

Trinity 17 (2026)

It was not too many generations ago that you ate Sunday dinner at home.

In those days, especially in rural areas, people would return after service for an ample sit-down meal. In the summertime, accompanying the chicken, ham, roast or whatever, there would be bowls of vegetables from the garden – cream corn, green beans, field peas . . . and always a plate of sliced tomatoes.

There would be good conversation, and certainly no one went away from the table hungry. More often than not, a nap was called for after getting up from the table.

Of course, the housewife usually bore the brunt of putting on this meal, but for the most part she did it without complaining. I remember my mother looking at her watch as the time for the morning service approached. If it was a

minute or so after 11 o'clock – the time the morning service began – she would say under her breath, **“Let’s get the show on the road”**. No doubt she was thinking of what she had to do when she got home.

I doubt that in Bible times people returning from worship had fried chicken or cream corn; nevertheless, the Sabbath was a special day.

According to Canon Frank Colquhoun, **“Among the Jews the sabbath was a day not of gloom but of gladness – a joyous feast day celebrating the completion of God’s work in creation.”**

It was to such a feast Jesus was invited in this morning’s Gospel, and it is worth noting that this meal was at the home of a *Pharisee*.

The Pharisees were a sect of the Jews who prided themselves in strict adherence to all the

laws found in the Hebrew Scriptures. The name meant “set apart ones.”

Some believed that if they kept the law perfectly for 24 hours, they could hasten the arrival of the Messiah.

The irony, of course, was that at this particular dinner the Messiah whom they sought was in their midst, and they did not recognize Him.

More than that, we are told that they “watched” him, which by interpretation means, “They were up to no good!” **“They watched as intently as a dog doth for a bone,”** wrote one Bible commentator.

It is possible, indeed likely, that the man with the dropsy, a disease in which fluid builds up in a person’s body, was a plant. They were seeking to discredit Jesus.

If they could get Jesus to break the Law (at least the law of their interpretation), they could say He was an imposter . . . a prophet not sent from God. Nevertheless, Jesus accepted this Pharisee's invitation to dine at his house.

There is something we can learn from Jesus here. It is this: If we are going to bring God's message of hope, love and coming judgment to the world, we cannot stay in our safe enclaves. No, we have to go out to where people who need the Gospel are.

I knew a young man from Canada, a clergyman, who joined a basketball team for this very purpose.

As time went on, he and his fellow players bonded. He listened to their problems, they to his . . . and, at propitious moments, he was able to share Jesus and the gospel.

In so doing, he was following Jesus. Jesus did not just hang out with people who were already His followers, but with all sorts.

A note of caution is needed here, though. There are places Christians should NOT go.

If you think you are going to be tempted to do things that a follower of Jesus should not do, or if being seen at a certain location is going to compromise your Christian witness, then certainly stay away.

With that caveat, look for opportunities and places where you may be light and salt in the world.

So far, I have set the scene for today's Gospel . . . Jesus accepted the invitation to eat at the home of a Pharisee.

Moving forward, we find what Jesus did at this meal. He preached what might be called a

dinner table sermon. Today the conventional wisdom is that you do not discuss politics or religion at a dinner party. Well, Jesus was not conventional. He was always about His Father's business.

This sermon had two points. The first dealt with the **quality of mercy**; the second with the **virtue of humility**. Let's look at each beginning with the first . . . the quality of mercy.

It began with Jesus asking a seemingly innocent question: **“Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath?”**

In view of the sick man in the room, it was anything but innocent. It was a hot potato.

If they said yes, they would be complicit in the very sin they were trying to pin on Jesus, that of breaking the commandment to keep holy the sabbath-day. If they said no, they would appear to be lacking in compassion for a fellow

human being. So, to play it safe: they said nothing. Their silence did not deter Jesus from healing the man. He did so immediately.

For Jesus, mercy was of primary importance. The Sabbath was made for man, not the other way round.

What might we take away from this part of the story? /// I think it would be the **importance of proportion**. By proportion, I mean getting things in right order.

The injunction to rest on the Sabbath was so that the body might be renewed and refreshed every seven days. One day in seven remains an important principle, one we ignore to our own peril.

But this command was never intended to exclude acts of mercy or to reduce the observance of the Sabbath to bare legalism, as was the case at a Presbyterian college where the

soft drink machines were jammed on Sundays so that no trading would take place on the Lord's Day.

Practices such as this trivialize God's gracious provision of one day in seven for rest and renewal.

Again, what is needed is proportion . . . getting things in right order.

Bringing this principle down to today, allow me to ask you a question:

If you were on your way to church and saw an old woman standing by her car with a flat tire, what would be more in keeping with the spirit of the command to keep holy the Sabbath day, keep on driving or stop and help her?

I think you know the answer. In the words of Hosea 6:6: **God desires mercy not sacrifice.**

Let's move now to the second point of Jesus' dinner table sermon, this one dealing with the virtue of humility.

As people were watching Jesus at this feast, Jesus was watching them. The thing He noticed was how people were jockeying for the best seats . . . those that indicated status.

In response, He tells a story about a wedding feast where people were doing this very thing. In this story, Jesus has the host asking a man who had taken one of these chief seats to go sit somewhere else. How embarrassing it would be for such a thing to happen.

More than teaching a point of etiquette, though, He was teaching a value of the Kingdom, how God wants His people to live and flourish in community.

The humility we have in view here is not some put-on act. It is in fact an attribute of Jesus

Himself. In Philippians 2, Paul, speaking of Jesus, says: **“Being in the form of God . . . He humbled Himself . . . took upon him the form of a servant.”**

This humility was displayed at the Last Supper. When the disciples were too proud to do the work of a servant and wash feet, Jesus Himself took up a basin and a towel and began going round the table. He then explained what He had done:

“If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet” (John 13:14).

What a contrast there was between Jesus' way and the way of the Pharisees.

--They were about show. He, about service.

--They were about jockeying for the best seats at dinner parties. He, about washing feet.

--They were about excluding those that did not measure up to their standards, the poor, the halt, the lame, the blind, those who were morally compromised. He was about bringing them in, making them whole, raising them up, giving them a new start, and welcoming them into the Kingdom of God.

Whom are we more like, Jesus or the Pharisees?

The hymn writer puts us on the right track when he has us pray: Lord:

“Help me to live for others . . . That I may live like Thee.”

In closing, here are the main points of today’s sermon, the “take aways,” if you please.

--By associating with those outside of our tribe, we open doors to mission opportunities.

--By exercising proportion, we move beyond the letter of the law to its real purpose.

--By being humble we become Jesus' hands and feet in the world and discover true greatness.

Jesus' dinner table sermon is for us. Hear it. Live it. Share it.