

The series we're jumping into is the practice or habit of Table Welcome. There's something uniquely ordinary about tables. Thinking back to my childhood, I remember sitting around the table eating with my family. We would often welcome others around the table, but more often than not, it was just our own.

There's just something about tables. We celebrate around tables—birthdays and anniversaries. Wedding celebrations are all built around a meal built around the table. No one really goes to the wedding for the ceremony. You go there for the reception and food. We gather around tables to celebrate. There's something about tables, but the flip is true as well.

Around tables, although ordinary, is not just where we celebrate but also where we grieve. The receptions after funerals or memorials in which you gather with family are around a table to remember and to reflect and share stories. Tables have this ordinary dimension in which they can hold together the entire experience of what it means to be human, from the highest of highs to the lowest of lows. Tables and the meals around them seem to be both equal parts commonplace and sacred space.

They're common in that it's one of the things that democratizes the experience of humanity around the world. Every society in every corner of the world gathers around some form of a table for meals. There's something sacred about this place. For all of its ordinariness, meals have the ability to transcend the mere exchange of calories. There's something greater that can take place as you sit at a meal. Have you had that experience? When the food is just right, the nice bottle of wine or sparkling cider that seems like you don't want the night to end. Meals have the ability to create sacred space where the raw honesty of life happens. It's a microcosm to life itself. A place where the sacred and the ordinary intersect.

Recently, Lindsay and I were invited to this beautiful dinner with a small group of loved ones. It was a gift to us. It was up in the Sacramento area, and it was a Michelin-rated restaurant. It was one of those meals in which you show up, and the building itself from the outside was the side of a warehouse, and there's not even a name on the wall, but rather you're called to stand there at 6:30 pm sharp because the doors open right then.

So we started lining up with those who had gathered with us, and at 6:30 pm sharp, the doors opened. The hostess welcomes you. They do one table setting, and that's it for the night. So that group is journeying together through this meal. We show up, the doors open, they check the first group, and the waiter takes them to their table. The door closes, the next group steps up, and magically, the doors open. There's another

waiter right there to take that group to their table. We're up next, and we walk to our beautifully ornate table and a glass of champagne, which they hand you while you peruse the menu.

Now, this was not a menu of choice; this is a six-course, prefixed meal filled with intricate flavors, everything from black cod and locally sourced caviar to lobster cannoli, which I didn't know was a thing, but let me tell you, it's a thing. So, the climax of the meal was a beef tenderloin. I haven't even mentioned the wine pairings that came with each of the six courses of the meal. The whole experience was transcendent. It's about the only word I can think of. For four hours, we sat and feasted. It was one of those meals where you get up to go to the bathroom, and you realize it's been three hours already. You have no clue because you're just whisked away into this experience.

I remember the year 2013, Lindsay and I were in a different environment, with a different transcendent meal, with a different set of four hours. We were somewhere in the streets of Siguatepeque, which is a city nestled in a remote part of Honduras. It was past 11 pm, and we were eating a meal that seemed to transcend the moment. This time, instead of prefixed menus and fine dining, we were eating homemade pupusas, tamales, and queso duro off the finest Chinet ware, which was made of Styrofoam. The pupusas paired very well with that year's Orange Fanta. It was fantastic. So we sat there as another glass of Orange Fanta arrives.

Eleven years later, I still remember the table setting in the corner of Siguatepeque, a meal transcended the ordinary. There was something about these pupusas and our host, whose name was Musse, who had poured her heart and life out to us. I can see the lights flickering. I can smell the dirt beneath my feet. These are very radical ends of the spectrum as far as meals go, yet they are still transcendent.

Was it the lobster cannoli and the beef tenderloin paired with the 2006 vintage Cabernet from Italy, or was it the pupusas and the orange Fanta plated on the finest of Styrofoam that made those meals transcendent? Of course not. In each of these settings, you find the ordinariness and the sacredness of the table. It's not necessarily the setting and the food that transcends the moment, but rather, it was in the space with the people and the welcome that we experienced.

What I didn't tell you about the Michelin-rated restaurant is that within those six people, there was a couple there with whom we had countless meals. They were dear loved ones of ours. Just earlier that week, they called us to let us know they were still coming to the dinner, but their marriage was falling apart, and they planned to file for divorce in a few days. We sat there and, with our hearts breaking, realized we wanted to

still be there present. It was amicable. They were still getting a divorce, but their heart was still to be present.

