

Reflection on the Word: Lent 5 March 18, 2018
Scripture: Jeremiah 31:31-34; Luke 14:12-24

The ministry and example of Jesus lies at the heart of our Christian faith. Jesus was one who used words and actions to help people understand what he meant by the kingdom of God.

He told parables **to teach** people about the love of God.

He performed miracles **to show** people the love of God.

He shared meals and table fellowship to help all people **experience** the love of God.

He called people to discipleship so that they could **learn from him and follow a way of life** based on the love of God.

Have you ever noticed how much ministry Jesus did around the dinner table? Meals feature so prominently in the gospels that scholars have commented: 'Jesus ate his way through the Gospels.' Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley claim: '... they killed him because of the way he ate; because he ate and drank with sinners.' Jesus revealed the Kingdom as he shared meals with others. And Jesus' *fellowship meals* are formative for the mission and ministry of the local church today.

Think about the times you have shared at table. Special holidays or occasions of celebration ... birthdays, Christmas, weddings. Church suppers and community gatherings. When you have visitors, it is common, is it not, to invite them to the table for a cup of tea and a lunch as a sign of hospitality and welcome. Think of the Communion Table, where all are invited to eat and drink for their strengthening in the faith.

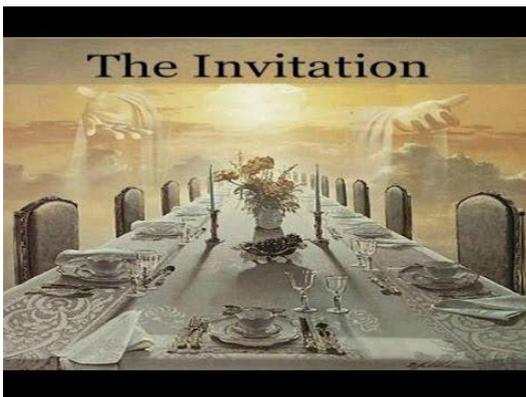
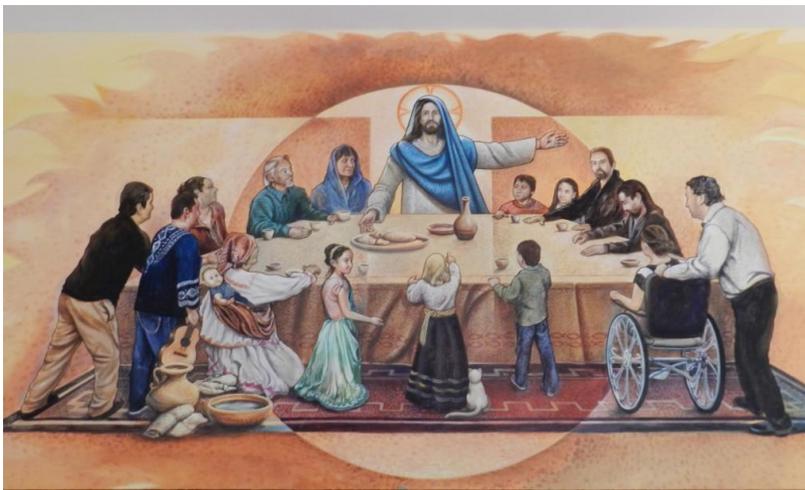
And think of all those fellowship meals contained in the gospels that Jesus shared and who he shared them with.

The table is taken so seriously that Jesus gets into trouble because of his eating buddies. He was known as a friend of tax collectors and sinners, because he ate with them. In Jesus' day, inviting others to a table could be a sign of affluence or status but it could also be a sign of service or a sign of acceptance, extending equal rights and opportunities to all through the breaking of bread.

And it was because table fellowship speaks to inclusiveness and acceptance of one another, that Jesus was held suspect by those who were the champions of religious purity laws and codes of conduct. For Jesus, what was important was the law that is written on the heart; the law that reflects God's abundant love and grace.

I love this statement by well known preacher and scholar, Fred Craddock: "The table is not only where one may say grace; it is the space where one extends grace ... To the gospel writer Luke, 'nothing is more serious than a dining table.'" Jesus said, when you give a banquet, invite the marginalized – the poor, the disabled, the blind, those who can never repay you for your generosity, and you will be blessed. The Last Supper and revelations of the risen Christ occur at table. Jesus promises the Holy Spirit while eating. And in the early church, Jews and Gentiles reflect the nature of the church through table fellowship.

By the company he kept, Jesus revealed his inclusiveness towards the privileged and the underprivileged. And we learn from Jesus' fellowship meals that our tables should be places of radical welcome, especially for those who feel lonely and on the outside. For this is the shape of the Kingdom of God!



The Invitation



Come to the Table

