Advent Series: Hospitality Incarnated: What Christ's birth reveals about how we treat others.
Sermon Text: Luke 2:1-20 (NLT); Galatians 2 **Key Words:** Shared meals, communion

For Advent this year, we've been exploring: "*Hospitality Incarnated: What Christ's birth reveals about how we treat others*." So far, in 4 lessons, we've learned that **Jesus came to redeem how we treat one another**, that **Remembering God's provision changes everything,** that **Hospitality honors God's design (image)**, and that **We must strive to be wise, tenderhearted, and forgiving** people like Jesus. While there are many practical ways to show hospitality, tonight I'd like you to consider this…

BIG IDEA: Shared meals have spiritual significance.

How often do you share a meal with people you love? A recent article in Newsweek says, "*The Average American Only Spends 3 Dinners a Week with Loved Ones*" and "*Many said they've seen a decline in how often they get to eat with family, leaving them wanting more*." By the way, the article also listed America's top 4 rules for table etiquette: 1) Wash your hands before you sit at the table. 2) Don't talk with your mouth full. 3) Don't slurp your food or drink. 4) Chew with your mouth closed. So, you may want to keep these things in mind this evening!

In her book on hospitality, Christine Pohl wrote that, "*In a society where even family members eat alone, and on the run, we're often unaware of the significance of shared meals. But, in most cultures, eating together expresses mutuality, recognition, acceptance, and equal regard*." She even suggested that hospitality can be an "*act of resistance and defiance*." Think about that--when socially respected people or groups receive social outcasts, it can change how they see themselves and challenge culture to rethink how it assesses people. Ever done that? Krista and I enjoy inviting outsiders into exclusive settings (holidays or birthdays) where only certain people (family) are expected to attend. We realize how easy it is for biological families (any comfortable group) to become an idol. Yet, Christ's gospel urges us to expand our social circles, not merely pursue or hunker down with folks who are like us.

An infamous dinner story in Galatians 2 illustrates the way our actions can either support or refute the gospel. Paul rebuked Peter for abandoning newly converted Gentiles after a conservative group of Jewish-Christians caught them eating together. His point was that if Jesus welcomes everyone to His table by grace through faith, then "*belonging*" isn't based on things like race, politics, status, or even behavior. As we learned in John 13, Jesus introduced a table with bread and something to drink (not a

pulpit or piano) as the centerpiece of our church gatherings. This was intended to make Christ's body and blood the main event, not preachers, worship leaders, or gimmicks. Sadly, early churches quickly lost sight of this. 1 Corinthians 10-11 describes believers consuming communion while segregating in groups, mistreating one another, getting drunk, and ignoring needs. There's was a spirit of "*I'm better than you*", but weekly church services are meant to remind us of our unity in Him, not what separates and divides us. None of us are here because we deserve to be or because our lives are perfect. Each of us are guests of the Christ Child who came into our broken world, identified with us, showed us how to trust God, and died to release sin's death grip over us. The Lord's Supper signifies the underserved union we have with Him and each other by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, and while it may feel weird to take communion alongside another meal, that's exactly how Jesus did it with His disciples.

Listen as I read this beautiful description of that night from a devotional called, *Learning from Jesus, the Most Gracious Host*: "*Only hours before His crucifixion, Christ gathered His disciples for a final meal together in the upper room. Sharing bread and wine at the Last Supper, Jesus explained that the elements were symbols of His body and blood that would be given as a ransom for their lives, the forgiveness of their sins. He served them food, then washed their feet—an act so humbling it was typically reserved for the lowest of society. The disciples were taken aback by this act of service, yet it was only a mere sign of the sacrifice to come. The King became a servant at the Last Supper—the most important meal ever served…In a wonderful preview of the gospel message, Jesus loved them, He welcomed them, and He served them. Christ's table is still set for you and me today. His great invitation still stands. May we all be willing to accept the most precious gift ever given, and may we see it as our life's work to share the gift of the gospel with others. Jesus, the most gracious Host of all, bids us to come to the table*."

