

Grace Presbyterian Church, Orleans

October 6, 2019

“What do you say to Jesus at His Table?” Worldwide Communion Sunday

Luke 17: 1-10

Pastor Jonathan

Opening Questions

You don't have to answer these questions: Do you gather with your family for meals? How many times during the week? Did you know that nearly half of N. Americans say they eat with their families about half the time that they ate with their parents when they were children? The last statistic I heard was something less than 7 times per week for most families, eating together, and less, particularly if you don't count eating out. And the last statistic I saw for parents having significant conversation with their children, 38 minutes per week. Yes, you heard that correctly (38 minutes per week).

But here's your question for an answer: What do you say to people when they gather at your table for a special meal? For example, take next weekend for Thanksgiving? What do you say to one another regularly at the meal table?

Let me make some suggestions for what you might say to Jesus at His Table this morning, from the Scriptures and from my heart. First from my heart: It's good to be with you here, Lord. Just like you might say to your family which has arrived from near or far away, say it to the Lord. Peter said this to the Lord when he was on the Mount of Transfiguration with Him (Luke 9:33). It is good to appreciate the moment, and fix our attention on Jesus. After that initial moment of gratitude, the time at the Table can go many ways. I always like to remember and imagine what it was like at the foot of the cross where the women had followed Jesus, but all the apostles except John had not gone there. I like to go there in my imagination and remember what Jesus did for me (and you) on that instrument of torture. I see the blood. I hear some of Jesus' last words, as recorded in Scripture. I make sure I visit Him there and say “Thank you.” You can do the same. It is happening around the world today in thousands of languages, people meeting with Jesus at His table, thanking Him for giving Himself sacrificially for us, for me. They see Him. They hear Him. We can do the same.

Luke 17: 1-10

Dr. Luke talks about three different subjects in chapter 17 of his gospel. He tells people that Jesus warns His followers to be in good relationship with one another. He warns us to not cause other believers to sin, and to be sensitive to one another, particularly newer believers, as they are the “little ones” whom Jesus mentions in

verse 2. He also tells us to warn others about sinning, but to be soft hearted toward them, accepting their repentance toward God and their acts of contrition and forgiveness. Where we hurt one another here, in Grace Church, and in the rest of our lives, we are encouraged by the Lord to forgive one another, to extend and receive forgiveness. If you believe someone has something against you, seek them out and ask their forgiveness. If you have something against someone else, forgive them, and release them to God. Say something like, "I forgive you for..." Or, "I ask your forgiveness..."

These are two biblical things to do at the Lord's Table and determine to do in Jesus' presence. It is not easy, at times. It is something that takes determination. Sometimes you can even put off Communion until you get it right with your neighbor. Leave your gift at the offering, and go get right with your neighbor, Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:23-24.

Luke 17:3-4

Then Jesus tells us to forgive one another multiple times, up to seven times a day, which was at least double what the most radical rabbi of his day would suggest. Don't get tired of forgiving one another is the message. We are all broken. We all mess up in various ways. Please be generous with your forgiveness: give the issue over to God and put the person on God's hooks, not yours.

To all this, we hear the apostles saying, "Increase our faith!" This might be the translation of someone saying, "I'm not sure I can do that, Jesus, I need your strength, guidance and grace to do so." And when you are at the Table, you can add that as your prayer: "Increase my faith, Lord!" (verse 5) I don't trust you enough.

Luke 17:6

Jesus then gives the teaching about only having a little teensy weensy bit of faith (like a poppy seed), of trust in God can accomplish wonders, miracles and amazing things. Like pulling up a tree with a very developed root system, and transporting it against gravity into the sea or a river. May I simply say that this is not a health and wealth guarantee to all sincere Christians, nor a carte blanche guide to get whatever you ask for... This is about being close to God through Jesus, and God having immense and infinite power. With God there, many surprises take place, one of the greatest being the change from being hard against God, to loving God with all your heart, soul, strength and mind; of being an adversary and enemy of God to a friend and representative of God. Trusting God does move mountains.

So the Scriptures invite us to be grateful to be at Jesus' Table with Him, sensitive to others in our lives, both here in the church and beyond, forgiving others, exercising trust in God both by forgiveness and by life choices that show trust in God, and then finally knowing our calling and identity. It is good to know your calling and identity at Jesus' Table.

Luke 17: 7-10

Who are you? You are a servant of God. In Jesus' day, if a person were a slave or bond-servant of a land owner, he would take care of the sheep, or take care of the crops, but he would also be the chef and housekeeper. It was a package deal. It would have been unheard of, for a landowner to defer to his servant's needs. He would expect to be served.

And the servant, who may have escaped death in a war, like many refugees face today, would be grateful to have the work, lodging, food and place to call home. What is the servant's proper attitude? It is just that: I am so grateful to have a place where I can serve, make a positive difference for others, have food and shelter myself and some sense of security.

Jesus put us in the servant's shoes. He says when you do what God teaches you to do, don't start telling yourself how wonderful you are and how special you are. Just say "I'm doing what I'm supposed to do, even if it doesn't work out perfectly for me, I am an unworthy servant, grateful to have what I have."

Now I would add: Are you grateful? What can you do to stop and cultivate gratitude in this extended season of Thanksgiving? Do you actually know how much worse it could be? Do you consider yourself an unworthy servant, or do you sense that you do have entitlement, that you indeed do deserve better? Honestly lay this before the Lord at His Table or any time today.

We have to be transparent in the way we truly are. We cannot fake it until we make it. We must ask God to help us, with gratitude, being grateful, sensitive to others, forgiving others, asking God to increase our faith and trust in Him, and owning our unworthy servant status or confronting our entitlement.

As we come to the Table today, we have very few minutes to consider all these things. If the Lord has spoken to you today, take one or two things to the Table, and offer them back to Jesus. Don't forget as well as to see what Jesus did for you at the foot of the Cross.

Let us pray.