

Unpleasant Table Talk

Dinner with Christ: Part 3 “Unpleasant Table Talk”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – June 26, 2022

3rd Sunday After Pentecost

Readings: Luke 11:37-52

Reflection: Psalm 112

Greeting: The Lord prepares a great feast for all the peoples. He destroys the dark shroud veiling all the people. The Lord our God swallows up death forever! God wipes away tears from every face! Praise the Lord! (*Isaiah 25:6-8*)

Prayer: O God, our Guide and Guardian, you have led us away from the stress and the strain of the world to be in your peaceful presence. Grant us grace to worship you in Spirit and in truth. May we find comfort in your love and may you build us up by your faith. Enable us to do the work that you have called us to, without fear of failure or hesitation to do good. May we worship you, not just with our lips this hour, but in word and deed all the days of our lives; through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Reflection: Psalm 112

Praise the Lord! Happy are those who fear the Lord, who greatly delight in his commandments. Their descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed. Wealth and riches are in their houses, and their righteousness endures forever. They rise in the darkness as a light for the upright; they are gracious, merciful, and righteous. It is well with those who deal generously and lend, who conduct their affairs with justice. For the righteous will never be moved; they will be remembered forever. They are not afraid of evil tidings; their hearts are firm, secure in the Lord. Their hearts are steady; they will not be afraid; in the end they will look in triumph on their foes. They have distributed freely; they have given to the poor; their righteousness endures forever; their horn is exalted in honor. The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing. (Psalm 112 NRSVue)*

We read the words of Psalm 112 and hear of those who follow the Lord. We hear how they are a light in the darkness and a blessing to others. Is your heart firm in the Lord? Do you find God’s presence to be a steadying one? Do you reach out to help others in the name of the Lord? How do you help others through God’s love? How do you support those who cannot help themselves? Are you accountable to God for how you treat others? How can we show the love of Christ in our daily lives?

Prayer: O God, you are our hope and our praise. You welcome us all to your table and invite us into your peaceful presence. May we be strengthened by your steadfast love and faithfulness as we come before you in prayer this day. Help us Lord, that you lift us up in both our joys and our sorrows. Be with us in both our laughter and our tears. May your light guide us and lead us to life everlasting, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading for today comes from the gospel according to Luke chapter 11 verses 37 through 52.

While he was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine with him, so he went in and took his place at the table. The Pharisee was amazed to see that he did not first wash before dinner. Then the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? So give as alms those things that are within and then everything will be clean for you. "But woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe mint and rue and herbs of all kinds and neglect justice and the love of God; it is these you ought to have practiced, without neglecting the others. Woe to you Pharisees! For you love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues and to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces. Woe to you! For you are like unmarked graves on which people unknowingly walk." One of the experts in the law answered him, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us, too." And he said, "Woe also to you experts in the law! For you load people with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not lift a finger to ease them. Woe to you! For you build the tombs of the prophets whom your ancestors killed. So you are witnesses and approve of the deeds of your ancestors, for they killed them, and you build their tombs. For this reason the Wisdom of God said, 'I will send them prophets and apostles, some of whom they will kill and persecute,' so that this generation may be charged with the blood of all the prophets shed since the foundation of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who perished between the altar and the sanctuary. Yes, I tell you, it will be charged against this generation. Woe to you experts in the law! For you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering." (Luke 11:37-52 NRSVue)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

So, I would expect today's reading to make some people very uncomfortable. I think the reason for this is that our reading today is confrontational. It doesn't match the image that we

may have of Jesus. It may not line up with the way that we describe Jesus. Because the words spoken over dinner are harsh ones. The Pharisees and the legal experts feel insulted. Our gut reaction may be to say that if they feel insulted then somebody must have said something wrong or could have said it better. But Jesus is here speaking clearly and concisely. Which raises a question for us as to why Jesus used such harsh language. Now, our reading today opens with Jesus being invited to dinner. When he's there, the Pharisee asks why Jesus doesn't wash before dinner. To make something clear, this isn't about washing your hands like we think of it today. This is about ritual purity. And that question begins the harsh dialogue that we get. Because Jesus notes that the Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside are full of greed and wickedness. What Jesus is saying here is that they make a show of washing themselves ritually so that they appear clean but do nothing about what's on the inside, the ugliness that they ignore. For Jesus, it's that they neglect justice and the love of God. They wash their hands so that they can make themselves appear to be clean and don't care about what happens to others. They keep up appearances while doing nothing to actually make a difference in the lives of those who are hurting. He notes that they love to have the seat of honor and to be greeted with respect. They want to be seen as important while not doing anything to earn that respect. Jesus really does lay into the Pharisees, and it's not the kind of polite talk that we often associate with love. The legal experts note that these are not the kindest of words. They complain that Jesus is insulting the legal experts as well when he is insulting the Pharisees. They view his words as an affront to them. We don't get an apology. We get more harsh words, because Jesus notes that the experts in the law load people up with burdens hard to bear and don't lift a finger to help. The legal experts want to make things more difficult and don't care if people are suffering because of their actions. And our closing statement is just as harsh if not harsher than everything else that he's said. Jesus states that they've taken away the key of knowledge without entering themselves and making it harder for anyone else who wants to gain knowledge.

Now, at this point, I'm sure there are those who are hearing these words and thinking that Jesus is being pretty mean. That if we said this about somebody, it might not be seen as loving or as kind. How do we reconcile that with calls for kindness? How do you read these words when we see an insult as not very loving? Maybe we just need to think about the context. Jesus knows that he's dealing with people who are used to being given respect, whether they've earned it or not. These are people who are happy to be in control and in charge without worrying about what their decisions will do to others. These are people who simply relish being in charge because of the position it gives them in society. They want the prestige power has without taking any responsibility for helping those in need. They want the respect of position without taking any responsibility for thinking about how their decisions will impact the lives of others. And I think it's because of that privilege that Jesus gives them the shock treatment. These are people who enjoy being held in high esteem, people who expect to be greeted with respect in public, people who expect to be given places of honor, people who want others to see their ceremonial acts that are supposed to make them righteous. They want

people to see them ritually cleaning themselves so that everyone can see how pure they are. To point out just how wrong they are, Jesus shows them some tough love by being brutally honest.

We might hesitate here, and we might be afraid of what this means. And I think it's important that we understand the reason for these harsh words and the context for them. Jesus isn't berating the everyday person struggling to make a living. He isn't leveling difficult words at people who are already suffering. Jesus is leveling his words at the people who are supposed to be in charge. He's aiming at those who are supposed to take the lead in helping others. He's being blunt with those who are supposed to show courage in doing what's right, the people who are supposed to be caring for those around them because of their prestige. Because of their position, they are in a greater position than anyone else to be able to help others. The legal experts are in a position to be able to help others to live and understand God, but instead chose to make life more difficult for everyone else. The Pharisees are leaders in the community but everything they do is just for show, not out of a genuine love of God and not out of kindness and love for neighbor. Jesus is leveling these difficult words at people who should already know better. Jesus is letting out these harsh saying at those who have a responsibility to those around them that's been neglected. I believe that is the reason that Jesus is so brutally honest. Because they are in positions of power, Jesus has to deal with them frankly. Not just for their sake, but for everyone else's sake. For anyone who's listening, they need to know that Jesus sees the hypocrisy. That Jesus sees how difficult the legal experts are making it for everyone else. That Jesus sees that the Pharisees are out to be looking good but not doing good. He speaks up so that they know that he knows. But he also gives the Pharisees and the legal experts a chance. He notes how sad it is for them that they hold the keys to wisdom and refuse to use them and that want to keep others from obtaining wisdom as well.

It's this difficult prophetic voice that I think we all struggle with. Because it means Jesus wasn't always the nicest person to those in charge when those in charge were neglecting their responsibilities. The kid gloves had to come off because the harsh truth had to be known. Because it's the only way that they could understand how far they had strayed from where they should have been. Just how great the impact was of the poor decisions they were making that impacted everyone else around them. For the Pharisees it was that they did everything for show so that they could be given respect, so that they would be seen set apart. But because everything they did was for show, none of it showed love for God or love for their neighbor. They could have done so much more but they held back. So, Jesus tells them the truth. We see the same thing with the legal experts interpreting the law in ways that make life difficult for everyone else, interpreting the law in ways that would keep people down and instead of giving them freedom, causing people to despair instead of giving them hope. They are not wanting to gain knowledge for themselves and are not wanting anyone else to gain knowledge either. These harsh words come to those in charge because those in charge should know better. The harsh words come to those in charge because their actions don't just impact some but impact

the community as a whole. And when their actions go against the best interest of the people, when those actions show a disregard for loving their neighbor, when those actions cause people to only see hypocrisy from those who are supposed to be doing God's work, we see Jesus call it out. Jesus doesn't waste time coming up with flattery and platitudes and beating around the bush. Jesus gets straight to the point because it's something they should already know and something that they have to change. This doesn't mean that Jesus isn't showing them love. To the contrary, Jesus is showing them love by speaking a harsh truth that others are going to avoid telling them to their face. Jesus is showing them love by using harsh words so that they understand the gravity of their situation. Jesus is using unpleasant terms at the dinner table because this might be the only time that they get to hear what they have to change. And so those harsh words are spoken in love. Not just the love for those Pharisees and legal experts, but also out of a great love for all the people negatively impacted by those people in charge. Because often times the truth isn't pretty, but it still needs to be spoken. Love doesn't mean we are always sidestepping the problems we face. Sometimes love means confronting them, even in the most unpleasant of way, so that the light may shine. It is done so that the truth may be known. It is done so that all may find hope, and all may find healing. And even among harsh words, the truth will set us free. Amen.

Prayer of Confession and Pardon: God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. Amen.

Almighty God have mercy upon you. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

Offering: If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

Lord's Prayer

Dismissal with Blessing: May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our Current Series – Dinner with Christ

Our current series will be looking different times that Christ sat down to have dinner with people. Each interaction teaches us an important lesson about our Savior and ourselves.

June 12th – *Unexpected Guest* – Luke 7:36-50

June 19th – *Faith after Dinner* – Matthew 9:9-26

June 26th – *Unpleasant Table Talk* – Luke 11:37-52

Prayer List

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Eric Veach	Ed & Verna Titus
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney	Nancy Hoke
Family of Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart	Ronnie Winstead
Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gabel	Sage Martin
Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch	Tom Finley
Laura Carlen	Rosie Chancellor	Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Jackie Potter	Don Holsapple
Family of Loise Roberts	Jeremy Klinger	Phil Hawickhorst	Doris Miller
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	Gary & Mary Winterrowd
Leo Smith	Sue & Bob Smyser	Larry Thompson	Nick & Leana Ochoa
Family of Bunny Sparks	Greg Williams	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte			

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