

LUKE 14: 1, 7-14  
“The Bad Dinner Guest”

MIDWAY CHRISTIAN CHURCH  
October 4, 2015

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## INTRODUCTION

This morning is WORLD COMMUNION SUNDAY and all across the country and other parts of the world, Christians are lifting up the importance of the Communion Table, the prayers for the bread and cup, the Words of Institution and what all these things mean not only in their own faith tradition, but also how the Table is supposed to bring us all together as the people of God. Christians will hear stories of the first Lord’s Supper, and some will also hear stories about the importance of the Table in their own local church history. **But sometimes I don’t think we get the true meaning of what the Table represents.**

In our text, we see Jesus as a guest at the home of a Pharisee. We don’t know why Jesus has been invited to the home of one of those in authority who is “watching him closely.” We don’t know why he accepted, but there he is, seated at the table, when he becomes what all of us dread, is a, **“bad guest.”**

## ILLUSTRATION

Have you ever been to a party or some sort of social gathering, when someone puts everyone on edge? Perhaps they have had too much to drink, or they are speaking too passionately about their version of politics, religion, or the football team. Whatever the circumstances, people are getting nervous. Spouses are looking at each other, with expressions that ask, “Can we leave now?” Nobody knows what to do or say, so you just find yourself standing with weak smiles hoping that someone will stop the person who is making everyone so uneasy.

One night some friends and I were eating out at a nice restaurant. When we finished our meal, we sat talking and catching up with each other when a woman at another table in a loud voice said,

“Charlie, you don’t love me anymore.” Well we all looked at our watches and said it was time to go. This poor woman had embarrassed Charlie and made those around her feel uncomfortable. This is exactly what Jesus had done. He made those around him, his fellow guests and host uncomfortable.

## MEALS

**Meals are a big deal in the Gospel of Luke**, and in the time of Jesus, the seating arrangements were organized by your social class and rank in society. So Jesus looks around and begins to insult his fellow guests by saying that they should not seek the places of honor at the feast. “Don’t build yourself up he says.” “For all who exalt themselves will be humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” And to the amazement of everyone, he doesn’t stop there. **He then turns on his host, the very person who invited him to dinner.**

The usual practice of the day was to invite people to these dinners and feasts, who were very much like you; people who could in turn invite you to their homes for meals, who could pass on insider information about some new economic projects; people who can help your child get a job, over someone who is more qualified than he is. In other words, they invited and socialize with those who could pass on favors to them. It was a, “you scratch my back and I will scratch yours” society.

## TODAY

What has all this got to do with us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? Well, we Disciples practice coming to the Table each and at every opportunity we have. We come every Sunday to the Table. Our youth partake of the bread and cup at camp. Our men and women come to the Table at retreats. **We hold the Lord’s Table in high esteem. It is part of our identity as Disciples of Christ.**

Yet I think we sometime forget, that our Communion Table, no matter what size, shape, color, or design, is a small icon, of what God had in mind. **At God’s Table all are invited to attend.** Let

me say that again, **all are invited to the Table**. At His Table, those who have had to step back because of their earthly conditions are lifted up in the eyes of God. So the poor *and* the rich are invited to the Table. The master *and* the slave. The divorced, the sick, the homeless, republicans, democrats and independents are invited. Men, women and children, black, white and every person in between are to be a part of the Great Banquet in the Kingdom of God.

In the larger picture, Jesus isn't just talking about when we come together for an hour or two on Sunday morning. Christian hospitality is to be extended 24/7, by all of us.

#### ILLUSTRATION

There was once a man who was down on his luck when he came to the church. He was rough looking. He needed a shave, a haircut, a bath and clean clothes. He also needed something to eat. **He came not asking for help, but demanding it.** The pastor and a couple of others at the church, gathered clothes, food, and personal hygiene items for him as well as some cash. They also prayed for him.

As he turned to leave, the man made this comment. *"I know that you expect me to say thank you for what you have done and make a promise that when I get on my feet, I'm going to start coming to your church. Well I'm not going to, he said. What you did for me is what you are supposed to do."*

Every time you open the doors of your church for a community dinner, don't expect those who attend, to become a part of your church. Every time you give clothing through your clothing bank, or school supplies to kids who need them, don't expect anyone to say thank you. Every time a woman shows up at this church and says that **Jim Bob, or Diego, or Jamal** or whatever his name is, didn't bring his paycheck home over the weekend and she needs food for herself and kids, don't expect that woman or her children to every make a donation to your church.

**When you open the doors of the church, you may be surprised at who God sends your way.** Often with God, the host becomes the guest and the guest becomes the host. Roles are reversed. We serve, we give AND we receive. The poor, the sick, the lame, the homeless, the ex-con, the drug addict, the good old boy, the man in the tailor made suite, the unmarried woman who has several children out of wedlock, **all make their way to the church, expecting to receive everything when they obtain the hospitality of God through you, yet, they may not give anything in return. But they are still welcomed to the house, the table of God.**

#### OXFORD CHRISTIAN

Almost two years ago when I served as an interim at Oxford Christian, I was told the story of a member who was a bad guest. He was argumentative and disruptive. He had a key to the church so that he was able to enter any time of the day or night. So, if the church was decorated for a special occasion and he did not like it, he would come in and change it to the way that he wanted. He tried his best to undermine the church in every way possible.

Finally the church had had enough. They had a special meeting and asked the man to leave the church. They no longer wanted him as a member because of his troublesome behavior. He of course said that he was not going anywhere. So the church then took him to court. The judge listened to everyone's point of view and pronounced to the "bad member," YOU ARE OUT! Can you imagine that happening to you? I can't. I would hope that the church would continue to love me and welcome me with all my shortcomings.

#### CONCLUSION

When we sing the old hymn, "Just as I Am," what does that mean to you? We all have secrets. We all at times wear a mask. We all have weaknesses, bumps and bruises. We all have done things we can't undo. **But despite all our faults, God has extended his hospitality to all of us. In God's Kingdom, the church is to**

**make sure that there will always be a great deal of inviting and hospitality, even when those invited, turn out to be bad dinner guests.**