

This is new. I'm looking out at familiar faces I know well, but I can see a bunch that I don't yet know. And it seems the faces I don't know are just a little more comfortable, a little more familiar with what's going on, than the faces I do know. That makes sense of course - for many of you, this is home. But for some of you this place is unfamiliar. The view from here makes it clear that two different communities are sharing this space today.

From up here I also have a good view of this beautiful space. You can tell it's a space steeped in history, with generations who've lived and died as part of this community: Calvary Episcopal Church. I can see from here that each of those generations cared for this place, stewarding it and passing it on, one generation to the next.

Stepping into that history and seeing that care so clearly just by walking through these doors is (I imagine) a little bitter-sweet for you Lutherans out there. For we have just last Sunday bid farewell to a space that we loved, with its own history, and its own long story of being cared for and stewarded to those who would come after. Well that story for us in that place has ended. We won't be passing it on. We might be feeling some sadness about that today, especially walking into a church and a community whose care and history with their own place continues.

But in Messiah's "time of need," in the midst of building a new home, you Calvary have chosen to take us in. In doing so, you show us the hospitality, generosity and loving acceptance of Jesus himself. It's not only a witness to us, but to the entire town. Your invitation to us is a witness to the very character of God as God wants to be known. For that witness, for your generous welcome, and on behalf of Messiah Lutheran, we thank you. We hope we can demonstrate the depth of that thanks as we journey, now together.

For Messiah, this is a wonderful arrangement. But our readings today tell us that it is good for you too, Calvary. Our reading from Hebrews tells us that those who share what they have are pleasing to God; that those who show hospitality to strangers (maybe especially Lutherans?) “have entertained angels without knowing it.” Psalm 112 describes those who deal generously, that it will be well for them. Indeed, their hearts are made firm, secure and steady in the Lord. They are the righteous and will never be moved; they will be remembered forever. In your generous hospitality and the sharing of your space, Calvary, you are being enriched in faith.

But as one of these Lutherans experiencing your generosity, a question comes to mind. What about us? Beyond the blessing of your welcome and the use of your space, is there something important or beneficial about receiving generosity? Is there something to be said about “being received” that matters?

Jesus is telling these dinner guests about how they should receive hospitality. "Receiving hospitality" sounds exactly like showing up at a party to which you've been invited. Jesus is seeing the way these people are receiving the hosts' hospitality and he wants to help them do it better. So he gives a little practical advice on proper party etiquette. But he gives it in the form of a parable. At that word, we should be on high alert.

Jesus says, "...when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place."

At such events in the ancient world, **where you sat** at such events **mattered** - your proximity to the host communicated to everybody your social status in the community. The honored seat was right next to the host, and the seat furthest away was the humble seat of least importance. In a world in which social standing meant something serious, why would Jesus say to sit at the lowest place? We understand | when we are clear about who the host is. So, who is the host? Who has issued the invitation for us? Who is our host? It is Jesus.

Jesus is the host of this meal, this party, this worship service - it is the feast of victory for our God to which we have all been invited, to which we gather and find generous welcome, whether Episcopalian or Lutheran. But this issue of who sits where... This parable shows us something important.

Imagine sitting in the honored place next to the host: Wouldn't all your attention be focused mostly on engaging them? Who, having been seated next to Jesus, wouldn't be totally focused on him, taking in that radiant love and welcome? In this way, that honored seat gives a limited view of the party. I think we've all met people, or have been those people, vying for that honored seat in their devotion to Jesus. But in that seat, our perspective (absorbed as it is by Jesus our host) turns out to be one that isn't all that Christ-like. That honored guest's narrow view is not what Jesus is after. Rather, Jesus is saying, "go and sit down at the lowest seat."

What is it about that humble seat? Keeping in mind that Jesus' parables are always about radically reorienting people's view of the world as it is, Jesus must be saying something at least surprising. What I hear him saying is that the humble seat is the best seat in the house.

From that seat, we are not only better seen by Jesus, we can see many more of the guests, the others who've been welcomed - truly the whole table. In fact, it is a similar view to that of the host. From the humble seat, with that expanded view we see the world through the eyes of Jesus. And what is it that we can see with that expanded view? What is it that Jesus sees from across the table? He sees a great deal, but he sees best and is most interested in the need of others.

We are all, individually and as communities, in a state of need. Whether a need for assurance, security, relief from anxiety or fear, sadness or grief or shame, a need for acceptance, for peace ... need is part of our days, part of the seasons of our lives, and part of what we bring "to the table."

Need is a shameful thing in this culture. To need assistance, to need help, to not be completely self-sufficient is to be less-than in western culture. Think about the stigma of food stamps, the anger directed toward "well-fare" and ... programs. The fact is though, need is right where Jesus comes in.

Calvary, you have seen the need of Messiah, and you have responded with generous hospitality. But Calvary, we see you too - we see your need. You are in a waiting season of your own. As you seek a new leader who will call this place and this community home, you are in search of your future, even as you welcome us into your present. Much comes with such a search - feelings of hope and possibility certainly, but also maybe worry, fear, exhaustion, and more. You too are in a place of need, Calvary, and we see you from across the table, just as Jesus sees you.

And what does our host Jesus do in the face of need? He cures the sick, helping the stooped woman stand straight. He touches the outcast, bringing them back into community. He invites utterly unexceptional people to follow him, to find a deeper sense of themselves and their power to heal, to love, and to invite. He shelters the shelterless. And he feeds people. Hungry we are for what he gives - his body and his blood, his very self, to sustain and save us.

So today, Calvary and Messiah, take in the view from that humble seat. Do you see what's needed in this room, between neighbors? Do you see what's needed in Red Lodge, or Carbon County? Do you see what's needed across this table?

Though we'll mostly be worshiping in our own communities, we travel now together, Calvary and Messiah. I look forward to sharing that coffee hour, deepening our community around food. And I hope that along this road, in this time together, some "cross-pollination" happens. I hope that we can grow closer as siblings in the body of Christ. I hope too that we can hold the need we find in each other and that we can find ourselves fully invited and ultimately fully seen in Christ who promises in the end to meet every need.

AMEN