



Open Table

August 29, 2010

Focus Scripture Luke 14:1, 7-14

Additional Scriptures
Jeremiah 2:4-13
Psalm 81:1, 10-16
Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

Christ, our loving host, open our hearts to accept your invitation to true community in God's reign. Assure us of our place at God's open table, and help us make certain that no one is excluded from dining there. Amen.

Check out Spirit Sightings for connections between current events and the focus passage. Spirit Sighting are posted weekly prior to the date of use.

An invitation in the mailbox brings anticipation of an event to come. Some invitations require formal replies; some expect only that we will show up. Each one requires us to decide whether we will accept the invitation and under what conditions. Today's readings prompt similar reflection on the invitation that is extended to the open table of God's realm.

Focus Scripture: Luke 14:1, 7-14

In Luke's gospel, the setting of a meal often speaks to what is important in God's reign. The use of this image reflects the importance of the social obligations surrounding "table hospitality" in Jesus' time. Meals reinforced and cemented relationships. Each invitation accepted meant a reciprocal invitation must be extended at a later date. Some hosts ranked guests according to their social status and even served different qualities and quantities of food accordingly.

Verse 1 sets today's reading in the context of a Sabbath meal at the home of a "leader of the Pharisees," a group of Jews who emphasized learning scripture and following the Law of Moses. In this setting Jesus does several unconventional things. First, verses 2-6 tell how Jesus heals a man on the Sabbath. Second, Jesus critiques the accepted standard of meal etiquette. At such dinners, guests were assigned places that indicated their social standing as well as their relationship to the host. Jesus observes the "jockeying for position" and urges guests not to trouble themselves about vying for places of honour. After all, true honour (the Greek word *doxa* also means "glory") is only of God.

Jesus addresses the inclusive nature of God's reign by speaking to the protocol of extending invitations. He challenges the host to include those who might not be able to reciprocate. To broaden the guest list is to accept God's invitation to create an open table – a community that invites and includes everyone. The reward that awaits such faithful living will be realized "at the resurrection of the righteous," a reference to the fulfillment of God's eternal reign. This teaching was particularly difficult for Jews who were concerned with ritual purity – where one ate, with whom one ate, and

what one ate were part of being able to carry out one's religious practices.

Jesus calls us to make changes in how we live as people of faith. Jesus calls all God's people to live in a spirit of humility – to be so secure in the knowledge of God's love for us that we sense no need to promote ourselves.

The prophet Jeremiah calls the people of Judah to return to the bountiful, open table that God provides. In **Jeremiah 2:4-13** the prophet exhorts the people to remember, as they have forgotten who and whose they are: "They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and dug out cisterns for themselves, cracked cisterns that can hold no water" (v. 13).

Psalm 81:1, 10-16 seems in dialogue with Jeremiah's word. The people are called to "sing aloud" to God, who promises: "With the finest of the wheat and honey from the rock I would satisfy you" (v. 15).

The author of Hebrews encourages early Christians to act on the basis of mutual love. **Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16** asks them to remember those in peril and to risk offering hospitality to strangers in their midst, following the example of Christ.



Jesus paints a picture of the reign of God as an open table where all are invited and where there is enough for all, forever. We are called to join Christ in setting such an open table – to invite all people to experience life shaped by God's inclusive and compassionate love. What does it mean to be invited to live in God's reign not because of what we have or what we do for a living, but simply because we are God's children? In what ways do our lives demonstrate our response to this invitation?

