

A Homily by the Rev. Dr. Renée Tembeckjian
Trinity Episcopal Church
31 August 2025
Proverbs 25:6-8; Psalm 112; Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16; Luke 14:1, 7-14

“Politics at the Table”

Some years ago, our family priest shocked me by asking if I would preach in his church. To say “shocked” is no exaggeration: Women have absolutely no standing in the Armenian Orthodox church and don’t even serve as acolytes. Not one of his parishioners would ever have seen a woman anywhere near the pulpit.

I was about to turn him down, but discovered that my mom was in cahoots with him. Anyway, I preached.

After the service, an elder member made a beeline right toward me, so I braced myself for a diatribe...but it wasn’t the rant I expected. Instead, he proclaimed that it was about ~~#!~~ time that the church made way for women. His wife, clearly embarrassed, tried to hush him up: “Quiet, Harry, that’s enough – the church is no place for politics!”

We know many agree with her – that the church is no place for politics.

But we also know this – the church did *not* start out that way.

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Jesus is at the home of a Pharisee leader. That group is already wary of his growing profile and bristling over his public remarks on their hypocrisy. So, they are watching him closely. But he is also watching *them*...

...and he sees them jockeying for position, for seats of importance at the dinner table. With that, Jesus tells a *parable* about tables – about tables being *turned* – where hierarchy is completely upended – a divine kingdom of social and economic justice in which those with much are no higher or more beloved than those with little.

Jesus is, indeed, talking politics at the table...as he *always* does.

And his is no politics of passivity or inertia – Jesus does not ask us to *wait* for that kingdom in the next life, but calls us to *create* that kingdom in *this* life.

But thoughts and prayers always seem to flow more easily than sacrifice and action, even for those of us who claim to love and follow Jesus. Maybe that is because most of us are among those fortunate souls born into circumstances that allow us to remain largely distanced and even protected from the real life impact of inequity of many types.

For example, we *know* we will have food today – our meal planning is about what we *prefer* to eat. We *know* we have a bed to sleep in tonight – we are free to choose the type of pillow or thread count of the sheets.

This does not mean we should feel guilt over our lack of suffering, but we who are blessed with safe food, reliable shelter, clean water, and access to medicine are often too quick to judge or ignore those who cry out for want of those same blessings. True, many of us have worked hard for what we have, but we also came into this life with a heck of a head start – where, when, and to whom we happened to be born. Best not to confuse random good fortune with moral virtue.

So, if nothing else, we would be wise to heed the call of today's scripture into a posture of humility, lest we slip into a politic of self *above* others. Jesus turns those tables around entirely in a sober declaration:

*For all who exalt themselves will be humbled,
and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*

This is the vision into which he was born, the same vision his mother sang even *before* he was born:

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
my spirit rejoices in God my savior,
who has cast down the mighty from their thrones
and lifted up the lowly,
who has filled the hungry with good things. ⁱ*

Jesus was raised in the echo of those lyrics, and even now, long since parted from his mother's arms, he evokes that same vision while at dinner with the Pharisees. Watching them strive and strain for personal status and group importance, Jesus speaks of social justice and economic balance – a divine promise of equality and restoration for all of creation. They must have been terribly unsettled to hear it...

...because once again, as always, Jesus is talking politics at the table...no matter who is offended by his message of equality...

...and so must we, if we want to approach *this* table as equal members, dare to call ourselves his followers, and carry his vision beyond these doors into a world increasingly full of suffering souls who dearly and desperately need *their* tables turned.

Amen.

