

All the H-words

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Luke 14:1, 7-14

14:1 On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.

² Just then, in front of Jesus, there was a man who had dropsy. ³ And Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees, "Is it lawful to cure people on the sabbath, or not?" ⁴ But they were silent. So Jesus took him and healed him, and sent him away. ⁵ Then he said to them, "If one of you has a child or an ox that has fallen into a well, will you not immediately pull it out on a sabbath day?" ⁶ And they could not reply to this.

14:7 When Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.

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;

14:9 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.

14:10 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.

14:11 For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

14:12 He said also to the one who had invited him, "When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid.

14:13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.

14:14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."

Communion Meditation

As a way to think about the Scripture, we encounter lots of H-words. First, we pick up on the Pharisees' hostility towards Jesus. Secondly, Jesus heals on the Sabbath. Thirdly, think of the word Honor- Jesus redefines who are honored guests. They are not the ones we would think. And furthermore, Jesus gives us a lesson on Humility in the Kingdom of God. Finally, Jesus describes what true HOME looks like- a place of hospitality and welcome.

Hostility, healing, honor, humility, hospitality and home. All the H-words.

I was driving through Pendleton the other day and noticed banners on their streetlight poles. Somebody must have read Jesus' words because the signs read, " History, Hospitality, Happenings, Home." Bravo all you Pendletonians...

Of all of those H-words, I am drawn most to home.
This sabbath feast happens in a home, and not just any home.
This is more than a church manse, this is the Mansion of the Arch Pharisee- the leader of the synagogue. Home.

When I was in graduate school, Seminary, we were required to meet with a group of professors in our middle year to assess if we were fit not just for our studies, but fit for the ministry.
I was anxious, but knew the professors rather well.
I was ready for a grilling.
I wasn't sure if they would quiz me on theology, bible, or what.
But the most unexpected thing happened.
My New Testament professor Stan, turned to me and said, "Laura, where do you feel most at home?"

Strangely, my eyes teared up. My throat caught as I thought of home.
Then immediately I answered, "In worship, and at the Open Door Community."
Home for me is about where I connect with God and where I get to be a part of God's people.
But the Open Door was not just any community, as I have shared with you before.
Members live in a big house, a former boarding school.
This Christian Community exists to show hospitality to strangers, especially the poor.
For me as a twenty-something, worship and the Open Door were the places I met Jesus and felt most at home.
Actually, I experienced the Kingdom of God there.
Your answer to where you feel most at home may be different.

I think we are all lonely for community, for meaning, for God.
The Open Door is based on the model of Christian community led by Dorothy Day.
Dorothy Day wrote, "**We have all known the long loneliness, and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community.**"

Loneliness¹

In the UK loneliness is such a problem, considered a public health crisis, that they have established a Minister of Loneliness.
Along with loneliness, comes emotional and physical health issues, crime...
So they have decided to address the problem of loneliness as a nation.

And recently a study was done in our country about loneliness.

The hypothesis was that if they were to survey all ages of adults, that the oldest, most homebound group would feel the loneliest.

Limited physically, the elderly must also be cut off from friendship and family.

But the findings were quite the opposite.

The loneliest generation was the millennials, now twenty and thirty-somethings. Millennials were also the most anxious and depressed.

But the oldest generation had relationships with real, live people who visited them, called them, cared for them.

The young adults were the most cut off from community.

Ironically, they also are the most digitally connected group.

But real community comes in person.

Dorothy Day wrote, "We have all known the long loneliness, and we have learned that the only solution is love and that love comes with community."

Jesus teaches us today that real community is built on hospitality and humility.

Proverbs 25:6-7

Don't work yourself into the spotlight;

don't push your way into the place of prominence.

It's better to be promoted to a place of honor

than face humiliation by being demoted.

This proverb and Jesus' story are lessons in humility.

We are reminded of our own place in God's eyes

is right alongside every other person created by God.

It is a lesson in not thinking we are greater than we are

lest we leave out someone who needs to have a place at the table.

Thomas Merton once wrote,

*"The humble (person) receives praise the way a clean window takes the light of the sun. The truer and more intense the light is, the less you see of the glass."*ⁱⁱ

What an image for those of us seeking to reflect the light of Christ in our lives, in our decision making , in our relationships.

How wonderful to imagine God shining so brightly through us

that people see the love of God most clearly.

Humble in Christ

Humble enough to make sure everyone is included at the table.

Last Sunday night we gathered at the Presbyterian Student Center for the usual Sunday night dinner and program for University students.

