

GUIDING LIGHTS: RECLAIMING EVERYDAY VIRTUES

Make Space - Courage

Luke 14:15-24

October 5, 2025

From the beginning, the Christian story has been written at tables. Jesus set the tone, eating with sinners and outcasts and spinning these wild stories about feasts where the most unlikely guests topped the invitation list. His followers later scandalized their neighbors with their fellowship dinners that mixed men and women, rich and poor, slave and free, Jew and Gentile.

But tables tell two stories. They can be places of exclusion as well as inclusion. Who is invited? Who is left out?

On this World Communion Sunday, Jesus tells a parable about a banquet and an act of courage that redefines the meaning of belonging. The story starts with every host's nightmare. You clean the house. You borrow chairs from the neighbor. You drag down those extra table leaves from the attic. You prepare an elaborate meal. Then, one by one, just before they're to arrive, the guests begin to call. *Sorry, can't make it. Something came up. Just not feeling well. Too busy. Can't make it.* Before you can catch your breath, the distinguished list of guests you carefully curated has evaporated. No one is coming.

The excuses sound familiar. Who hasn't heard them all, or made them all? Okay, maybe not the one about the oxen, but you get the point. In response, the host's anger feels very human. All that work for an empty table.

We might expect the host to cancel the party in wounded pride, to let the feast spoil in silence. But just watch what courage does: *Go out into the streets and lanes, and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.*

Then, when there's still room: *Go back! Go back out into the streets and lanes; compel people to come, so that my house may be filled.*

He isn't just inviting a different set of people. He's subverting the criteria for inclusion, shifting his focus from the right crowd to a crowded table.

In Jesus's world, refusing a banquet invitation was more than ghosting the host; it was a public insult. And bringing in the very people excluded by purity codes wasn't pity; it was reversal. Jesus isn't telling a charming story about hospitality here.

This is a picture of the kingdom of God and a warning to the religious leaders at dinner with him. Exclude others from God's table, and you will find yourselves left outside.

This is not charity. It is courageous witness.

I saw this kind of courage years ago, worshiping with a Catholic community outside Managua, Nicaragua. Their church was beautifully broken. There were only two complete walls on either side, only half a roof, dirt floor. Which all combined to mean that no one, and nothing, could be kept out. I'm talking about birds flying through during the homily. I'm talking about children who repeatedly kicked soccer balls into the chancel and a priest who kicked them back with a grin. Street vendors selling their crafts. Babies fussing. Laughter drifting in on the breeze.

And as we prepared for Eucharist, as we prepared for the Lord's Supper, people wandered in from north and south and east and west to join us. Then the Nicaraguan priest did something that took my breath away. He invited our group of Presbyterians to come forward for the sacrament. No, he *insisted* that we come.

"*Esta mesa*," he said, "*es para ustedes también*." This table is for you as well.

Not the right crowd. A crowded table.

It's the message of the parable. When God sets the table, we don't set the guest list. When we decide who belongs at this table, we have forgotten our role in the story. We are not the host. We are the servants whose master has said, "I want my house to be filled and no seat left empty." We are invited guests compelled to invite others, to say, "This table is for you as well."

On World Communion Sunday, the Christian family draws the widest circle we can imagine. The table links us to Christ-followers in village churches and soaring cathedrals, in refugee camps and everywhere a table is set for the Lord's Supper. We affirm our unity with siblings facing persecution, war, famine, crushing poverty across the globe. This awareness of our unity creates an agonizing tension. For followers of Jesus, our global solidarity is inseparable from the reality of brokenness. Our table is set in a world of pain.

The parable concludes with haunting judgment: *None of those who were first invited will taste my dinner.* They had a chance. They chose scarcity over abundance. They chose control over grace.

But the banquet will not wait. Their seats are already taken. With or without us, God's table will be filled.

We come as invited guests. We come as those who were once standing on the margins, brought near by the wonder of welcome. We are the ones waiting in the highways and the hedges for the scandalous embrace we never deserved. And having been so welcomed, we have no excuse to exclude.

The most subversive thing the church can do in a fractured time is to prove that profoundly different people can share the same loaf, the same cup, the same hope.

And so, Second Church, we are called to courage. To confront the corners of our own hearts where exclusion has taken root. I remember in college, when I was sorting through my own views, I asked my mentor, Dr. Orval Wintermute, how to reconcile what seemed to me at odds. As he often did, the old professor answered my question with a question. I've never forgotten it. "Chris, do you think

it is possible to overestimate the love of God?" I know some of you are wrestling with this tension right now. That struggle takes faithfulness when many would rather draw lines of separation.

Some are preaching a pseudo-gospel of identity checklists and limited seating. The vulnerable are treated as a threat to be managed rather than neighbors to be welcomed. The baptized are denied a place at the tables of leadership or blessing because of who they are. Exclusion is excused in the guise of "biblical fidelity." Hostility dressed up as "muscular authority." This is not new. The church has always faced this temptation—to be those first invited guests in Jesus' parable, the ones who had their *reasons*, who had their *standards*. Who chose their own self-constructed circles over the extravagant welcome of the host. And it left their stomachs empty and their hearts hardened.

The truth of the gospel is deeper. As Yale theologian Miroslav Volf has written, exclusion is not just rude. *It is a lie about God* when we exclude, claiming God's abundance is limited and suggesting God's grace has boundaries we get to determine. When we decide who's in and out, we are making ourselves the host of a meal we were only invited to.

The courage Christ calls us to is subversive precisely because it refuses the categories our culture—and much of the church—insists upon. So, what does this mean for us?

Well, it might be the most important work for the church now: to show again and again, to show the world, that we are not a vehicle for extremism, division, or weaponized fear, but a community called to reflect God's boundless grace, especially when that work stretches us.

So yes, we share tables to address food insecurity. Yes, we stay in relationship even when it's hard. Yes, we refuse to treat any person or group of people as a problem to be solved when they are God's beloved children claimed by the same grace that claims us.

We reject the baptizing of dehumanizing ideologies. We refuse to recreate God in our image. Because, friends, the call of the Lord's table is not a call to politeness but to faithfulness. To be faithful to a God who invited us when

we had no claim on belonging—and who keeps extending the invitation.

I think you know exactly who needs an invitation to your table. I think you know who has been waiting at the edges while you're comfortable at the center. Listen: God's love transcends all your categories. You cannot overestimate it.

When you come forward this morning, remember that priest on his beautifully broken altar, who chose the courage of welcome over rigid rules. His choice changed my life.

Esta mesa es para ustedes también. This table is for you as well. So, make space for everyone our host welcomes.

Pray with me: *Holy God, gather us at your table. Seat us beside those we would never invite. Send us to carry your love to all. Amen.*