

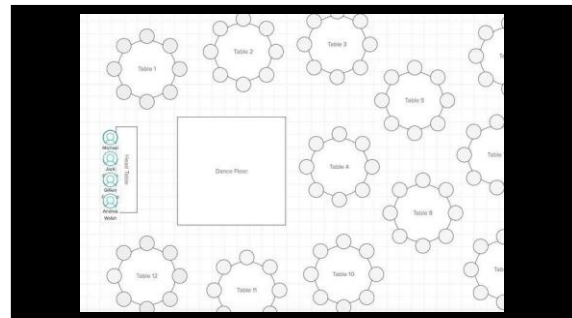
“Who gets a seat at God’s table?”

Bible reference for sermon: Luke 14:1, 7–14

⁸ “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host, ⁹ and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. ¹⁰ But when you are invited, go and sit down at 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 the table with you. ¹¹ For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Grace, peace and mercy are ours through the Triune God, who invites us to his banquet of grace.

If you’ve ever helped plan a wedding reception, you know how tricky the seating chart can be. Who should sit on the table near the bride and groom? Which relatives might not get along? Who gets the best seats, and how do you avoid offending anyone? A seating plan is never neutral. It shows relationships, status, and sometimes even old tensions.



Blessed are those who have a standing reception!

Jesus knew all about this. In today’s Gospel, he is at a Sabbath dinner in the home of a Pharisee. Luke tells us that the people were watching him closely, waiting to see what he would do. But Jesus was watching them, too. He noticed how guests were competing for the best places at the table. In response, he told a parable—not only about seating at a banquet, but about how God rearranges our whole way of seeing community.

Jesus begins with a simple observation. In his world, where you sat at a meal told everyone your importance. The higher your seat, the more honour you had.

But Jesus turns this upside down. He says: don't take the best seat. Sit lower down, and let the host invite you forward. At first this sounds like good manners—avoid



embarrassment, save face. But Jesus is teaching more than etiquette.

He is teaching humility—not as false modesty, but as a way of life that points to God's grace. "For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted." These words echo Mary's

song, where God brings down the proud and lifts up the lowly. The Gospel is not about protecting our pride but about God's great reversal. And in baptism we are joined to that reversal—washed clean, clothed in Christ, and welcomed without having to earn our place. God's banquet table is not arranged by human status but by divine mercy.

Jesus then speaks to the host. When you give a banquet, he says, don't invite only friends, relatives, or wealthy neighbours—people who can repay you. Invite the poor, the disabled, those who cannot return the favour.



This was shocking in Jesus' time. Meals were part of a system of favours and obligations. Sharing food was a way to climb the social ladder. But Jesus imagines a different way: a community held together not by calculation but by mercy, not by payback but by joy.

In God's kingdom, the table is strongest when it crosses boundaries. The outsiders become honoured guests. True blessing comes not from what you gain, but from what you give and share.

Luke also highlights how we see. At the beginning, the Pharisees are watching Jesus closely. But then Jesus notices how guests are choosing their seats. He sees in a different way.

This challenges us, too. Our world still judges people by wealth, race, ability, gender, or reputation. The poor are often blamed for their situation. People with disabilities can be ignored. Refugees and the displaced are treated as problems.

But Jesus looks with God's eyes. He sees beloved children where others see weakness. He sees dignity where society sees shame. He sees potential where others see a burden. As disciples, we are called to learn to see with his eyes—eyes of compassion, justice, and welcome.

Jesus' words in this passage are not just spiritual advice. They are also political. To host people who could never repay was not only unusual; it was dangerous. It challenged the very structures of society.

And that is the point. God's reign tears down worldly hierarchies. The kingdom is not a polite dinner party—it is a revolution. This is why Luke's Gospel is full of stories around food: the prodigal son welcomed with a feast, Lazarus embraced by Abraham while the rich man starves, the hungry fed in the wilderness, Jesus dining with tax collectors and sinners. These meals show us what God's new world, God's kingdom, looks like.

Jesus promises that those who invite the poor, the disabled, the outcast will be blessed. Not because they will get something back now, but because their lives align with God's kingdom.

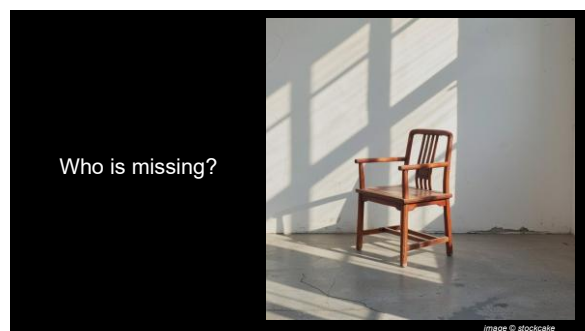
In Luke, blessing is never about wealth or popularity. Mary is blessed because she trusts God's promise. The poor, the hungry, and those who weep are blessed. Blessing means living in God's way, even if it clashes with the values of the world.

To be blessed is to open the table to all, to live God's hospitality here and now, and to look forward to the banquet of resurrection life. Baptism holds us in this promise: marked with the cross of Christ, sealed with the Spirit, we already have a place at the feast that no one can take away.

So what about us?

We live in a culture that still organizes "seating charts." Wealth and fame, race and citizenship, gender and education—these determine who is treated as important and who is not.

Jesus asks: Who is missing from our tables? Who have we overlooked because they cannot repay us? Who have we forgotten about because they no longer turn up? Who in our local community in Box Hill South is waiting for an invitation—not as a charity case but as an honoured guest, a child of God?



For the church, this is not extra work. Hospitality is at the heart of the Gospel. When we make space for the excluded, when we set the table with no expectation of return, we live as signs of God's kingdom. Our St Paul's Centre is a gift for our community. A chance for us as church to show hospitality to all whom we meet.

And, it's not just about a building. This parable is not about politeness or personal modesty. It is about a way of life. It is about choosing the lower place so that others are

lifted up. It is about letting go of privilege so that God's grace is visible in every aspect of our lives.

Humility is not weakness. It is courage. It is the courage to follow Jesus into the risky work of justice, to stand with those ignored or shamed, to live as though God's great feast is already unfolding in our world.



At the end of today's Gospel reading, Jesus gives us a vision: God's kingdom as a banquet. A table where every seat is a seat of honour. A feast where walls of division fall down. A meal where the only currency is grace.

In baptism we are already given a seat at this table, already named and claimed as beloved children. The water of life has placed our name card on God's seating chart, and nothing—neither sin nor death nor human hierarchy—can remove it.

We, as church, are called to be a foretaste of that feast: setting tables of welcome, working for justice, creating communities of hope for those hungry for food, for dignity, and for love.

So let us go humbly. Let us see with Christ's eyes. Let us invite those whom the world ignores. And let us rejoice in the blessing of God, who humbles the proud, lifts up the lowly, and fills the hungry with good things.

Amen.

Video of the service including the above address can be found on the St Paul's Lutheran Church Youtube page <https://www.youtube.com/@stpaulslutheranchurchboxhi1133>