The other four of us obviously wanted to extend the welcome to let them know that in the midst of their brokenness, we were present and welcoming them at the table. It was in Siguatepeque, around that table with Musse, where she spoke blessing, love, and welcome to these foreigners from a different country who she had only met that night. Yet that welcome transcended the week of work in which we had poured into her community on that mission trip.

There's just something about tables. What's happening in these places is what we, for the past few weeks, have called hospitality. The New Testament defines hospitality as love of the other. And what we think of often, at least what you probably think of when you hear the word hospitality, is either the styrofoam plate experience in Honduras or the Michelin-rated experience in Sacramento. But whatever it is, those experiences are not what defines hospitality. What defines hospitality is the extension of welcome around a shared meal. It's how we love one another.

This is why we define hospitality this way. Hospitality is creating a space where strangers are welcomed as friends, and friends are turned into family. This is the vision of the New Testament. Hospitality is the extension, the conduit of God's grace, offering through the very extension of our own welcome, the welcome of God to others. What we've talked about and framing up this whole practice for this year is that in our post-Christian world, the credibility of our witness is dependent on the quality of our hospitality.

If we are to reach and welcome people into the kingdom of God and extend the welcoming grace of Jesus, we must, in our world, recapture the practice of hospitality of welcome because we live in a post-Christian world in which most people are either ambivalent or skeptical of this Jesus that we claim. The core of our heart is to welcome others into the presence of God through the extension of welcome.

The question I want to queue up today, which will extend for the next four weeks, is a much more practical one. For the last three weeks, the topic of hospitality has been to whet your appetite and remind you of the experience of welcome that you have felt from God, the experience of hospitality that you have been called to. But we want to dig deeper.

How do we practice hospitality? What does it look like on the ground? We do so through the practice of the habit of Table Welcome, opening up our lives and our tables to others who are near and far from God. We are going to look at two stories. I want to capture the essence of these stories, more so than the technicalities of each individual piece. We're going to pick up in Luke 19:1.

Jesus entered Jericho and was passing through. A man was there by the name of Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax collector and was wealthy. He wanted to see who Jesus was, but because he was short he could not see over the crowd. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore-fig tree to see him, since Jesus was coming that way. When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him,

"Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today." So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. All the people saw this and began to mutter, "He has gone to be the guest of a sinner." Luke 19:1-7

Now, this is a familiar story. What happens when we grow up familiar with this story is that we actually become quite unfamiliar with it. We lose its edge. There are a few things about Zacchaeus that we must remember to hold the edge of the story. The text says that Zacchaeus was a tax collector and was wealthy.

In this space, in this time, Jesus and the Israelites are living in an occupied country. Rome had come in, and one of the mechanisms they'd pull to keep control of the area was they had a brutally harsh tax code that they would impose it on the Jewish people. But to institute that, they would have these people known as tax farmers or tax collectors like Zacchaeus.

But Zacchaeus isn't Roman. He's one who had defected from his Jewish faith. He was a Jew who was now working for the oppressor. The way tax collectors and tax farmers made money was to lump, on top of the harsh tax from Rome, their own percentage. So if Rome is charging 70 percent, he taxed another 15 percent. And he gets to keep all of it.

Rome didn't really care as long as the people paid their taxes to Rome. So when it says he was a wealthy tax collector, he is one who had taken advantage of this system because he had the whole Roman army at his disposal to impose the tax. When it says he was a tax collector and was wealthy, you can imagine for the Jews that were there lining the streets, looking at Jesus and then seeing Zacchaeus in the tree, they didn't look on him with much favor. He was hated and despised.

What you'll see later in Luke 7 is that Jesus was called a glutton and a drunkard, and he ate with tax collectors and sinners. Did you catch the way they differentiate those things? It's as if the Jewish people couldn't even get themselves to say tax collectors were sinners. They were worse. They had their own category of their own kind.

Jesus sees Zacchaeus, this tax collector and sinner, in the tree. I love the imagery. Jesus is a poor vagabond who doesn't have anything to his name. And he says, "Hey, I know that guy. He is wealthy. I'm coming to your house, Zacchaeus." The crowd begins to grumble. He's gone to be the guest of a sinner. Grumble is a bit too light. I imagine they were questioning, accusing, "Who is this Jesus that would eat with Zacchaeus?" But look at the impact this has on Zacchaeus.

But Zacchaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount." Jesus said to him, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." Luke 19:8-10

Notice the verbiage in which Jesus says salvation has come. There's something in this exchange in which the extension of welcome around a meal, which was what Jesus offered, brings a response within Zacchaeus of repentance and reparations. He says, "I'll sell half of everything I have,

and I'll pay back everything I cheated." This implies, by the way, he certainly has cheated people out of their money. And then he says, "I'll do it. Not just what I took, but fourfold what I have taken from them." Which was the legal maximum you could pay in retribution.

So he's saying, "I will do everything I can to make it right. I am repenting." He fell down into the presence of Jesus. Jesus looked at this hated man and said that salvation had come to this house through the Son of Man, Jesus' favorite title for himself, who came to seek and save the lost. In the first century, the Gospel of Luke would have been written not like the form we have it here, but it would have been a letter or something that would have circulated around the area.

The way you would have encountered this story and the whole of the gospel was not through holding a book in your lap but rather a little more like what I'm doing now. Someone would travel with the Gospel of Luke, stand before a church, and read it word for word. The listeners, in an oral society, when they had got to Luke 19 and the last verse was read, "For the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost," their ears would have perked up because they would have been listening to the entire Gospel of Luke in one setting.

This isn't the first time the phrase, the Son of Man came had been used. Now, the Son of Man, as I mentioned, was Jesus' favorite name for himself. One of the ways in which this society would emphasize things to save space was through repetition. So when Luke uses this phrase for the Son of Man came for the second time, the listeners would have perked up and said, wait a minute, we've heard this before. Flip your Bibles back to Luke 7. This is earlier in the story of Jesus, and we'll pick it up in verse 33. It's Jesus talking, but it's the second instance in which this particular phrase is used.

For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say, 'He has a demon.' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say, 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.' But wisdom is proved right by all her children."
Luke 7:33-35

Notice our particular phrase, "the Son of Man came," and while the beginning of it is the same, the back half of it is different. In Luke 19, the Son of Man came to seek and save the lost. But here in Luke 7, it says the Son of Man came eating and drinking. In classic biblical fashion, a bomb is dropped as far as an important truth. Then, the story that follows helps us to understand what was just said.

In your Bible, you have a subtitle here that may say something like "Jesus Anointed by a Sinful Woman." In the original writing, that wasn't there. It was added later for us to help navigate the text. But in the original hearing, if you're in that audience, it would say, "He's a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. And then you'd read verse 36 right away. *"When one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table."*(v. 36).

A few things about ancient homes. Most scholars believe that the dining area probably had some opening to a public courtyard area. So if you're walking down the street, like this woman did you would look in and

see people feasting at tables. Now, if you've seen a picture of an ancient table, they weren't necessarily sitting in chairs. It's likely they were lounging on a pillow next to the table with their feet tucked behind them.

A woman in that town who lived a sinful life learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, so she came there with an alabaster jar of perfume. As she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." Luke 7:37-39

Imagine she's walking down the street. She sees this scene. Jesus is lounging, knowing who Jesus is, his feet hanging behind him. And you can envision the scene. She walks up and begins to recognize this famous rabbi, Jesus. She's so consumed with emotion that she begins to weep and wipe Jesus' feet with tears. But Jesus, rather than stopping her, just allows it to take place.

That earlier phrase in verse 37, "A woman in that town who lived a sinful life." We don't know exactly what that means, but likely that phrase was used when people were sex workers. She's likely a prostitute, to the best of our knowledge. And so this woman, a prostitute, someone who's lived a sinful life, comes to Jesus who is eating right there with all of the Pharisees.

The Pharisees were strict about their purity codes. They get a bad rap, and they've earned that. But let's also back up and understand why they were so passionate about the purity codes. They're in an occupied land. They've lost their land. They're exiled away from their own space. The Pharisees wanted to return to God and believed that if they just followed every Jewish law for a whole day, the messiah would come, and God would bring them back from exile and restore the land to his people, hence the purity codes. Clearly, they had lost the mark. They're constantly the bad guys in the text, but their legalism was rooted in this desire to return back to God.

But within their purity codes, they would have seen a woman like this; a sex worker, and she would have been more like an infectious disease than a human. If she touched someone, particularly a rabbi, that would have been a whole thing in which he'd had to purify himself, go through this process of cleansing, and therefore would have restarted the whole process.

They would think, "We want to return to God, but this woman ruined it all." You can imagine the shame that she had endured. You can imagine the vitriol that she had received. You see, this scene that she is making is remarkably offensive to the religious leaders of the time. It's likely that the host of this, Simon, the Pharisee, would have been repulsed by this move.

