

THE KIDS' TABLE



Scripture:

Habakkuk 1:2-4 & 12-13 & 2:1

1 O LORD, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not listen? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? **3** Why do you make me see wrong-doing and look at trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. **4** So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails. The wicked surround the righteous – therefore judgment comes forth perverted.

12 Are you not from of old, O LORD my God, my Holy One? You shall not die. O LORD, you have marked them for judgment; and you, O Rock, have established them for punishment. **13** Your eyes are too pure to behold evil, and you cannot look on wrongdoing; why do you look on the treacherous, and are silent when the wicked swallow those more righteous than they?

2 **1** I will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint.

Ephesians 2:1-10

1 You were dead through the trespasses and sins **2** in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. **3** All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. **4** But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us **5** even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--**6** and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, **7** so that in the ages to come he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. **8** For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God -- **9** not the result of works, so that no one may boast. **10** For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life.



GIVING THANKS

It's November 14 and Thanksgiving is just around the corner. My four siblings and I have the tradition of taking turns hosting Thanksgiving each year. Last year Liz and I hosted at our house here in Santa Rosa. We had thirty for dinner on Thursday. This year my younger sister Peggy will host at her house in San Diego. Getting together with my family at Thanksgiving is a highlight of the year for me.

It wasn't all that long ago when my nieces and nephews were little kids themselves, and now they are starting to have children of their own. My three older siblings all have grandchildren. So the holiday has come full circle for me.

With twenty-five to thirty-five people at Thanksgiving each year, you can imagine there is always a need for multiple tables. We always have at least three and sometimes as many as five or six.

With eleven nieces and nephews around plus my two daughters, in years past there would always be one or two designated kids' tables for the Thanksgiving meal. There is nothing better for my girls than spending time with their cousins. The kids, when they were younger, really much preferred eating with one another and not with the adults. It wasn't until they got into their late teens and early twenties that they wanted to sit with some of the adults during dinner.

There were a few years when I can remember having to sit at the kids' table. The adult tables were already full when I got through the buffet line. So even though I was thirty-something I found myself listening to conversations about topics and events I had long since lost interest in.

It just wasn't what I was looking forward to. I was hoping to catch up with my brother Ken on what he had been up to, how his work was going. I wanted to talk with my sister Peggy and her husband Scott about the new house they had just bought. My sister Betsy had a new job and my sister Kathleen had a fabulous new computer. I really wanted to talk with them about all these things.

But I was relegated to the kids' table. The conversation was, well, much less stimulating if you were thirty-two years old.

CELEBRATION?

So here we are preparing to celebrate Thanksgiving, ready to give thanks for another year of abundant living. This year probably has not been especially abundant for many of us. But it did get me thinking. Here we are at the very end of 2010; economists say the recession is over. They say the economic recovery will be slow; I don't think it could be any slower. They say the worst is behind us.

If you are one of the ten percent of the people in the U.S. who is unemployed and not

able to find a job, the worst is not over! If you just graduated from college or high school and are looking to start a career, good luck; the job market for new graduates is also tough. The federal government has said inflation has been non-existent this year, so if you get a social security check, it won't be going up in 2011. The stock market is making a steady recovery, but the real estate market is still stagnant. If you need to sell your house, now is not a good time.

But life isn't really all that bad; it's really pretty good if you compare it with most of the people in the world. But like the kids' table, it is just not as fulfilling as it was in the past. The portions are smaller, there are less options and opportunities, and the food is a little bland. It's like we are all sitting at the kids' table at Thanksgiving waiting to grow up so we can sit with the adults. It's conversation that lacks depth, it's activities that lack meaning; it's relationships that lack commitment.

SHARED BOUNTY

I have noticed how especially good the food and drinks are at Thanksgiving. There is always too much food, and I always eat way too much. But it is so good. And there are foods that I only eat once a year that I just have to have: fresh cooked turkey and mashed potatoes smothered with gravy, the yams that are baked with marshmallows on top, the baked green bean casserole with the fried onions on top, the cranberry sauce, the stuffing, oh, that stuffing. I just can't get enough.

There was a time that I thought the food was so good because it was Thanksgiving and everything was fresh, home made, hot and right out of the oven. But I have come to realize that that is only part of the reason the food and wine are so good. I have come to realize that it is being with family and good friends that make the food taste as good as it does.

After having gorged myself, I have no energy to go for even the shortest walk after our meal together, but with the support and the urging of the gathered family, (usually it's the kids who get us going), we get up from the couch or the chair, and we go outside, enjoy the fresh air and take a long walk around the neighborhood. It's just what the doctor ordered.

But I have also come to realize that too much food or too much wine eaten alone or with just one other person is not nearly as good as when it is shared with family. The most exquisitely prepared food eaten alone isn't really all the great. To indulge alone is such a waste. If you are going to overdo it, do it with the ones you love. It takes conversation and communal participation to make the food taste it's very best.