The Council of Students shared.

The University Ministry team fed everyone.

New friends and old gathered as community.

Everyone spoke of the importance of having a place to belong, to call home while here in college.

But at one point, Kate said, "**We are here for you. We mean that. If you need rides, just use the Group text, and we will pick you up. And seriously, last year, I needed a ride to Greenville to get a CAT scan. Ashley drove me to the appointment and waited with me. "**

The Love of God shines through when we are Christ to one another.

We become like that glass Merton spoke of.

Jesus is the one who others see.

That's hospitality, being at home with one another in God's love.

Jesus calls us to extend welcome and that happens best around tables.

The table is the place where we meet Jesus so often.

The Table is where Jesus taught, met, and encouraged others regularly.

This is one reason why Presbyterians have a Communion Table and not an altar.

But that table of grace is given to be shared and extended, especially to those who need it most- the left-out, the lonely, the broken and suffering.

A special kind of table set a world record not long ago.

In Durham, England a group of builders decided to construct the longest picnic table in the world.

It was 137 meters long, over 400 feet- longer than a football field.

Think about how many people could get around that table!

In conjunction with Habitat for Humanity,

all the lumber used for this 137 meter table

would be reused to build houses for people in need. ⁱⁱⁱ

But this table made quite a statement,

built first as a place where people could break bread together

it was then remade into houses,

homes for people who were struggling to afford a home of their own.

Think about it, a picnic table is not a fancy banquet table,
but rather one you can come to wearing any kind of clothing,
you don't have to know which fork to use
or how to hold up your pinkie while you drink
At picnic tables, sometimes you just eat with your hands.
And amazingly at a picnic table,
there always seems to be room to squeeze in one more.
especially at a 400 foot table!

I imagine this kind of table is a place lots of people would feel welcome
to be themselves and just scooch in no matter where they were from.
That seems to be a table Jesus would enjoy gathering around
where conversation would be easy,
where stories could be shared about our lives
and our need for one another.
And where all would have a balanced meal,
where every last person would serve and be served
mysteriously by Christ's grace.

So what if, we, followers of Christ, decide to eat more meals together- and with neighbors?

In Greenville on the Monday before Thanksgiving they will put 50 eight foot long tables down Main Street, and invite everyone to a potluck.
The group called *Gratefull* Greenville^{iv} are having sort of a flash mob potluck.
It is a potluck for all- a chance to talk around tables and to be fed.
The organizers grew up in Greenville and noticed that with great change, many people are disconnected- rich from poor, black from white, homeless from housed.
And they want to build community when it seems like more divisions exist.

What if Fort Hill church did something like that?

Or all the churches along Sloan St. threw a feast and invited the whole downtown to a potluck?
Students living in high-rises, neighbors without homes sheltering in the park, church folk, downtown workers, local neighborhood people, breaking bread.
Maybe some brokenness and divisions healed, even just a bit.
Grateful for a chance to connect as community where we can all be surrounded by crowds of people and yet, feel so lonely.

Today we gather at the Lord's Table to break bread.

The Church calls this supper, the Eucharist- meaning *eucharisto*- Greek for "I give thanks."

Today we have confessed our brokenness- our lack of connection to God and one another.
We are restored by the words, "In the name of Jesus Christ, we are forgiven."
And at this table we are re-membered- put back together again as God's beloved Children- God's people.

As we come forward we can all look around and see the ones to whom we belong-
Jesus' body, his church.

As we eat together we remember that we are called to share-
for we all have the same hunger and thirst-
to belong-to overcome the long loneliness- to love and be loved.

Orthodox theologian Andrew Schemann writes, "we offer the bread in remembrance of Christ because we know that Christ is Life, and all food, therefore, must lead us to Him."

Jesus is the host at every meal.
And His message is clear, "Welcome home."

ⁱ Carey Nieuwhof on Typology podcast, *Carey Nieuwhof on the Enneagram and Self-Leadership*, part 2 July 11, 2019.

ⁱⁱ Thomas C. Howell, *The Beattitudes for Today*, pg. 48

ⁱⁱⁱ Durhamregion.com, August 18, 2015

^{iv} <https://projecthost.squarespace.com/grateful-gvl> and
https://www.greenvilleonline.com/story/news/local/2019/08/12/main-street-meal-gratefull-gvl-everyone-invited-connect-greenville-sc-potluck/1953073001/?fbclid=IwAR0Uw9GX_Z6ZgGiLwHrHsbhWki5HDfMKWRju4WS3OYd6mA3sQwBbG_VDh9E