Yet they look, and Jesus allows her to continue this lavish outpouring. She's wetting his feet with tears. She's using her hair to scrub them. And she brings this anointing perfume to pour out onto his feet. So the host

has this thought, which, by the way, watch your thoughts when you're around Jesus. He thinks that if this man were a prophet, he would know who's touching him and what woman she is, that she is a sinner. Jesus is always perceptive of these things.

Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. "Two people owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he forgave the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt forgiven." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as her great love has shown. But whoever has been forgiven little loves little." Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace." Luke 7:40-50

Could you imagine the tension in that room? Jesus looks at the very one who opened his home to have Jesus over and says, "You're actually not the host." Simon didn't offer to wash his feet or greet him with a kiss. He didn't provide him with oil as was customary, but the woman did all of these things.

Here she is with an alabaster jar of perfume to lavishly anoint him. "Simon, you are not the host; this woman, the one you dehumanize, has been the extension of hospitality." And it is because of that, Jesus said her sins are forgiven. Her faith in who Jesus was, her faith in this Messiah, this savior. This is the one in which she poured out that hospitality and salvation had come to her.

These two stories are not an anomaly; they're the norm. If you pay attention to the life of Jesus, what you'll notice in the Gospel of Luke is that Jesus is constantly gathering with people around tables. Did you hear the reputation he earned in verse 34? They called him a drunkard and a glutton. I don't think Jesus was a glutton or a drunkard, but we have to say he may have come by that reputation, honestly. He seemed to eat a lot of meals. He had a hankering for turning water into wine. He certainly was in that environment and earned that reputation from somewhere. Again, I don't think he was a glutton or a drunkard, but there was something about the rhythm of Jesus' life in which he was constantly at open tables, welcoming, sitting with others, friends of tax collectors and sinners.

One commentator on the Book of Luke, Robert Karras, says, "In Luke's gospel, Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal or coming from a meal. References to food abound on almost every single page...You can eat your way through Luke's gospel." And then he looks at us and says,

"Come follow me." And you're like, "I can do that. I can follow you, Jesus."

See, the idea of Jesus eating is an intentional theme. If you were to read the Gospel of Luke straight front to back, you would note over 50 plus references to food and or meals. If you were to do that with Matthew's gospel, you'd find 90-plus examples. Jesus became known as a glutton and a drunkard because he had a tendency to eat a lot with people. He enjoyed long, lasting meals around the table.

There's a British writer named Tim Chester who has a great little book called *A Meal with Jesus*. In the book, which we're using a lot in this series, he makes the astute point that Jesus used meals as a strategic and conscious choice. He says that in Luke 19, when Jesus says, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." In Luke 7, "The Son of Man came eating and drinking," Luke 19 is the mission of Jesus, to seek and save the lost. The method is through eating and drinking. This is the way in which Jesus would welcome and seek and save the lost.

He did so with Zacchaeus on one end of the socioeconomic and political spectrum, and he did so with this woman on the far other side. There's just something about tables, isn't there? Jesus would walk people into the kingdom of God one meal at a time. Turns out the gospel pairs nicely with beef tenderloin.

This methodology of reaching people for the kingdom of God, what we'll call Table Welcome, is a reversal of a common practice that in almost every culture, at least according to sociologists, meals are typically understood as boundary markers. We tend to eat with people who look like us, have the same tax bracket as us, vote like us, experience life like us. We tend to eat with people that are very similar to us. They're our boundary markers, not always consciously, sometimes very much so, but often unconsciously; we simply have placed the boundaries over who is in and who is out based on who we eat with.

But for Jesus, the opposite is true. Where culturally meals tend to separate in which you find your social stratification, where you land in the hierarchy of culture, Jesus did quite the reverse. For Jesus, was not a place to keep people out; it was a way to invite people in. Jesus was constantly breaking down boundary markers.

You could argue, and Robert Karras does, that Jesus was killed for the kind of people he ate with because it was so disruptive to the status quo. The reality is that Table Welcome offers the opportunity for us to find the sacred invitation of a meal in the ordinariness of a meal, to say that the grace of God extends to all people.

That's why we define Table Welcome as: The rhythm of extending God's hospitality by eating and drinking with those near and far from God. We use the phrase eating and drinking very particularly because that's what the text says. I know where your mind goes, and it's like, "I could drink with a lot of people; that'd be good." It's not necessarily that, but rather, it is an invitation. Just like the life of Jesus where he came eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners and Pharisees, with the disciples, the crowds, the masses, whoever it was. For believers across the centuries, Table Welcome as the expression and extension of God's

hospitality, has been the way that the gospel has flipped cultures upside down.

