

Sharing our lives with others, at the table and to the end!

Proverbs 25:6-7; Psalm 112; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

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Stewed goat, or as it is known where I'm from as Cabrito Guisado, is one of those family dishes made to be shared with large groups of people. And mostly on special occasions like birthdays, Thanksgiving, Christmas, etc. Whenever people hear that someone is going to make cabrito guisado, the question that is asked is not at what time do I show up, but who's making the cabrito (and the rice, and beans, and tortillas, and salsa). I bet you have a similar kind of dish, that everyone raves and craves for it. I remember when I was eight years old, and all sorts of strangers showed up to eat my mother's cabrito guisado. My mother had just dropped me off from school, and I was anxious to pick up where I left off on my Sega Genesis game. As I entered the living room, the familiar aroma of cabrito guisado compelled my hungry self to head to the kitchen and "taste test for my mother (I was really good at that)." My mother, savvy woman that she was, met me at the entrance of the kitchen with two of my "favorite things:" the mop and bucket. This served two purposes, one known to me and another not: free manual labor (the known), and pure exhaustion (the not known). After cleaning the house, I decided to rest my head on my bed for just a few minutes (which of course turned out to be three hours). I woke up, startled by what seemed to be the sounds of a party. I said seemed because I didn't recognize any one's voice except my father and mother. As I walked to the living room, I saw so many kids who I didn't know, playing with my toys, and leaving their half-eaten bowls of cabrito guisado everywhere. Naturally, I was livid. I went straight to my mother, demanding an explanation. Another, my mother had a task for me to do, and this time it dealt with the cabrito. My mother told me that this was the family of one of his workers, who had wanted to celebrate his daughter's birthday but didn't have any of his extended family in McAllen. For my parents, this was their mission: to follow Jesus' example of welcoming anyone to his table. They taught me to welcome people not because it made you appear to be the bigger person. Rather in sharing the best of what we have to offer, we no longer see strangers as hostile, as the other. They become both family and, as Hebrews says, "angels," messengers of God to us.

If there's one thing that was consistently said about Jesus, was that his life and ministry was one big fiesta. Franciscan friar and professor, Robert J. Karris (who has now become one of my favorite scholars) made this observation about Jesus' ministry at the table in his book, *Eating Your Way through Luke's Gospel*: "Jesus loves to eat and gets himself in deep trouble with the religious leaders of his day because of his eating habits." Whenever Jesus came to dine, he brought his plus-one with him: power of the Kin-dom of God. By the time that Jesus dined with one of the leaders of the pharisees, he had already proven himself to be a disruptive party guest, twice over. On the first occasion, he allowed a woman to wash his feet with her hairs, tears, and kisses before she anointed him with ointment. The party host, a pharisee, thought it scandalous for Jesus to let this so-called, "open sinner," touch him. Jesus made an example of this pharisee by forgiving the sin of this woman. On the second occasion, Jesus rebukes his pharisee host for focusing too much on customs such as ritually washing oneself before dining, and neglecting deeper spiritual renewal. I'm surprised that Jesus' isn't on some first century blacklist by the time he enters the house of one of the leaders of the pharisees, for a sabbat meal.

All eyes are on Jesus as he begins to notice how the guests were seating themselves. Rather than the leader of the pharisee assign them to their place of honor, or less honor at the meal. They themselves vied for positions of honor, the protoklisias, which was the center section at the dining table. Shame and honor was central to people in Jesus' time, as was the system of patronage. If you were invited to the dinner and you were a fairly important person, you were seated at the place of honor. The hope was, that they would return the favor by making sure you're at their next soiree. All this was to maintain the cultural and societal norms that kept certain people in positions of power, prestige and honor. Jesus loves to eat, but he's someone who builds a longer table, so that everyone can be winned and dined. He's a mama's boy who remixes the lullaby his mother used to sing to him after dinner: God has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. No longer would disciples then and us now, be valued by how we maintain systems of power, prestige, honor, sin. Jesus came to transform this broken world, and bring us into table fellowship with people of different abilities, neurodivergence, living, loving.

By now, you all have probably either read my letter and/or heard the news that I have accepted the call to be the Senior Pastor at Abiding Love Lutheran Church. Of the many lessons you as a congregation have taught me these past five years, it is how to eat well. To eat like Jesus. I'm not just referring to the many bottles of wine consumed at Festival each year, or the cheese spreads after Bach Society events, Reinetta Hansen's famous cookies, or even the sandwiches curated every time we have a reception for funerals at this congregation. I have learned what it means to eat at this table, as we share in Christ's body and blood. We become the body of Christ for the sake of the world. Just as we have been fed, so we too feed others. Wealth, fame, power or status do not define us at this table or from this table. It is Christ, who feeds us in love so that we can live in love for each other. The author of Hebrews calls this mutual love, philadelphia (the love of siblings) as he encourages his audience to continue in that love. Martin Luther described this love perfectly as the way we ought to live in Christ and for our neighbor: "therefore, we conclude that Christians do not live in themselves but in Christ and their neighbor, or else they are not Christian." May this love guide you in the weeks and months to come, as together you heal from your losses so that you may then discern the qualities and characteristics needed of ministers who will be called to serve this community. Share in each other lives, starting with this table, and going into every corner of your life together.

I learned much about sharing life with strangers, as I help my mother ladle cabrito guisado unto so many plates. Here was Jesus, getting himself into some good trouble at the kitchen table. Jesus is calling me to join him at another table, to dine with those whom I will have the privilege of serving just as I have served you. May the mutual love you showed me, continue, as you share each other's burdens and joys. This table is only the beginning. Amen.