If you are willing to trust Jesus, even a little bit, we invite you to share in this meal tonight as our equal brothers and sisters in Christ. Communion is not a cookie for good behavior, it's for those who confess their sin, turn to God in repentance, and believe (as the old hymn says) that our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

Let's pray: Father God, on this Christmas Eve, we celebrate you for sending your Son to us, and not just for us, but for all creation. Therefore, consuming your holy meal isn't a time to think only about ourselves but also of those partaking with us and of who else we might invite to this table. The gift of your Son is too precious to keep to ourselves. May our celebration of Christ's first appearing not just

make us yearn for His return, but also remind us WHY He came. Scripture says Jesus came not to be served, but to serve and give His life a ransom for many--to seek and to save the lost (cf. Mark 10:45; Luke 19:10). What's most fascinating though is HOW Jesus came, and I don't just mean as a humble baby in a manger. I mean how He preferred to make disciples while eating and drinking, like we are tonight. And how He shrugged off the condemnation of those who couldn't grasp why He associated with social outcasts. As we prepare for the new year, stir our hearts to use our tables like Jesus did. In this world of judgment and isolation, help us to believe that shared meals have spiritual significance and to keep our hearts and lives open to whoever you put in our paths. Amen.

So, what's your NEXT STEP?

- Remember, our next step always begins with faith in Christ. Either placing faith in Him for the first time or exercising faith to repent, change, and grow. Either way, His Spirit will help you.

- Review Kevin's messages
- Jesus "lusted" to take it with them and said they'd be taking it again in the kingdom. Heaven will be like a banquet. Relationship.
- Some of us are like squirrels that dart around under cars and barely survive. We need to make more room at our tables.
- Story about how things get broken or ruined because we're not giving them the attention they deserve.
- Acts 2 and Galatians 2 level the playing field in a world that says what's mine is mine!
- We all want to justify ourselves
- Rom 12 or 13 says we're to seek to show hospitality, not wait.
- We throw money at problems because we don't know what else to do, but we don't know because we don't get to know them. Or if we never get to know them, we'll never know what to do.

Read sermon collab notes

- State my goal (lesson focus) more clearly up front and then nail it at the end.
- BIG IDEAS, MY CHAPTER BREAKDOWN, RESOURCES
- https://classic.net.bible.org/bible.php

Quotes related to this passage:

- **Hosting**: If the idea of "hosting" gives you anxiety, check out this brief article.
- **Being different in a good way**: Christians have been called to stand out and be different in a world that prefers sin and Satan over God. Jesus, however, came to model the right way to be different. As we resist evil influences, we must realize that our battles are with sin and Satan, not people (cf. Ephesians 6). Our attitude must mirror what we see in passages like John 3:17: "*God did not send his Son to condemn the world, but so that the world might be saved through him*." Perhaps the clearest statement of this is found in Philippians 2:3-7: "*Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men*."
- **Seeing God's image in everyone**: "John Calvin, writing in the sixteenth century, developed one of the most comprehensive foundations for a generous response to strangers: Therefore, whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him. Say, 'He is a stranger'; but the Lord has given him a mark that ought to be familiar to you, by virtue of the fact he forbids you to despise your own flesh (Isa. 58:7, Vg.). Say, 'He is contemptible and worthless'; but the Lord shows him to be one to whom he has deigned to give the beauty of his image. Say that you owe nothing for any service of his; but God, as it were, has put him in his own place in order that you may recognize toward him the many and great benefits with which God has bound you to himself. Say that he does not deserve even your least effort for his sake; but the image of God, which recommends him to you, is worthy of your giving yourself and all your possessions…Bearing God's image establishes for every person a

fundamental dignity which cannot be undermined either by wrongdoing or neediness…We should not regard what a man is and what he deserves: but we should go higher—that it is God who has placed us in the world for such a purpose that we be united and joined together. He has impressed his image in us and has given us a common nature, which should incite us to providing one for the other. The man who wishes to exempt himself from providing for his neighbors should deface himself and declare that he no longer wishes to be a man, for as long as we are human creatures we must contemplate as in a mirror our face in those who are poor, despised, exhausted, who groan under their burdens.'" (Pohl, 64-65)