You could make the case, and many historians do, that this practice of Table Welcome alone is what allowed the early church to flip Rome upside down because they just simply refused to use meals as boundary markers. Think about 1 Corinthians, the text we read every communion Sunday. What Paul's doing at that moment in that section of chapters 8 through 10 is correcting abuses of the Lord's supper, which was more than just a cracker and a wafer by the way; rather, it was a feast. It was a meal.

The issue at hand for Paul was that the rich who didn't have to work all day could arrive to the meal early and feasting by themselves. Then, those who were day laborers were coming later, all within the church, and there was segregation taking place.

Paul, having the harshest words, says, "*If you participate in the Lord's meal that way, you are eating and drinking condemnation on you.*" It was this meal around tables that was the organizing principle of the early church that God used to be emblematic of his hospitality to the world. The meal transcended the ordinary and welcomed people near and far.

Let's go back to lobster cannoli for a second. I know some of you are thinking about this idea of Table Welcome, and quite frankly, you're probably writing me off in a couple of different ways. Maybe those two meals can help you think through it. Some of you are thinking that you can't make lobster cannoli. I understand that. Others of you think that you don't know how to offer the welcome that Musse did in Siguatepeque and create that space.

You would rather see Table Welcome as a side note, which was great for that time, but you're not gifted that way. You don't have the spiritual gift of this, and you want to distance yourself from this practice. Let me offer a few distinctions that might invite you more into this practice of Table Welcome.

First, when I hear those concerns, I know that we tend to equate Table Welcome with entertainment. But Table Welcome is different than entertainment. We misunderstand the beauty and the simplicity of it when we conflate it with entertainment. What may come to your mind, if you're of a certain generation, when you hear the word hospitality is hand-stitched doilies and Town and Country Magazine with Martha Stewart and the beautifully decorated table.

There's nothing wrong with that, but it's not hospitality. That's entertainment. Others of you may be a little younger. You think of the spread on Instagram, the perfectly hung twinkle lights in the backyard where the lighting's just perfect, and this gorgeous view where everyone seems to be happy and has no issues. That also is entertainment. It's not Table Welcome.

I have nothing wrong with entertainment. I simply want to make the distinction that it's different from what the New Testament talks about when it speaks of this idea of hospitality. And I would suggest that your strict view of hospitality as entertainment is actually missing the

invitation of the ordinary and the sacred welcomed around a table. Let me draw a few more distinctions.

Entertainment tends to be a little bit more focused on exclusion. It's a way in which we project our status like the Pharisee Simon. It was come to his table, and it was all Pharisees, all of the upper echelon of the culture. Entertainment is more focused on exclusion. It's about signifying your worth and dignity, but hospitality is about inclusion. It's about welcoming and breaking down boundary markers of typically held views of the table.

Entertainment is about performance. It's about showing everything that you have and the beauty of your home. It's not a bad thing, but that's entertainment. Hospitality and Table Welcome is about service. It's about tangible love. Entertainment is about a clear distinction between host and guest, but hospitality blurs the line.

One of the beautiful things about Jesus is that he was often the host and the guest. Here at this table, he's hosting this woman with the grace of God. He's extending grace, welcoming her, but yet he's receiving so much hospitality from her. Table Welcome is about this exchange where people are no longer in hierarchies, but rather flattened, all receiving and giving together. It blurs the lines. Entertainment is sporadic. It happens on occasion. Hospitality is a way of life. Entertainment is about reciprocity. I host you, you host me, and hospitality is about generosity. It's about freely giving. Entertainment is about social stratification, whereas hospitality, for Jesus, seems more rooted in justice, of welcoming those from all ends of the spectrum.

Miranda Harris in her beautiful book, *A Place at the Table* writes,

Hospitality is not about parading your perfect home, culinary magic, or immaculate children before your admiring and now demoralized guests. Rather, it is inviting other hassled people to come and eat, talk, and laugh with you over the idiosyncrasies and impossibilities of your lives in the secure, cozy environment of your own intractable mess. We are not called by God to impress others. We are called to bless them. Harris

I love that line, "The cozy environment of your own intractable mess." You know this distinction. There are those people you invite over which you scurry around to make sure every corner of the house is perfectly clean, just in case they happen to open the medicine cabinet in the master bedroom. But then you have those other friends who have the openness to just drop by, and the clothes aren't folded. There's a pile on the couch. Not everything's made, but there's a welcome there that just says you can come in with all the mess that I am because it's not about performance; it's about welcome.

