

Table fellowship

Scripture Luke 19:1-10

Jesus and Zacchaeus

He entered Jericho and was passing through it. A man was there named Zacchaeus; he was a chief tax-collector and was rich. He was trying to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was short in stature. So he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to see him, because he was going to pass that way. When Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down; for I must stay at your house today.' So he hurried down and was happy to welcome him. All who saw it began to grumble and said, 'He has gone to be the guest of one who is a sinner.' Zacchaeus stood there and said to the Lord, 'Look, half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much.'

Then Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because he too is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost.'

Notes

As the marginalised one offering hospitality to Jesus, Zacchaeus found himself drawn into a wider hospitality – the hospitality of God. The key aspect of this narrative is how the removal of the label and stigma of human judgement provided the opportunity for transformation. Luke's gospel in particular embraces the deep symbolic value of meals. A shared meal is a sign of deeper solidarity between dining companions. Through meals, Jesus reflects the action of God who is essentially hospitable.

The charge was regularly thrown against Jesus that he was a "glutton and a drunkard, friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Lk 7:34, Mt 11:19). Throughout his ministry Jesus welcomed the rejected and excluded, especially at

meals. It came to be a publicly identifiable characteristic of the community of disciples and a visible expression of liberation, welcoming those who had been excluded by a legalistic religious leadership. The social system of **reciprocal generosity** could only be entered into by those with the means to reciprocate, thus meals were only shared amongst people of the same social status as only they could show the host the appropriate honour. Those without means, social misfits or the physically impaired were excluded as they were unable to reciprocate. By extension, sharing a meal with someone 'lower down' the social order risked incurring shame and exclusion. Jesus completely subverted this thinking (Lk 14:12-14) so that those guests normally excluded were all invited.



By gathering at the table with anyone, anywhere, Jesus completely changed the rules about who was in and who was out, relocating the field of mission to the margins. Sharing a meal expresses mutuality, recognition, acceptance and equal regard, breaking down boundaries within and across communities. By dining with people from different backgrounds, as both host and guest, Jesus demonstrated how the intimacy of a shared meal can forge relationship of dignity and respect, transforming lives.

The table is one of the most intimate places in our lives. It is there that we give ourselves to one another. When we say, "Take some more, let me serve you another plate, let me pour you another glass, don't be shy, enjoy it," we say a lot more than our words express. We invite our friends to become part of our lives. We want them to be nurtured by the same food and drink that nurture us. We desire communion. That is why a refusal to eat and drink what a host offers is so offensive. It feels like a rejection of an invitation to intimacy. Strange as it may sound, the table is the place where we want to become food for one another. Every breakfast, lunch, or dinner can become a time of growing communion with one another.

Henri Nouwen

Questions for Reflection

1. Why is eating together so important?
2. How can we ensure our celebrations and rituals reflect our desire for communion? Is there more we can do symbolically and practically to celebrate the experience of a shared meal?
3. For whom is there no place at the table?



Closing Prayer

May an abundance of gratitude burst forth as you reflect upon what you have received.

May thanksgiving overflow in your heart, and often be proclaimed in your prayer.

May you gather around the table of your heart the ardent faithfulness, kindness and goodness of each person who is true to you.

May the harvest of your good actions bring forth plentiful fruit each day.

May you discover a cache of hidden wisdom among the people and events that have brought you distress and sorrow.

May your basket of blessings surprise you with its rich diversity of gifts and its opportunities for growth.

May all that nourishes and resources your life bring you daily satisfaction and renewed hope.

May you slow your hurried pace of life so you can be aware of, and enjoy, what you too easily take for granted.

May you always be open, willing, and ready to share your blessings with others.

May you never forget the Generous One who loves you lavishly and unconditionally.

(Joyce Rupp, *Out of the Ordinary*)

