

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Put a single place setting—plate, knife, fork, spoon, napkin, glass at the center of your group. Place nearby a shaker of salt and a lighted candle.

LEADER: Salt is a gospel image of discipleship. Let us each take a turn shaking a little salt into the hand of the person next to us, saying the words that follow. The person receiving the salt tastes it and says amen.

EACH: Be salted with the flavor of the gospel, and never lose its taste.

More frequently than any other gospel writer, Luke pictures Jesus eating with people, both friends and critics. Luke points to Jesus as nourishment for a hungry world when Mary lays him as a newborn in a feed trough.

Jesus feeds a multitude with a few loaves and fish. He shares the meal Martha prepares when he visits. He hosts a last supper for his friends. He is the stranger who becomes the invited supper guest of two disciples on their way home to Emmaus after his death. In Sunday's gospel Jesus is the dinner guest of a Pharisee.

We human beings eat to live. We also live to eat. We live to find nourishment in one another's presence and conversation. We live

SUNDAY

by SUNDAY

by gathering for meals that celebrate special events and people.

Some meals stand out for the food. Gumbo at Dooky Chase's in New Orleans. A hillside picnic in Iowa on fried chicken and coleslaw with a friend's mother. Sharing sandwiches and their insights with the *Sunday by Sunday* group that gathers at the Caritas Community in Memphis.

Some meals stand out for the company. Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas and Easter meals, Fourth of July picnics bring family and friends together. When people die or move, we often miss them most on these days when we stop, continue our traditions, and remember who we are.

Sameness makes these meals memorable—the same people, the familiar turkey and dressing, and the continuity across the years and generations.

Some meals mark public events of importance to people who are strangers to one another. Weddings, receptions, convention banquets, roasts, retirement dinners, teas, receptions for dignitaries, formal White House dinners—such meals mingle strangers, colleagues, acquaintances, friends.

- Describe a meal you remember for its food.
- What meal remains memorable for its compelling conversation or intense conflict?



GOSPEL

Who will have the seats of honor at the messianic banquet?

NARRATOR: On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath, they were watching him closely. When Jesus noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable.

JESUS: When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host. The host who invited both of you may come and say to you—

HOST: Give this person your place.

JESUS: Then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you—

HOST: Friend, move up higher.

JESUS: Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all

who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

NARRATOR: Then Jesus spoke to the one who had invited him to the meal.

JESUS: When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors. They may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. You will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.

Luke 14.1,7-14



days of the week to be healed, but not on the Sabbath.” Jesus shames him for being willing to water his animals on the Sabbath but unwilling to free the woman from her suffering.

Miracle two. On his way to a Pharisee’s house for a meal, Jesus meets a man with dropsy, a serious case of edema, which indicates the man’s organs are failing. Jesus asks the Pharisees and lawyers who have gathered to eat with him if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They are silent. Jesus heals the man and asks, “Would you pull you ox or your own child out of a pit on the Sabbath?” Again they don’t answer but they are watching him closely.

At the dinner Jesus notices guests claiming the best seats and launches into the parable that skewers two kind of people, those who take the places of honor at banquets and those who invite people just like them, or better than them, to dinners they give. Invite the poor, Jesus tells the guests, the lame and the blind. The two healings they have witnessed demonstrate that God’s will is to have people restored to community, able to praise and worship.

In his advice for making guest lists, Jesus prefers those who cannot repay their hosts with a return invitation and places of honor at their tables. Luke wants to broaden the circle of those who eat at the tables of the elite rather than

Whom do we invite to our tables?

When we hear only short portions of the gospel at Sunday worship, we often miss the context for the story. Why does Jesus provoke local Pharisees by telling the parable we hear this Sunday? Because Jesus is arguing back and forth with these Pharisees about keeping Sabbath laws. A pair of miracle

stories raise the Sabbath issue.

Miracle one. Jesus is teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath when he notices and heals a woman who has been bent over for 18 long years (Luke 13.10-17). When she stands up straight, she immediately praises God. The synagogue official chides the congregation, insisting, “You can come on six

tighten the social circle. He wants our guest lists to help distribute food justly rather than cut people off as chronically inferior, deserving distance from us rather than place among us. Luke urges us to seek God's blessings rather than honored places at earthly meals.

● **What places of honor might you give up? What would you lose or gain?**

Immediately following Jesus' cautions about taking first places, he tells another parable about a man who gave a dinner but whose invited guests refused to come. Instead the man fills his tables with people from the streets who are poor, crippled, blind, and lame. This parable holds up people who are poor and chronically ill as the best guests to share the host's abundance. Luke wants the justice we do on earth to reflect the seating priorities at the heavenly banquet. He calls us to social justice as well as personal conversion.



One doesn't need to be sick or homebound for very long to feel out of the loop, left along the roadside. Helping friends and neighbors get to church or the store can nourish their spirits and include them in the life of the community.