This is Table Welcome. It's something deeper, something that touches the divine, the sacredness of God's welcome in your own life. Table Welcome is both metaphoric and literal. This is the second point. There's another way in which we can escape this particular command to welcome people around tables. You can either make it purely literal or purely metaphoric. The problem with metaphoric is similar to when we talked about our metaphoric neighbor. It's easy to say, I welcome

everyone, and we can make it this broad thing. That's fine. We want you there. That's a heart posture. But when it's purely metaphoric, you miss the very literalness that Jesus was at that table at that time on that night when that woman and Zacchaeus were present.

There's a literalness, too, in which we're called to hold loosely all our belongings and recognize they're the Lord's in the first place. We are merely stewarding them for a season, and we are called to steward them in hospitable ways. So the table is metaphoric in the sense that it doesn't need to be your literal table in your dining room or your coffee table or whatever, but it's a table. If meals are boundary markers, you can break down boundaries at restaurants and coffee shops; you can break down boundaries on a blanket at Catamaran Park as you sit and welcome others around a shared meal, whatever it is, just find a table, any table and invite somebody to join you around it. Whether it's the finest China or styrofoam plates, you can extend welcome regardless of the experience.

Table welcome is both metaphoric and literal, and I encourage all of us to learn how we can open up our homes to our neighbors and invite them in. Because the home is something that we tend to protect and hold back and think that maybe I don't have a beautiful enough house. You may not have the place settings. Just find a table and invite someone around it. This is the heartbeat of Table Welcome. It is about posture and presence.

This probably goes without saying, I've been dancing around this, but what happened at that table with Zacchaeus and this woman was not just about the meal in which they were partaking, but rather it was the posture and presence of Jesus to their deepest needs. Table Welcome is about posture, a way of viewing the world. It's about recognizing that our sacredness around tables is not about exclusion but welcoming people to the table. What does it look like for you to have a posture towards others that doesn't see them as distant but rather welcomes them in?

Table Welcome is about posture, but that posture ultimately must give way to presence. And we need to learn to be present in both body and soul for the other in front of us. It can be very easy when entertaining to get caught up in all the little details. And there's nothing wrong with that. Those can be expressions of love and hospitality. I encourage you to do those things as well but make sure you don't do them at the expense of being present for your guests.

Jesus was one of the most calm presences you could be in. He had a way of just moving at a different pace of life in which he slowed down enough to look this woman in the eye. Maybe the first look she had gotten in a long time. To look at her and dignify her with his presence. To look and see Zacchaeus in that fig tree and see Zacchaeus come down. Jesus had this presence about him, and Table Welcome is entirely that.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

With no alternative motive, it's just simply the welcome of others at the table.

We welcome people to our tables because we are becoming people of love, and that's what loving people do. We extend the hospitality of God, and somehow, in that, the Holy Spirit becomes present. You can just watch the way lives change when you open up your house and become present to both God and the other and just say, welcome—posture and presence.

I hope this practice of Table Welcome is coming into focus and that it is not a fringe practice. It can be one we want to relegate adjacent to the way of Jesus, but that's more of a cop-out to modern individualism and inconvenience than it is through a healthy reading of the scriptures.

What you find in the life of Jesus is a rhythm where he was constantly welcoming and inviting people to the table. You can make the argument in our particular moment, filled with hostility and all sorts of tensions, that there is no better environment to show and share the gospel than over a meal. Because somehow, in that meal, the very extension of God's grace is happening.

Hear me; I'm not asking you to do more. You eat two to three meals a day already. What I'm inviting you to do is to take a few of those and just welcome people to the table. The excuse that we don't have time is simply a lack of creativity. You eat meals.

What would it look like to invite your coworkers down to the cafeteria to sit across the table and be present to them in a way they haven't experienced? What would it look like to spend a Saturday setting up a picnic in your front yard? And as they walk their dog or go past you, just offer a few extra cookies or a piece of sourdough bread, whatever it is. You already eat meals. What would it look like for you to welcome others in? Because all of this is merely in response to God's welcome and hospitality.

May we be a people who invite and take on this practice of Table Welcome with the seriousness that sees ourselves as extending the hospitality of God to others.

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Catalog No. 1488FC