

Year C – 12th Sunday after Pentecost; Lectionary 22 – August 31, 2025

Pastor Megan Floyd

Proverbs 25:6-7a

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Luke 14:1, 7-14

Grace and peace to you from God, our Creator, and from Jesus, our Savior, who invites us to share in the gift of a meal, for which we can never repay. Amen.

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It is remarkable to me how often the Holy Spirit swirls around us with opportunities to practice the radical love that Jesus invites us into...

And there are a couple of exciting ones that I'll tell you about in a bit.... These opportunities were awesome when I first heard about them, but even more so after thinking about how they fit with our scripture today.

The Spirit is feisty like that... I love it... but before I tell you about them... we need to talk about Jesus... and his lesson on table manners.

Drawing from the old wisdom found in Proverbs, Jesus tells these Pharisees and leaders not to claim the most prestigious spot at the table, where you might have to lower yourself if someone higher in the social hierarchy arrives.

But instead... choose the lowest spot, so that you might be honored when asked to move higher.

“For all who exalt themselves will be humbled... and all who humble themselves will be exalted.”

What Jesus leaves hanging in the air... is that if they intentionally choose the lowest spot... *so that* the host will honor them... choosing to humble themselves *so that* they may be exalted among others... then they have missed the point.

...they have missed the point.

The game of honor and shame... of social hierarchy and status... of being humbled or exalted before others... is not how the kingdom of God works.

Jesus tells us to forego the shuffling around for status altogether and instead, invite those who cannot return the favor... to give to those who cannot give anything in return.

Do not invite the elite of society to your dinner party. Instead, invite those whom our society pushes to the edges... the ones whom society would like to forget exist.

Jesus' word for us today... is to step away from the cultural expectation of social climbing and quid pro quo... to stop jockeying for status and prestige...

Share a meal with those with whom no one else would dare share a meal ... those who have no food to offer you in return.

This is what Jesus himself did... time and time again... revealing to us the values of God's kingdom.

When you look upon those who have nothing to offer you... and recognize that in the eyes of God, you are equal... and you are both loved beyond measure...

*That* is where God's blessing is revealed... that is how we glimpse the face of God in our neighbor.

Not by lording our status or privilege over them... but by recognizing that we are siblings through Christ.

And just as I am reminded today of the radical hospitality that Jesus calls us to extend...

I also remember that we are the ones who have nothing to offer... and yet, Jesus invites us to such a meal...

We are the ones... whom Jesus has invited to come and share the meal of bread and wine... a meal that comes with the promised presence of our God, and the full and great cloud of witnesses from all time.

We are the ones whom Jesus has invited to receive this incredible gift... for which we cannot ever repay, and for which we are only worthy to receive because Jesus has declared us to be worthy.

We dine on such a meal almost every time we gather for worship...

...and so, our Savior, Jesus Christ, is calling us to do for others, as he did for us... as Jesus continues to do for us.

Jesus is inviting us to live in a completely different world within our culture... inviting us to embrace the values and ideals of God's kingdom...

inviting us to claim the blessing that is found by extending grace and hospitality to those whom others would just as soon forget.

And to not only see ourselves as equal to them under God's eyes...

But to connect with them in such a way that their suffering becomes our suffering, their hunger becomes our hunger... their pain becomes our pain... so that together, we might break the causes of oppression, poverty, and harm.

Because when our neighbor is suffering... it's personal.

It was counter-cultural then, and it is counter-cultural now... Jesus has been inviting us into something new, and something better... this whole time.

Our text from Hebrews tells us to remember those in prison *as if* you were in prison... remember those being tortured *as if* you were being tortured.

That's a level of connection that most of us would rather avoid...

Yet, we are urged not to keep those in need at arm's length. They are our siblings in Christ, and God loves them as much as God loves us.

This idea... completely topples the social hierarchy... and shreds the practice of jostling for the seat at the table that will earn you the most prestige.

Invite those who cannot invite you in return... give to those who cannot repay your kindness.

This kind of generosity... is the true source of God's blessing. Still, I confess... that it's easy to say... harder to do.

However... we know that God's Holy Spirit is with us on our faith journey, and this week was no exception.

So, this is what I wanted to share with you... These opportunities seem Spirit-inspired.

The first is something that our pantry team has been working on... they have been blessed with an abundance... and have been looking for ways to bless others beyond the visitors to our pantries... with that abundance.

After much due diligence, they have connected with a group called Homeless Angels in Lansing.

Every Sunday night, all year long, they serve a dinner in a park in Lansing where anyone can come and eat.

The meals are sponsored by various organizations, and volunteers help serve the food.

Along with the meal, they often have donated hygiene products and bags with non-perishable foods that folks can take with them.

This is where our pantry team comes in. Out of their abundance, they will provide food items for our high schoolers to pack into easy-to-carry bags on September 21<sup>st</sup>, which is our first high school youth group night.

Then, on Sunday, Sept. 28<sup>th</sup>, Gretchen and I will deliver the bags and stay to help serve the meal. We want to start building a relationship with this group and the neighbors they serve.

...and by the way, this is an open invitation. If you'd like to join us, please do!

Our hope is that our new High School Youth Group will be able to come and serve with this group at some point in the future.

The other opportunity came from a conversation I had with Randy... he and Jamie volunteer at the Mission in Lansing on the fourth Thursday of every month.

I know some of you have joined them from time to time... but Randy was telling me that they have moved into their new location... and now have the capacity to serve 300 at mealtimes.

...and together, we lamented that there was a need to serve 300 at mealtimes.

But the increased capacity means an increase in the need for volunteers to help serve those meals.

And so here again... is another opportunity to serve and share a meal with those who cannot repay...

These are both opportunities to share life with those whom Jesus would have given preference to... to share in their humanity.

Jesus consistently gravitated toward those who were on the edges... toward those who are so pushed down that they couldn't see the light.

Jesus meets them in that space... and loves them... reminds them that they are beloved children of God... reminds them that they bear the image of God and they are worthy of God's love.

Jesus meets them... just as Jesus meets all of us wherever we are... and loves us... and calls us all to share God's love... to share God's invitation.

And.... to give preference to those who cannot return the favor.

For in doing so... in letting our guard down and allowing ourselves to share in the full humanity of our neighbor, whom God loves... Jesus knows that we will be blessed.

Not because we have a higher place than them or a better seat at the table... or because we can congratulate ourselves on being so generous... that's missing the point.

We are blessed because when we look into their eyes, we glimpse the face of God.

And the best news... The Holy Spirit will not stop showing up with opportunities for us to join in the work of bringing close God's Kingdom. It's an open invitation... so come to the party.

Amen.