- **The power of hospitality**: "For much of church history, Christians addressed concerns about recognition and human dignity within their discussions and practices of hospitality. Especially in relation to strangers, hospitality was a basic category for dealing with the importance of transcending social differences and breaking social boundaries that excluded certain categories or kinds of persons. Hospitality provided a context for recognizing the worth of persons who seemed to have little when assessed by worldly standards. Because the practice of hospitality is so significant in establishing and reinforcing social relationships and moral bonds, we notice its more subversive character only when socially undervalued persons are welcomed. In contrast to a more tame hospitality that welcomes persons already well situated in a community, hospitality that welcomes 'the least' and recognizes their equal value can be an act of resistance and defiance, a challenge to the values and expectations of the larger community. People view hospitality as quaint and tame partly because they do not understand the power of recognition. When a person who is not valued by society is received by a socially respected person or group as a human being with dignity and worth, small transformations occur. The person's self-assessment, so often tied to societal assessment, is enhanced. Because such actions are countercultural, they are a witness to the larger community, which is then challenged to reassess its standards and methods of valuing. Many persons who are not valued by the larger community are essentially invisible to it. When people are socially invisible, their needs and concerns are not acknowledged and no one even notices the injustices they suffer. Hospitality can begin a journey toward visibility and respect." (Pohl, 62)
- **Relating with those in need**: "Alms and physical assistance were not sufficient to define hospitality; true hospitality involved face-to-face, gracious relationships of encouragement and respect. Combining care and respect remained a concern throughout the Christian tradition. Calvin recognized that the 'vile and abject condition' of strangers can cause us to 'injure them the more wantonly, because they seem altogether deserted.' Strangers—alone, unprotected, and in need—were vulnerable to every form of injustice and disrespect. But, Calvin believed, putting oneself in the place of the person in need would prompt a compassionate response and would keep the giver from arrogance and insolence. It was not enough, Calvin wrote, 'to perform acts of kindness towards men, if our disposition towards them were not warm and affectionate.' Liberal donations were made 'reprehensible' if they were given 'with a proud countenance or …insolent words.' Similarly, John Wesley insisted that those responsible for the temporal affairs of the Methodist societies treat the poor with respect and kindness. His warnings show his sensitivity to the tendency to be disrespectful to those forced to ask for help: 'If you cannot relieve, do not grieve, the poor. Give them soft words if nothing else. Abstain from either sour looks or harsh words. Let them be glad to come, even though they should go empty away. Put yourselves in the place of every poor man; and deal with him as

you would God should deal with you.' Combining care with respect—seeing the dignity as well as the need of the person —is also a distinctive feature of contemporary ministries of hospitality. At the personal level, hospitality communicates to guests and strangers that they are valued; respect and recognition are expressed in giving someone our full attention. Because so much of 'helping' has been turned into a profession with paid specialists, it is very unusual when someone gives focused attention to a needy stranger outside of a paid relationship. Giving a stranger full attention communicates that he or she is interesting and worthwhile; we pay attention to the people we value. Those who offer hospitality are not so much providing a service as they are sharing their lives with the people who come to them. This is an important distinction because it affects the nature of the relationship." (Pohl, 70-72)

- **Meals in Scripture**: "In the context of shared meals, Jesus frequently challenged prevailing religious and cultural boundaries by the company he kept and exposed the hidden patterns of social exclusion. He was a guest in the home of tax collectors, dined with sinners, and taught hosts to welcome those most likely to be excluded. Many of the early church's struggles over recognition and inclusion surfaced in the context of eating together. Peter, at God's instruction, visited Cornelius and ate with his household—a powerful demonstration of the acceptance of Gentiles into the Christian community (Acts 10–11). Paul addressed the tensions between rich and poor believers that became apparent in common meals when the poor were 'humiliated' by believers with higher status and wealth. In a community that declared ethnic and social boundaries irrelevant, some poor believers were being treated as less significant members (1 Cor. 11:17–34) …Jean Vanier explains that when he first began sharing his daily meals with men with serious mental disabilities, he started to understand the force of Jesus' words in Luke 14 about who should be invited to the banquet. "Sitting down at the same table meant becoming friends with them, creating a family. It was a way of life absolutely opposed to the values of a competitive, hierarchical society in which the weak are pushed aside." (Pohl, 73)
- **We must learn to serve AND to sit**: "Often we maintain significant boundaries when offering help to persons in need. Many churches prepare and serve meals to hungry neighbors, but few church members find it easy to sit and eat with those who need the meal. When people are very different from ourselves, we often find it more comfortable to cook and clean for them than to share in a meal and conversation. We are familiar with roles as helpers but are less certain about being equals eating together. Many of us struggle with simply being present with people in need; our helping roles give definition to the relationship but they also keep it decidedly hierarchical. Practitioners recognize the relation between justice and shared meals. Ed Loring, of the Open Door Community in Atlanta, observed that 'justice is important, but supper is essential.' His comment in no way reduces the importance of sustained efforts at social justice, to which the entire community is committed. But, as Murphy Davis, cofounder of the Open Door, explained, 'Without supper, without love, without table companionship, justice can become a program that we do to other people.'" (Pohl, 74)
- **The significance of shared meals**: "Jesus' post-resurrection encounter with two disciples on the road to Emmaus reinforces the promise of Jesus' presence in shared meals (Luke 24:13–35). Jesus comes to them as a stranger (they do not recognize him), but they welcome him as a guest, and in breaking bread together, Jesus becomes their host. In this moment of table fellowship, they recognize him as their risen Lord. Jesus is known to them in the breaking of the bread—an anticipation of the Eucharist and a foretaste of the final Kingdom banquet. The

epistles provide strong evidence for the practical importance of hospitality in early Christian life. Paul instructs believers to practice or pursue hospitality (Rom. 12:13), the writer of Hebrews reminds believers not to neglect hospitality (Heb. 13:2), the author of 1 Peter challenges the community to offer hospitality ungrudgingly (1 Pet. 4:9). Hospitality, in each of these passages, is a concrete expression of love—love for sisters and brothers, love extended outward to strangers, prisoners, and exiles, love that attends to physical and social needs. Within acts of hospitality, needs are met, but hospitality is truncated if it does not go beyond physical needs. Part of hospitality includes recognizing and valuing the stranger or guest…In many settings the line between the shared meal and the Eucharist is blurred; the two flow into each other much as was the case in the early church. The sacramental aspects of meals become clearest in these settings, but even separate from the Eucharist, one often senses a divine mystery in dining together at a table of welcome." (Pohl, 31, 74-75)

- **Consider what Acts 2:42-47 says about the first church**: They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

Quotes related to the larger context:

- **Advent**: Word with Latin roots, meaning 'coming.' Christians of earlier generations spoke of 'the advent of our Lord' and of 'His second advent.' The first phrase refers to God's becoming incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. The latter phrase speaks of Jesus' second coming. In a second sense 'advent' designates a period before Christmas when Christians prepare for the celebration of Jesus' birth. This practice may have begun in some churches as early as the late fourth century. Advent began as a time of fasting. Sermons focused on the wonder of the Incarnation. By the Middle Ages four Sundays had become the standard length of the Advent season. Since then, Advent has been considered to be the beginning of the church year." Fred A. Grissom and Steve Bond, "Advent," ed. Chad Brand et al., Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 31.
- **Confusion about hospitality**: Today when we think of hospitality, we don't think first of welcoming strangers. We picture having family and friends over for a pleasant meal. Or we think of the "hospitality industry," of hotels and restaurants which are open to strangers as long as they have money or credit cards. Perhaps large churches come to mind, with their "hospitality committees" that coordinate the coffee hour, greet visitors, or help with the parking. In any case, today most understandings of hospitality have a minimal moral component—hospitality is a nice extra if we have the time or the resources, but we rarely view it as a spiritual obligation or as a dynamic expression of vibrant Christianity. (Pohl, 4)

Bibliography:

- Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016).

- The Lexham Bible Dictionary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016)
- R. C. Sproul, ed., The Reformation Study Bible: English Standard Version (2015 Edition) (Orlando, FL: Reformation Trust, 2015), 1807.
- Christine D. Pohl, Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999).
- Ed Robb, Making Room: Sharing the Love of Christmas (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2020).
- Steve Corbett, Brian Fikkert, and Katie Casselberry, Helping without Hurting in Church Benevolence: A Practical Guide to Walking with Low-Income People (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015).

Other Articles/Songs/Videos: Please ask us about many other resources.

Direction for discussion leaders:
1. Keep circling back to the big idea and main points of the passage to stay on track.
2. Keep the discussion around 30mins. Go for a single, not a home run.
3. Keep the group small for deeper sharing. Once you hit the "sweet spot", spend your time there.
4. Keep these simple questions in your back pocket: What is God teaching you? What are you going to do about it? How will it help you love & serve others?

Let's prepare for our Christmas Eve sermon.
- Please read Luke 2:1-20 and Galatians 2.

Let's apply our Christmas Eve sermon.
- Thankfully, Jesus moved toward us, not away from us. Our table, like His, should always have room for outsiders. Is that true in your life or is that something you need to work on? What tips can you offer to help us navigate the tension of avoiding corruption (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:33), being non-condemning (cf. John 3:16-17), and engaging the right enemy (cf. Ephesians 6:12)?
- Besides communion, what do you enjoy most about the weekly church service? Is there a part you may prefer a little too much? For instance, how can a good desire for things like doctrine, preaching, worship music, or proper behavior cause us to lose sight of our unity with others as symbolized in the Lord's Supper? If you've ever struggled with this, please elaborate.

Here are some great resources for digging deeper into community group life…
How life together looks http://austinstone.org/stories/film/item/140-missional-community-lukes-story
Rethinking what we do https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kvWnXYSELF4&feature=player_embedded
Numerous articles to provoke thought http://toddengstrom.com/archives/
What groups of 2-3 might look like http://toddengstrom.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/LTG-Overview.pdf