

Travel Stories: *Table-Talk* - wk 5

Rev. Scott McGinnis - First Presbyterian Church of Newton, KS - August 9, 2020
Luke 14:1-14 *The Message paraphrase* - (Adapted from Eugene Peterson's book *Tell it Slant*)

We're continuing our message series today looking at some of Jesus' conversations. These are the Travel Stories Jesus told, while walking along and participating in the common things of life. As a main resource for this series, I've been drawing from Eugene Peterson's book, *Tell it Slant*.

In our story today, Jesus is invited to a Sabbath meal by a leader of the Pharisees. Others attending are probably all Pharisees except for Jesus. We can imagine that having just worshiped together at the synagogue they are now walking to the Temple leader's house to celebrate the Sabbath meal. Now the setting is the Sabbath and the Pharisees were obsessed about their Sabbath rules, so obsessed that they were suspicious of Jesus who broke their rules and ate meals with rule breakers. Luke describes their hostility toward Jesus with the phrase, **"watching his every move"**.

The conversation as they walked from synagogue to dinner table had been anything but restful on that Sabbath. They were not chatting about the sermon they just heard. They were not relishing in the freedom and good rest of God's Sabbath. They were watching Jesus for any failure to keep their Sabbath laws, even a little infraction that would invalidate him. And what's the

Sabbath for? For the benefit of people. We need time for restoration and reflection in God's presence.

Jesus then gives them the infraction they're looking for. There is a man sitting beside the road who is "hugely swollen in his joints." The old name for the condition is dropsy. Doctors now call it edema. It's the retention of water in the joints, making movement awkward and painful. Jesus asks them if it's okay to heal him. The Pharisees sense that they're being baited, so they don't bite. They don't answer.

Jesus accepts their silence as permission to heal. He heals the man and sends him on his way. He then exposes their obsessive police-ing of God's day of rest. He shows them some common sense: *wouldn't they rescue a child from drowning in a well on the Sabbath? Or even an ox?* But they still don't answer.

Jesus has asked them two questions: Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath? Would you save a child from drowning on the Sabbath? The Pharisees have not answered either. Do you think they had a rule against answering questions on the Sabbath? They didn't, but they acted like it.

Luke then shifts the scene at verse 7: they are at the table of an important host, the top Pharisee. The Pharisees are continuing their rudeness, but now toward one another. Nobody is saying anything to anyone. Jesus sees the Pharisee guests pushing and shoving for the place of

honor at the table. That Sabbath meal was a place where they could be recognized as important. The closer they sat to the top Pharisee host the more important they were. They'd be the talk of the town, if they could get that seat next to the host.

Jesus notices that everyone seated around that table is really already "important" in some way or another. So they really don't need a competition to be MOST important that day. And then Jesus supplies the table talk.

Luke 14:10-14

10-11 "When you're invited to dinner, go and sit at the last place. Then when the host comes he may very well say, 'Friend, come up to the front.' That will give the dinner guests something to talk about! What I'm saying is, if you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face. But if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself."

12-14 Then he turned to the host. "The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbors, the kind of people who will return the favor. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You'll be—and experience—a blessing. They won't be able to return the favor, but the favor will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people."

The guests and the host have just ruined a Sabbath meal together. *It is wrong to use a place of hospitality to promote oneself at the expense of others; it is wrong to use an occasion of hospitality to manipulate others.*

Preparing and sitting down at a meal is probably the most common practice for growing and engaging in community. The Sabbath is made for these relationships of God and people, host and guests, for strangers becoming friends.

Sabbath is a gift. It's a day we can open our hearts, reflect on the week, and take it all in. Receiving what God generously gives in creation and love, and sharing that bounty with *strangers-become-friends* in the hospitality of a meal and good conversation.

We are needy creatures. We need food and drink, shelter and clothing. We need God and we need each other. We are interdependent creatures and we receive and receive and receive our whole lives. Sabbath helps us reflect on the wonder and miracle of each day. Sabbath is a day to deepen our gratitude, another wonderful day to be embraced by God's love and share it with others.

Would you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, You are the Maker and Minder of all beings. Each one of us you fashioned. You are mindful of each hair on our heads, each pain in our lives, each joy we find, each sorrow we bear. You comfort and guide us in all we do. Forgive us—for the times we failed to look after our neighbor, for the times we failed to help those in need. Overwhelm us with your boundless love. Teach us to love as you love. In Jesus Name, Amen.