

Rio Rancho Presbyterian Church

Rev. Frank Yates

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## SINNERS

Luke 5: 27-32

If the Gospel of Luke were to air on television, it would be broadcast on the Food Network. Why? Because every time you look up, Jesus is sharing a meal or talking about food. In our text, Jesus shares a meal with one of his new disciples and his friends. Levi, who has left his job as a tax collector, invites Jesus to a feast, along with a bunch of his tax collecting friends. The Pharisees are not amused that Jesus chooses to eat with tax collectors and sinners. As we will see, Jesus seems to prefer breaking bread with biker gangs rather than the stuff shirts.

Walk through Luke's narrative with me, the way the Food Network would. In Luke 7 Jesus shows his openness to all kinds of people by eating at the home of an unnamed Pharisee. Not all Pharisees were his sworn enemies. Some even invited him to dinner. But when entering the Pharisee's home, Jesus is not offered water to

wash his feet. Instead, a woman who is a sinner intrudes upon the party and bathes Jesus' feet with her tears.

The Pharisee is scandalized that such a woman would even touch Jesus. Then Jesus tells his host the parable of the two debtors, one owing a tremendous sum and the other a meager amount. Both debtors are forgiven and Jesus asks who will love all the more the one who forgave them. The Pharisee apparently gets the point.

In Luke 9 Jesus hosts a large outdoor picnic garnered from but five loaves and two fish. Everyone ate their fill and twelve baskets full of leftovers are gathered. Such a feast from so little! So like mana from heaven!

In Luke 10 Jesus goes to the home of Mary and Martha, where Martha feverishly prepares a meal for her honored guest. Meanwhile, Mary her sister simply sits in the living room listening to Jesus. When Martha complains, Jesus suggests that Mary has chosen the better portion. Here words of life trump the preparation of food.

In Luke 11 Jesus again dines in the home of an unnamed Pharisee. Do you see a pattern here? The host is again scandalized, this time when Jesus does not perform the ceremonial washing of hands before the meal. Then Jesus turns on his host and criticizes

his “pharisaic attitude”, if you will. In fact, Jesus launches into a broadside against the blatant hypocrisy of religious leaders. I’m thinking that put a damper on the evening’s festivities.

In Luke 14 Jesus is again invited to the home of yet another unnamed Pharisee. Now you can probably guess what happened. It was a Sabbath meal, a holy tradition in Judaism. A man with swollen feet shows up and Jesus heals him. Jesus explains that since the Sabbath is a day for healing, he has not violated the commandment against work.

At that dinner party Jesus notices that people are acting as though they are attending an awards banquet, coveting the places of honor. So Jesus tells an after dinner story, the parable of the great banquet. Invitations are extended, but excuses all around are offered. Now the host proposes a rather unlikely guest list: “the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.” Furthermore, the banquet hall is to be filled by going out in to the “roads and lanes and compel them to come in.” Has such a banquet ever been held?

In Luke 19 Jesus dines with yet another tax collector, this one with a name-Zacchaeus. This might be labeled “the happy meal”, where things go swimmingly. This chief tax collector of Jericho insists to his guest of honor that he gives away half of all his

possessions to the poor. And Zacchaeus adds that if he defrauded anyone, he promises to offer restitution fourfold. Jesus is so astonished by the utter sincerity of his host that he declares, “Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.”

In Luke 22 Jesus serves as the host to the most famous meal in history, the Last Supper. In this anxious final night of his life, Jesus gives new meaning to their Passover meal. Now the bread broken will remind his disciples of his body broken for them. The wine poured out will remind them of his blood shed for them. As in Psalm 23 where a table is “prepared before me in the presence of my enemies”, here Jesus dines with Judas, who betrays him.

Now this motley crew of disciples also show their true colors by arguing over who will be the greatest in the coming Kingdom. Jesus reminds his clueless followers that the true leader in the kingdom will be “like one who serves”, not one who lords it over others. Nevertheless, Jesus promises that in the coming kingdom they will eat and drink with him and judge the twelve tribes of Israel. Still a dark cloud hangs over this meal when Jesus reveals that one will betray him and all will abandon him, even Peter.

In Luke 24 after his death and resurrection, the Risen Christ ends up walking incognito with Cleopas and his friend to Emmaus. Deeply saddened by the events in Jerusalem, they arrive at their home and invite this mysterious guest for dinner. During the meal Jesus reveals himself to these two amazed disciples “in the breaking of the bread.”

Later that same evening, the risen Christ appears to his disciples huddled together fearfully in Jerusalem. While they can hardly believe their eyes, Jesus asks for something to eat. He is given a “piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate in their presence.” The final meal with the risen Christ has him holding a piece of broiled fish in his hands!

As I said, the Gospel of Luke should air on the Food Channel. By my count, there are at least ten occasions where Jesus dines with others or talks about a shared meal. For Jesus, dining with someone is offering the hand of friendship and fellowship, even forgiveness. Breaking bread with someone brings reconciliation and healing.

In our text in Luke 5, Jesus offers the hand of friendship and fellowship to Levi and his tax collecting friends, whom the rest of society despised. When challenged, Jesus responds with two memorable lines. First, “Those who are well have no need of a

physician but those who are sick.” Second, “I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Those who imagine they need no forgiveness are not Jesus’ target audience. Those who know their estrangement from God are given what they most need- fellowship, friendship, forgiveness, healing. Sinners in need of God’s grace-that is who Jesus wants to break bread with, even to this day. The biker gang, not the stuffed shirts!

So just how important is sharing a meal? A rabbi friend of mine once summed up Judaism in this way, “God wins. Let’s eat!” The Presbyterian version of that statement goes like this, “We will not meet unless we eat!” And so it goes in our congregation: our monthly communion at the Table, our weekly fellowship time after worship, our Ladies who Lunch, our Men’s Fellowship Breakfasts, sharing food after memorial services as we did yesterday, our Deacons sending meals to our members in need, and hopefully soon our reconstituted Chatterbox meals together. And you may have noticed I love to eat lunch with you!

Our abundance reminds us of those who have far less, especially those in Africa now cut off from food shipments from USAid. In our abundance, let us always remember the needy in

prayer. “Give us this day our daily bread” moves us to pray “give them their daily bread as well”.

Friends in Christ, Jesus has broken down the walls of hostility by breaking bread with us. We are loved and accepted and forgiven as we share a meal with our Lord. And we pray that all people, sinners all, will share in the great blessings of Christ’s mercy, forgiveness and grace. May it be so. Amen.