

Luke 14:1-14

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Good Shepherd Lutheran Church + Boise, Idaho
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Messianic Table Manners

The Word of the Lord from Luke 14:10-11: “But when you are invited, go and sit in 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 table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” This is the Word of the Lord.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen

“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath, or not?” That’s what Jesus asks the Pharisees and lawyers at the meal. It’s not just a theoretical question, either: a man with dropsy stands in front of Him, and the Pharisees are watching closely to see what He does. See, according to them, it’s not lawful to heal on the Sabbath: the Sabbath is the day of rest, and you’re not supposed to do any sort of work. Healing people is normally the job of doctors, and practicing medicine is work. Since it’s not lawful to work on the Sabbath, the Pharisees would say that it’s not lawful to heal on the Sabbath. Especially if they are out to get the Physician. Which they are.

Jesus takes hold of the man and heals him, then sends him on his way. This will not sit well with the Pharisees. For one thing, He defies their rules. For another, He points out that they do too: if their son falls down a well on the Sabbath, they don’t say, “Just keep treading water ‘til the sun goes down.” They rescue him.

Here’s the kicker, though: Jesus doesn’t heal the man by practicing medicine. He performs a miracle with divine power – He demonstrates that He’s the Son of God. Are the Pharisees going to insist that *God* can’t work on the Sabbath? Are they going to forbid God from healing people?

We arrive at Rule #1 in Messianic Table Manners, a common *faux pas* among sinners: it’s a bad idea to try to make the Lord of heaven and earth conform to your rules and expectations.

Rule #2 in Messianic Table Manners comes in the form of a parable. Jesus says,

When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, “Give your place to this person,” and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in 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 table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

That’s an awkward one, isn’t it? Your seat at the table says a lot about who you are, and you’re always tempted to desire a better seat than you deserve, because your ego writes checks that are going to bounce. It might be because of self-deluding pride in yourself or jealousy about others, but you want the better seat. Note that, in the parable, the guilty party doesn’t get bumped down a chair or two: he’s got the walk of shame to the low end of the table. Sometimes, the only chair left might be outside the banquet hall.

Rule #2 is clear: don’t think more highly of yourself than you ought. Pride goes before the fall, and it hurts to fall.

How do the Pharisees take this one? It's an issue, for Jesus tells this parable after watching them pick their seats. But is this really what Jesus is getting at? If you just leave the parable there, then it's ripe for hypocrisy: every Pharisee who thinks he's hot stuff will pretend to be humble and sit at the lowest seat, so that he can preen as the host makes him step up to a better place. I'm thinking that, ultimately, Jesus may be teaching something else.

But for now, on to rule #3 of Messianic Table Manners. Jesus says,

When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

Of the three rules, I've got to admit that this is my least favorite. Dinners and banquets are for celebration, and should you not celebrate with friends, family and neighbors? Is it really wrong if they return the favor ask you over for dinner, too? Jesus' table manners say to avoid this: instead, invite all sorts of people who are going to be high-maintenance, and who are unable to repay you for your kindness in any way. Not just that, but these people are sinners, too: they might steal, break things or make messes and cost you dearly. Honestly, though, this rule kind of accuses you, doesn't it? I mean, you'd rather have a nice meal with friends than spend time with the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, right?

Maybe this isn't a general rule for you and me: maybe Jesus is just sticking it to the Pharisees because of their particular sins. But if that's the case, why is it wrong for the Pharisees to have a meal with friends and family? Why does Jesus give them rule #3?

Perhaps it's this: perhaps it's because the Pharisees are the religious leaders; and being the religious leaders, they're supposed set an example of godly virtue. Godly people should do nice things like love their neighbor, practice humility and care for those who are less fortunate. If they are godly, the Pharisees' lives should reflect how God treats people.

If you are godly, your life should reflect how God treats people. Does it? Not as much as it should. Jesus has given three rules, three laws with His Messianic Table Manners, and the law always accuses. It always exposes your ungodliness – it shows your sin.

That being the case, I have some good news for you: when Jesus gives His Messianic Table Manners to reflect how God treats people, He's also telling you how He treats you.

For what is the Lord doing this Sabbath? He is healing you – not merely of dropsy, which is bad enough. He takes hold of you in His means of grace and forgives your sins. You've not merely fallen into a well: apart from His grace, you're outside of the kingdom of God. He wastes no time! He doesn't wait for the day to go by, but He cleanses you now by His Word. He makes you holy with His own body and blood.

And as for that rule about where to sit at a banquet table, well, where should you sit in the presence of God? Where should you sit at the wedding feast of the Lamb for eternity? The answer is that, as a sinner, you're the least in the kingdom of God; and the the least or the last in the kingdom is the one who is outside the kingdom. Whatever seat you would take at God's table based on your own righteousness, the Host would come and say, "You will have to move down to the lowest place ... outside, in the dark with the and weeping and gnashing of teeth." But behold what Christ does! There is no question that He deserves the seat of honor: now ascended into heaven, no one protests that He sits at the Father's right hand and is worthy of all glory, honor and praise. And why? Because He took your seat at the lowest place. He became the least in the kingdom of heaven: He became the One who bore the curse of your sin to the cross, and He was affixed to that throne with nails. But because He has taken

your seat, because He has died for your sin in that darkness, risen again He now says to you, “Your sins are forgiven.” He beckons you and says, “Friend, move up higher. At this banquet feast of heaven, how ‘bout you sit with Me.”

And as for rule #3, for giving feasts for the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind, well ... what does the Lord do for you this very day? We can make this metaphorical, about faith, if you like: we talk about being blind in sin or crippled by sin. That’s true, but there’s more to it than that. See, diseases, injuries and disabilities are the effects of sin upon the flesh – and sinful flesh can’t be in heaven because there’s no sin allowed. So if, say, a man with dropsy were to show up at the gates of heaven, he wouldn’t be allowed inside because of his disease. At first, this makes the Lord sound very bad, because He only allows perfect people into heaven. But does He turn away the man with dropsy in our text? No. Does He say, “Take heart, you’ll still be sick – but at least you’ll be in heaven ”? Again, no – He heals him! Because a man with dropsy can’t get into heaven, Jesus takes his dropsy away so that he can.

Whatever ails you in body is enough to keep you out of heaven, because heaven is only for those who are perfect and holy in body, mind and soul. But rather than tell you you’re out of luck, Jesus hosts a meal for you – the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind. He forgives your sins, and He promises to raise you up perfect in body on the Last Day. Because only perfect people are allowed in heaven, He declares you perfect for His own sake, and you will see this to be the case at the resurrection. But for now, rejoice that the body and blood of the Lord Jesus Christ strengthens and preserves you in *body* and soul until life everlasting.

So go the Messianic Table Manners of our Gospel lesson. While they are good rules for a godly life, they are far better than that. They are an announcement of how the Messiah is mannered toward you: He became the least, and now the one who humbled Himself to death on the cross has been exalted, so that you might be at His feast forever.

The Table awaits!

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen