



New Table Manners

TEXT
Luke 14:1-14

July 17, 2016 — Sermon by Dr. Rodger Nishioka

The late Preaching Professor and New Testament Scholar Fred Craddock wrote that in the gospel of Luke, it seems as if Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal. In a lecture, he said that it was a good thing Jesus had to walk everywhere because otherwise by the end of the gospel he would have weighed 400 pounds.

Sure enough, in the opening of Chapter 14, Jesus is going to eat at the house of a prominent Pharisee — one of the religious leaders of the day. On his way, he encounters a man suffering from “dropsy.” Today we would call it an edema — an unusual accumulation of fluids somewhere in the body often signaling an inflammation and infection. It is a symptom of a more serious physical ailment and very painful as well as unsightly. Jesus turns to ask the religious leaders who are with him, “Is it lawful to cure on the Sabbath or not?” According to the rules of the day, you must not work on the Sabbath and healing is considered work.

The religious leaders, the keepers of the rules do not respond to him, so he cures the

man. This is the third time in Luke that Jesus heals on the Sabbath.

Then when Jesus gets to the Pharisee’s home, he notices that the guests are quick to take a seat closest to the host — the closer you are to the host, the greater the place of honor. That is the rule. But Jesus tells them a parable — a story with a lesson. He tells them that when they are invited to a home, for instance to a wedding banquet, do not take the place of honor, but rather go sit at the lowest place, so that when the host comes, you may be invited to come sit at a place of honor. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

Jesus is doing it again. He is changing the rules.

Then Jesus turns to the Pharisee and says, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or brothers or relatives or other rich persons so that in return, you may be invited to their homes. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, those who could never repay

you, and you will be blessed at the resurrection of the righteous.”

He is changing the rules. Again. That’s the problem with following Jesus.

Friends, we have rules at the table — table manners. Many of you know these.

Chew with your mouth ... closed.

Keep your elbows off ... the table.

Don’t talk with your mouth ... full.

Clean your ... plate.

There are starving children in ... Africa or India or China.

And during Jesus’ time, the rule was get the best seat at the table, and when you have a dinner party, only invite those who can repay you with a similar meal or an even better one.

Jesus is doing what he does best. He is changing the rules.

But he is not just changing the rules for the sake of change. What he is doing is teaching us all to understand what it means to be in the kingdom of God. Jesus is saying that the table is the kingdom of God, and in the kingdom of God, do not think of yourselves as more deserving than others. Do not think of yourself as more honored. Do not be arrogant. Be genuinely

humble. There is no room for false humility. All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and all who humble themselves will be exalted. And at God's kingdom table, you serve others without expecting anything in return.

It is different at God's kingdom table. There are new table manners.

At the exit off the interstate that took me to my home where I lived in Atlanta is a Publix grocery store. It was convenient and as happened often, I had just arrived back in town after a full weekend of preaching — and even this extrovert was tired. I remembered that I had nothing at home to eat, so I quickly stopped by the grocery store and dashed in to pick up a few things. I had a total of 10 items in my plastic basket along with my cloth bag because I am a true follower of Jesus, and when I got up to the express line, I saw just one small older African-American woman there and thought to myself, "Great. I will be out of here in just a few minutes."

But as I got closer, I realized the woman had far more than 10 items. Then as I stood there, I realized that she was having the clerk scan each item because she did not have enough money to buy all that she had and was negotiating what food to buy and what to leave behind. I was tired. I had preached and taught about Jesus all weekend. *Come on, lady.*

As this went on, a thought occurred to me. So I asked the

clerk directly, "Excuse me. How much is she short?"

The clerk looked a bit confused and said, "What, sir?"

I asked her, "How much does she need to buy all her groceries?"

The clerk looked at me and at the food and said, "Well, between her EBT card and her cash, she needs about \$27 more dollars."

So I said, "Fine," and took out \$30 from my wallet and gave it to the clerk. The clerk looked confused, and I said, "I'll pay for the rest of her groceries."

Now if I am honest with you, I was envisioning that God in heaven was watching and gathering the saints and saying, "Everyone! See how wonderful Rodger is. He is being so generous to this woman he does not even know. This is why he is my favorite!" And God was commanding the choirs of angels to sing, oh, I don't know, something like ... "Blessed is Rodger! God's favorite!" And just as I was beginning to hear the voices of the heavenly hosts, the small, older woman spoke in disgust, loud enough so the grocery clerk and I could hear, "He didn't even look at me."

Now the clerk looked at the older woman and said, "Wait, what? Oh no. You are not going to talk bad about this big Asian man. Lady! He just paid for your groceries."

And the woman, looking away from me, said again, "He should have asked my permission. He didn't even talk to

me." Then she took her groceries and left.

Well, the clerk, who I was liking very much right now, was incensed. "Sir, I do not know what that lady was talking about."

And I told the young woman, "Actually, she was right. I should have spoken to her first. I should have asked her permission."

The clerk said, "Well, honey, I am telling you right now, I am giving you my full permission, you can give me all money you want, baby, just go right ahead."

See, that's what Jesus is saying. At God's kingdom table, there is no room for false humility, and there is no room for acts of service and kindness done with the expectation of something in return. The truth is, I may have appeared to be generous, but if I am honest, it was all about me so I could get out of there faster and with less inconvenience so I could get home. At God's kingdom table, there is no room for revenge or holding grudges, and you do not hurt others because you are hurting. At God's kingdom table, neither are you kind to others so that you may get something in return.

Jesus is telling us that it is time for new table manners.

I wonder if you caught it. In the midst of the ongoing frustrations of many in the African American community and the sadness in Dallas and the grief of Nice, on Monday, three days after the horrific shootings that killed five police officers,

a group of nearly 200 Black Lives Matter protesters, mostly African American, continued their protest walking along a street in Dallas. Across the street, a small group of counter-protestors, mostly white, held up signs and chanted that All Lives Matter. Police officers kept the two groups on opposite sides of the street.

Then the Black Lives Matter group stopped, and one of the leaders went across the street as several police officers approached him. He told them it was all right. He then went up to one of the white counter-protestors, put out his hand and the two shook hands, then they hugged. Then as he began to shake the hand of and hug each of the All Lives Matter protestors, other Black Lives Matter protestors saw what he did, and they followed his lead. The protestors crossed the street, and soon they were all standing together hugging. Then they gathered in a cluster and prayed together, and they gathered several of the police officers into their group.

That's what it looks like at God's kingdom table: new table manners.

We are welcomed at God's kingdom table by the grace of God. And we invite others to the kingdom table — not expecting anything in return, but only because we know what it is like to be served and what it is like to be saved by Jesus. That's it. Village Church, we live in a time when everything we do is with the expectation of something in return. That's not

what happens at the kingdom table. Jesus has changed the rules. Jesus has given us new table manners.

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

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.