

**“SETTING THE TABLE”
“Who is Welcome at the Table?”**

We have begun our sermon series “Setting the Table.” In our culture and society food has in some ways become an issue. We have gotten used to eating so fast (most school children must eat in 20 minutes or less), or we are so concerned because of whatever diet we may be on that food is seen as problem, rather than a gift or a blessing. From the beginning, the Bible has shown how God is interested in food and providing for the basic needs of God’s beloved children. Beginning in the garden of Eden, God gives food for human beings to delight in and to enjoy. The commandment to keep the Sabbath holy was that human beings would worship God, give thanks for the gifts of the earth in bread and wine and to feast as a family together. In many Christian traditions, it is common to gather at the table to remember and give thanks for heavenly banquet and the bread and cup. Hospitality is in our religious makeup and it begins at the table. This week in our studies, we follow up with Abraham and God and the other messengers go on their way. This may be one of my favorite stories. Abraham is not afraid to push God in terms of being aware of the people of Sodom and Gomorrah. While in our most recent history, we use Genesis 19 to justify the condemnation of the LGBTQ community, the truth is that this story is about the lack of hospitality and the threat of sexual assault on the sojourner and stranger. This seems to be a universal trait: vilify and condemn those who are different or have different cultural understandings. Jesus ate with “sinners” and was condemned as well. Who is welcome at the table? Who is welcome period? May this week’s scriptures and God’s spirit challenge us to open our hearts and minds with the spirit of hospitality and grace.

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Who is Welcome at the Table?”**

Daily prayer: (adapted from a prayer by Rev. Abi) *EVER-LOVING GOD, who having loved us loves us still, help us to hear again your word, “By this shall they know you are my disciples; that you love one another.” Turn our hostility into hospitality and our callousness into care. Through Christ, we pray. Amen. – Rueben P. Job and Norman Shawchuck*

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

Monday, July 29, 2019 Genesis 18: 16-22

Abraham walked with God and the messengers. God is musing over whether he should let Abraham know what the plan will be for Sodom. This intimacy between God and Abraham is so unlike any other relationship in scripture. I find it powerful and moving. God has promised to make Abraham and Sarah the parents of many nations and will bless all families because of that relationship. So, in this amazing relationship, God shares with Abraham that the cries of the innocent and of injustice has reached the Divine. And because of it, God intends to destroy the city. I find this both encouraging and a bit overwhelming. God is speaking to Abraham about what he intends to do as if what Abraham thinks or believe matters. As we will see in tomorrow's reading, Abraham takes this seriously. Abraham believes that what he thinks matters and this relationship with God matters. *How deeply do you take your relationship with God? Do you believe what you think matters? In what ways is God conversing with you right now and how will that be made real in your life?*

Tuesday, July 30, 2019 Genesis 18: 22-33

Here the conversation gets real. Now, Abraham is respectful, but pointed. "If there are....50, will you really destroy everything? I know I am nothing, but still...how about 45? Or 30? Will you behave like this?" Finally, Abraham asks...."what about 10?" God agrees to not destroy this city if there are 10 people that are innocent. Other than his nephew Lot living outside of Sodom, who knows how many people in that city Abraham knew. Perhaps none since he and his nephew were working their businesses in separate places. Abraham bartered for the lives of people he probably didn't know, and who were of a different ethnic and religious background. He bargained with God for their lives, businesses and homes. I am challenged in my life as to who I would bargain with God for their lives, businesses, homes and families; people I don't necessarily know or love but am willing to beg God, for their lives? Abraham's commitment to the innocent and to justice in his relationship with God, shows the depth of their friendship. Abraham's faith and trust in God to do the right thing is witness generation to generation. *How is your friendship with God today?*

Wednesday July 31, 2019 Genesis 19: 1-13, Deuteronomy 29: 16-26, Ezekiel 16: 49-50

I do not have time to unpack all of this. Genesis 19 is the story of the what happens to the messengers when they reach Lot's home and the hostile response of the men in Sodom. The level of violence in this story, including Lot's willingness to sacrifice his daughters is horrific. This threat of assault, battery and sexual assault is the stuff of nightmares. What is interesting is that modern society makes this all about "sexual orientation" and homosexuality, rather than about the assault on strangers, foreigners and outsiders. Deuteronomy is clear that the sins of Sodom is about idolatry and Ezekiel about not caring for the poor and needy. Scripture again and again cries out on behalf of those on the bottom: the poor, the refugee, the widow, the orphan, the hungry and homeless. Hospitality is at the center of our faith as Christians. *Who are we caring for? Who are we ignoring? What cries of the innocent and those seeking justice are not being heard?*

Thursday August 1, 2019 Luke 5: 27-32

Jesus has continued to heal and teach and continues to call disciples. Here he calls a tax collector. Truly someone outside the mainstream, a collaborator with the enemy Rome and someone who has been willing to steal and threaten and do whatever it takes to satisfy Rome and their own bank account. Jesus chooses this man and then Levi throws him a party, and everyone grumbles, particularly the religious leaders. Like Abraham, Jesus is interested in those who are outside, those who may have no one to speak for them. Jesus says to the "religious" people: if you are not "sick" you don't need me. These people do...people who have not been accepted, who have been kept away from God's love and grace. *How do you think we can be more intentional to setting the table for those who are lonely, lost and uncertain? How do we reach out to those on the "outside" and help people find welcome "inside"?*

Friday August 2, 2019 Luke 5: 33-39

After Jesus explains that he is there to help those who need it the most, the next criticism is that he and his disciples "eat and drink" all the time! John the Baptist didn't and the religious leaders fast. The contrast is clear. Jesus parties and the religious leaders and John the Baptist are more serious spiritual people. Jesus understands that bringing fresh insight, hope, love and joy into faith communities is more than just doing the same old rituals. Jesus eats and drinks with "outsiders" because Jesus wants them to know God's love and grace as real in their lives. You pour new life and spirit (or wine) into new wine skins, new people, not into the old. Jesus points out that there is nothing wrong with old wine, in fact many prefer it. But new energy, comes from new life and new understandings. Setting the table so that new and different voices and cultures and people can join in creates growth, energy and new life. *How can we set the table and make sure new people feel welcome?*