Our Eucharists anticipate the messianic banquet. Jesus' advice to the assembled dinner guests in Sunday's gospel also applies to our meal of faith.

● **Who, if anyone or any group, should your parish move from the lowest to the highest place at the meal that gives our community its identity?**

● **Volunteer to create a welcoming liturgy that invites the diversity of people in your parish to recognize the parish community values their participation. What might differently-abled, teens, immigrants, single parents need from your group?**

The feast for all peoples is an ancient Israelite image of peace and communion in God. Isaiah promises, "On this mountain the Holy One will make for all

peoples a feast of rich food and choice wines." At that feast, "the Holy One will swallow up death forever and wipe away the tears from all faces" (25.6-8).

The last chapter of Second Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) invites "everyone who thirsts to come to the waters, and you that have no money, come, buy and eat!" This feast with God will satisfy like no other, so why, Isaiah asks, "do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?" (Isaiah 55.1-2).

These ancient visions of God's abundance flowing free of charge to all remain visions rather than realities in our world. More than one in five children in the United States live in poverty, in households that don't always have enough food. They are food insecure. Wars around the globe spread hunger wherever they happen.

Luke's gospel challenges us to live Jesus' word, do what Jesus did, and renew that pledge at every Eucharist.

● **Share all the good news that group members know about the many people who help others get the extra food they need each month or who put their lives on the line to get humanitarian aid into places of international emergency.**

DO SOMETHING

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- **Practice welcoming Sabbath. Walk a mile in the morning alone, early. Welcome the dawn, the hour of Jesus' resurrection. Welcome colors that warm the sky. Breathe. See wide. Explore the tiny. Taste the nectar of flowers. Listen to the birds. Imagine people from whom you feel estranged in the dawn light of Jesus' new life and enduring love.**

What is wise about humility?

Sirach, the author of Sunday's first reading, is a teacher of wisdom, a giver of practical advice about the right way to act. He praises humility, a not-so-popular virtue in our society that values self-esteem and assertiveness.

In the middle of finishing my doctoral dissertation, a feat I was feeling justifiably proud about, I attended a sisters' chapter meeting as my province representative. At prayer, one of our sisters from Hawaii shared a version of 1 Corinthians 13, in which Paul writes about the importance of love. It began like this: "If I have a doctorate in theology and work hard in church-related programs, but have no *aloha* for those I live with, what I say and do in the name of the church and Jesus is *waha'au*, empty talk."

The words got my attention; so did the rest of the prayer:

"Aloha is most of the time patient and kind with those with whom she lives. Aloha is not jealous that someone else is singled out for recognition Aloha will go on forever."

The use of the word *aloha* made me hear Paul's message very personally and very practically. It places humility in the down-to-earth context of our personal hospitality both toward all and toward those closest.

The same systemic evils we see in our society and world exist also within us. We grow up

in our society and absorb its biases. The scriptures call us to see from God's point of view both as Christians in our daily lives and as citizens in our work for the common, public good.

Sirach teaches humility.

My child, perform your tasks with humility; then you will be loved by those whom God accepts. The greater you are, the more you must humble yourself; so you will find favor in the sight of the Holy One.

For great is the might of the Holy One; but by the humble God is glorified. When calamity befalls the proud, there is no healing, for an evil plant has taken root in the person. The mind of the intelligent appreciates proverbs, and an attentive ear is the desire of the wise.

Sirach 3.17-18,20,28-29

● What is wise about being humble?

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PRAY

Focus on the place setting at the center of your group. Use this place setting to make a commitment to invite someone you exclude from your life to your own table or to your parish table.

Spend five minutes in silence, thinking about whom you want to seat at this place setting.

VOICE 1: I am the woman bent over for 18 long years until Jesus raised me tall to praise and thank God.

ALL: Welcome to our table.

VOICE 2: I am the man with dropsy, misshapen, lame, the object of ridicule, long forgotten.

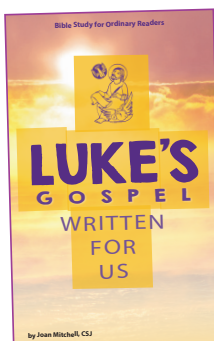
ALL: Welcome to our table.

Tell the group whom you will invite to your table or work to include by speaking in their voices, following the pattern of the woman bent over and man with dropsy. Answer each voice—

ALL: Welcome to our table.



Look Ahead to a Fall Bible Study



You have been enjoying Luke's Gospel this summer. The good news is we continue reading from Luke all the way to Advent. Why not start a group that can read and study Luke together? It will make Sunday Eucharist much more meaningful and deepen your relationships with your fellow Bible students.

Sister Joan's book on Luke is short (nine chapters), easy to use, and inexpensive. Go to goodgroundpress.com to read sample chapters. Then find a few others who want to make Luke's story about a compassionate and inclusive Jesus more alive in their lives. 1-9 copies, \$10.00 each; 10-99, \$8.00; 100 or more, \$7.00.

You can order online or call us at 800-232-5533.