Without all the elements, the food and wine, the conversation, the meal, the banquet, the walk, the gathering just isn't complete. We need the whole and complete event; otherwise the picture will be missing a key component.

HABAKKUK COMPLAINS

In the Old Testament book of Habakkuk that we read earlier, I find it interesting that the complaints of Habakkuk are very similar to the complaints we might hear today. In fact they may be some of the very same complaints we ourselves have made.

Habakkuk is outraged at the violence and injustice in his society. He lists six different problems, sin, wickedness, destruction and violence, no justice in the courts, and the bad people outnumbered the good people. All I have to do is turn on the twenty-four hour news channels on TV and I can hear the same complaints. It has been two-thousand-six-hundred years since Habakkuk registered his complaints with God, but the complaints sure have not changed much in two-thousand-six-hundred years have they?

Habakkuk needed to stop what he was doing, give thanks to God for what he had and let God be in control of this world. He needed to realize that life here on earth was not always fair, not always just, not always caring, not always loving. Human beings who live on planet earth are always in the need of being in a relationship with God. We inhabitants of this fragile planet try to varying degrees to be in community with God, but historically we have had a very difficult time succeeding.

I sit at the kids' table on earth, I listen to the squabbles, I engage in redundant conversation, I squander valuable time, I fight over unimportant things, I place my life style above everyone else's. I want to be in control of my own life; I am afraid to let God be in charge. I can be like my twelve year old nephew at Thanksgiving who could not understand why his mom would not let him have a fourth piece of cherry pie.

I want it all, but when I have it all I too often abuse the privileges I have been given. I eat way too much for Thanksgiving dinner and the heartburn settles in; the incredibly tasty spicy stuffing is paying me back for having seconds, or maybe it was the small third portion I took. I feel incredibly tired after the feast. All I want to do is find the couch and stretch out and take a long nap. Days later when I step on the scale, it balloons to never seen before heights.

Habakkuk never really receives a direct answer to his prayer. At least not the answer he is looking for. We are like Habakkuk in that we often have in our own mind how we want God to answer our prayers. When he does it differently, how do we respond?

God's ultimate response to Habakkuk is simply, God is God, God is holy, God does care, and will act as God sees fit, but only in Gods time, not in human time.

FALL SHORT

We are reminded in the reading from Ephesians that we fall short in the eyes of God. Eugene Peterson translates the passage in Ephesians this way, "It wasn't that long ago that you were mired in that old stagnant life of sin. You let the world, which doesn't know the first thing about living, tell you how to live. You filled your lungs with polluted unbelief, and then exhaled disobedience. We all did it, all of us doing what we felt like doing, when we felt like doing it, all of us in the same boat."

You know that behavior and attitude sounds a lot like some kids that I know. Without Christ as our example we have no hope for ourselves or humanity. But in Christ all things here on earth are possible.

HEAVEN

So we come to another Thanksgiving. Will we come as daughters and sons of God, forgiven by the creator, sustainer and redeemer of life? Will we come giving thanks, working for good here on earth, working as God desires life here on earth? "On earth as it is in heaven." So let's talk about heaven.

The singer song writer Carole King in her song "*Way over Yonder*" has these lyrics which I think could easily be a description of heaven.

"Way over wonder is a place that I know; where I can find shelter from the hunger and cold. I know when I get there the first thing I'll see, is the sun shining golden-shining right down on me. Then trouble's gonna lose me - worry leave me behind. Maybe tomorrow I'll find my way, to the land where the honey runs in rivers each day. And the sweet tasting good life is so easily found. Way over yonder, that's where I'm bound."

She makes it sound so enticing; I hope she is right!

But I think the banquet in heaven is nothing like it is here on earth. Every one at the table will be welcomed; ethnicity, color, sex, rich or poor, north and south, east and west, ALL will be in attendance. Nationality will be unknown, and unimportant. Surgery will be unnecessary, sickness will be nonexistent, and my back won't hurt. Injustice will be unheard of; peace will finally have won out. And at last our swords will have been turned into plowshares.

The banquet will be incredible. The smells will be incredible -- some we will be accustomed to, but others will be brand new to us. The adult table will be filled with an incredible bounty of food, with foods and spices that we have never seen or tasted. But they will blend together to make the most appetizing aroma, the most satisfying of meals. No one will leave hungry.

At this banquet we can eat as much as we want, heartburn free. We can even start with dessert if we want too, and even have that fourth piece of cherry pie. The conversation will be lively but loving, caring but not condescending; there won't be any winners or losers. Envy, jealousy, greed, resentment, hatred, bitterness, anger, and hunger will be words that have no meaning. We will ALL be sitting at the welcome table. We will all finally be sitting at the adult table. Amen.



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