at table
because Jesus is always talking about food
and feasting and celebration.
“People really liked being around Jesus.
He was such a popular dinner guest
that when his enemies
wanted to say something bad about him,
they accused him of being a glutton
and [as the KJV puts it] a wine-bibber.”⁵

There is something about the table fellowship
that Christ puts out there in these parables
where the intention is for us
to not only notice and hear a story
but enact and carry it out in our lives.

These stories are enacted,
this gospel is embodied
by what we do here at this table.
This table should determine how we live our lives
in light of the life we see lived out here.



At a small church in FL,
the session was introducing itself
to the new members.
There was a scientist, a NASA legend
who had helped coordinate the moon landing.
When it was his turn to introduce himself
he said, “I’m a teacher.”⁶

⁵ Scott Hoezee, Luke 14:1, 7-14 https://cep.calvinseminary.edu/sermon-starters/proper-17c-2/?type=the_lectionary_gospel

The table fellowship of the humble
who aren't concerned
with jockeying for position—

do this in remembrance of me.



Lito Mason was browsing
in the Gordman's Discount Department Store
when he overheard Zachary Stone's mother
tell him that she only had
\$20 to get him new shoes.

Zachary's mother, Malisa, explained
that was all they could afford this month
and Lito Mason stepped in
offering to buy the 11yr old some shoes.

Mason said his heart just went out to Zachary,
his shoes were worn and tattered.

Lito Mason went on
to pay for everything
the family bought that day.

Zachary said, 'Mom I can't believe he just helped us;
he just helped us, he's like an angel.'

Malisa, said,

'Some people make the world special
just by being in it.

I am convinced that mercy changes everything.'⁷

Do this in remembrance of me.

⁶ Ronald Byers, Luke 14:1, 7-14 Feasting on the Word, Year C, Vol. 4 (John Knox Press, Louisville, KY 2010) pg. 23

⁷ https://www.theepochtimes.com/idaho-man-buys-new-shoes-for-teen-after-his-mom-says-she-only-has-20_3055524.html

Chris Bolich worked in the garden Saturday
at the HSK.

She sees the soup kitchen
as a place, 'where everyone is welcome
and people are just people there
—no distinctions, no sharp dividing lines.'

She has a passion for good healthy food
and loves even more
that fresh vegetables can be harvested
right from the soup kitchen's garden.



She got to see this delivery of beautiful butternut squash
from Don & Lisa Osborne
that were grown in rich generational
and nurtured soil
that Bolich calls "black gold."
Now they can be shared with all.



While Chris was gardening yesterday
she saw a young man
stroll over to the squash bed
and harvest out 10 ripe yellow squash.
He put one in his backpack
and set the rest on the picnic table
for others to enjoy.

Do this in remembrance of me.

So friends when we give a banquet

—don't worry about etiquette or manners.

Don't worry if the menu is ribs or bread and wine,
enjoy feasting together.

But remember to look for who is missing,
and look with mercy in your heart.

Because remember someone is watching closely;
it isn't religious leaders,
it isn't even Jesus,

it is our children—

for we are who teach them

how to embody and enact this wonderful table.