

LENT IN PLAIN SIGHT: TABLE MANNERS

John 2: 13-22

April 3, 2022

In our second scripture lesson this morning, Jesus is angry. He is flipping over tables and driving everyone out of his Father's house. Every time I hear this scripture, I'm taken aback by Jesus' anger. I wonder, "Why is Jesus so angry?" Perhaps you wonder, too. Listen for the clues as I read from John 2:13-22.

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!"

His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?"

Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?"

But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

You have to ask yourself: "Why is Jesus so angry?" I want to talk about that, but first I want to look at a few different tables.

First, I want to share a story with you about a very special table in my life. You all have these tables. It's my grandmother Ruth's table. Ruth Morton Burns was a force to be reckoned with! Red hair,

beautiful eyes, a kindness and love for others, an impeccable eye for fashion, tailored dresses and brooches situated just so, and her fine leather bags—an elegance that seemed to be part of her very being. Not that she had a lot, but what she had she invested in the very best. Details mattered.

Nowhere was this more evident than around her table. And what a table it was! I can still remember on Sundays following church, her cheeks were flushed from the heat of the kitchen. She would untie her apron—revealing a beautiful dress—step to the table, and call us all to dinner.

With the crisp, starched linens, the fine glassware filled with iced tea so fresh that the ice cubes were melting as it was poured, I can still remember the magic of her food: fried chicken that I still can't figure out the recipe, mashed potatoes and gravy, hot rolls, real butter, peas with cream sauce, and custard for dessert.

It was around my grandmother's table that I learned *table manners*. Napkin in your lap. Sit up straight. Chew slowly and with your mouth closed. Do not eat until everyone has been served. And never eat until this blessing has been offered: "Our heavenly Father, who gives us food for the body and strength for the mind, so enlighten and nourish us that we may grow strong and wise to do thy Holy will. Amen."

Even as children, we were expected to bring our best to the table. In all the mess that a family brings, the table was where I learned true intimacy. To listen. To see. To love in spite of our differences. To be patient. And not that tough things weren't discussed. Oh, they were! Real life happened around that table.

But around my grandmother's table, I learned to appreciate the value of good food. Of being nourished, food for the body and strength for the mind.

As a child, those meals seemed to last forever. I longed to be excused from the table, to get outside to play with my brothers. But often we got the eye, and we sat and listened to adult conversation.

Years later, and many dinners and tables later, both my older brother and I found ourselves living in our hometown of Evansville. Different circumstances had brought us back home. Although much had changed—my grandmother lived in a much smaller house with a much smaller table—the table had not changed. Although she was alone, she still prepared an evening meal, and occasionally my brother and I would bump into each other hoping to be invited to stay for dinner following a hard day at work.

I believe that it was the memory of the table, of all those family meals, the love, that sustained her. The intimacy of being together. And I know that even when we were not there, my grandmother wasn't alone at that table. Her memories and Christ's presence sustained her.

I still long for fellowship at table around the close of each day. Times around table are what have sustained me in all of my life. I imagine that each one of you has those memories as well. What if we shared our life sustaining memories with one another? I think we would be transformed.

Let's look at another table—a Passover table. In our first scripture lesson we find Jesus, coming to the Last Supper, and once again we see the importance of the life of the table. He asked Peter and John to go ahead, to secure a place, and to prepare the Passover meal.

Scripture tells us that Jesus was eager to be with his disciples. He said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer." He knew that he needed his friends. He longed for the comfort of their presence. To be nourished. To be strengthened.

And Jesus knew, too, all of the mess that life, that

friendship, brings. But still, around that table, he learned and taught his disciples true intimacy. He taught them through many parables. He invited them to see others and themselves in spite of their differences. He urged them to be patient. And he modeled trust in the face of betrayal. Jesus invited the disciples to bring their best.

Jesus knew what lay before him. Anticipating his disciples' confusion, he said, "I tell you, I will not eat until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then He took a cup, and giving thanks, he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves, for I tell you that I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." He gave them a loaf of bread saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Longing to give the disciples a way forward, Jesus gave them *a way to remember*.

At that table, Jesus gave the very best he had: himself.

What must the disciples be thinking and feeling? They thought they were invited to a Passover meal, and they hear it is Jesus' last meal. How could they even swallow the bread? Or drink from the cup? Did they see this coming?

In the middle of life and in his anticipation of his death, *Jesus challenges them to remember*. He gives them life sustaining memories around the table set for Passover. Jesus offers the disciples intimacy, love, and wisdom. And the memory of this Passover meal will stay with them until their last day, just as it affects us years later.

Jesus gave us a way forward. He gave us a way to remember every time we come together around the table. He gave us the gift of his spirit which makes that possible.

So now we find ourselves back at the original question: Why was Jesus so angry?

The Passover was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And in the temple, he found

people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and the moneychangers seated at the table. *In the temple.*

Making a whip of cords, he drove them all out, even the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins and flipped over the tables. He told those who were selling doves, “Take those things out of here! Stop making my Father’s house a market place.”

Turning over the tables is an act of love. It is an act of love for his Father, for God. It is an act of love on behalf of all those who were there seeking prayer and worship, even the moneychangers and the merchants.

The people had lost their way. They had lost sight of why they came to the temple in the first place. It is not that the animals or the moneychangers were bad in and of themselves. Friends, the tables in the temple were barriers to God. They were barriers to the intimacy and love that Jesus knew and longed for the people to know.

The tables were in the way. And that is why Jesus became angry.

God’s house, this church, is a place of honor. It’s a place of belonging. It’s a place of prayer. This table is a place for intimacy, for listening and learning even when we don’t agree, for seeing one another and God, for patience and love, and for bringing our best selves.

No one should be blocked from entering. No one should be blocked from prayer and worship. No one should be blocked from the knowledge of God, and the knowledge that you belong to God and to one another.

The table was central to Jesus and his ministry. The table is central here.

Friends, tables are meant to unite us. To bring us together to share our stories, ourselves, the good and the bad. To listen. To truly see one another.

What are the barriers that keep you from God? Anything can be a barrier. I admit that it is scary to think of Jesus, angry with a whip in his hand, knocking over the tables in my life.

How about you?

Because of Christ’s great love for you and for me and for all of his creation, let us pay attention to our table manners. At Second Presbyterian Church, may our tables be a place of intimacy, where we listen even to those we don’t agree with. Where we see, and where we are patient, and love.

Jesus has provided a way. He calls us to the table with eagerness. Listen. With great love, Jesus will overcome the barriers in your lives, in my life, in all lives. It’s a promise. To God be the glory. Amen.