

BUILDING A LONGER TABLE



Scripture:

Psalms 78:1-4, 12-16

¹Give ear, O my people, to my teaching; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. ²I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter dark sayings from of old, ³things that we have heard and known, that our ancestors have told us. ⁴We will not hide them from their children; we will tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done.

¹²In the sight of their ancestors he worked marvels in the land of Egypt, in the fields of Zoan. ¹³He divided the sea and let them pass through it, and made the waters stand like a heap. ¹⁴In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all night long with a fiery light. ¹⁵He split rocks open in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep. ¹⁶He made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers.

Matthew 21:23-32

A few days before this Jesus had turned over the tables
of the money changers and healed the blind and lame

Now –

²³When he entered the temple, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him as he was teaching, and said, “By what authority are you doing these things, and who gave you this authority?” ²⁴Jesus said to them, “I will also ask you one question; if you tell me the answer, then I will also tell you by what authority I do these things. ²⁵Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ ²⁶But if we say, ‘Of human origin,’ we are afraid of the crowd; for all regard John as a prophet.” ²⁷So they answered Jesus, “We do not know.” And he said to them, “Neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. ²⁸“What do you think? A man had two sons; he went to the first and said, ‘Son, go and work in the vineyard today.’ ²⁹He answered, ‘I will not’; but later he changed his mind and went. ³⁰The father went to the second and said the same; and he answered, ‘I go, sir’; but he did not go. ³¹Which of the two did the will of his father?” They said, “The first.” Jesus said to them, “Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³²For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him; and even after you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe him.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



I have two sons who used to behave in a similar way to the ones in this teaching lesson. Did your kids ever agree to do something you asked and then not do it? Sometimes I would ask one of them if he would take the dog for a walk or clean up his room and he would say, "Sure! I'll do it!" And then an hour later I'd find him playing a video game or watching TV. Isn't it comforting to know kids were the same way back in ancient days, too?

When Jesus is questioned by the chief priests and authorities in the temple, it is a whole different game they are playing here. In this instance, they are trying to trap Jesus into saying something that will get him arrested. When Jesus turns the game around on them, they are the ones who suddenly feel trapped, so they claim to know nothing.

Jesus likens them to the people in the story who insincerely say they will obey their father and then ignore his request. Jesus knows the temple leaders are also insincere in their actions. They fail to follow through with obeying God and yet, they judge others like the tax collectors and prostitutes as unworthy and not righteous. Hypocrites.

Jesus astounded his followers whenever he confronted hypocrites (especially powerful ones). And he shocked his disciples when he welcomed sinners like tax collectors and prostitutes to his table. Jesus invited the "disrepute." Disrepute means: the state of being held in low esteem by the public or disgraced. Society at that time considered the people to be outside the grace of God.

So you can understand why his own disciples were especially surprised when Jesus held up these people as role models who understand the Kingdom of God better than the temple leaders! Jesus was showing them that those they assume are unworthy, may truly be the more righteous people because they were open to changing their ways and believing in Jesus Christ who was acting with the authority of God.

The Chief Priests and elders in the temple were too proud to be able to see who Jesus really was and to trust in him. Also, Jesus used this lesson to teach his disciples to build a longer table (so to speak) to include the people deemed unworthy rather than to wall them out.

But the Chief Priests in the temple were blinded

by their own self-righteousness. Their elitism made them too isolated to reach out to the real world. And their efforts to cling onto their high status in society kept Jesus from having any influence on their hearts and souls. They could not imagine changing their elitist ways for fear they might lose their elite status.

In contrast, the lowly tax collectors and prostitutes caught onto the open welcoming message of the kingdom of God that Christ proclaimed.

Those who are humble or downtrodden are more readily able to see the truth clearly because pride isn't blocking their reality. When we are in need, our hearts open to learning new ways of living. When we face our failures and vulnerabilities, the wall protecting our ego falls down.

The main themes in Jesus' teachings about the Kingdom of God were: One, the command to love God wholeheartedly and to love your neighbor as yourself. Second, he came to give life and give it abundantly. But to live a real authentic life, you have to be aware of your need for God's love and your need for others.

To truly appreciate God's love, you must humble yourself and still believe you are worthy of being loved. Then when God's love has filled your emptiness that love will spill over onto others around you. Even the others that you previously considered unworthy.

That is who Jesus is commanding you to welcome at your table. Ponder for a moment, When was the last time a person around your table had a different accent or skin color? When was the last time you invited a stranger into your home or to church here?

As you know I invite strangers to church here all the time. And now we want to extend our own table here and include a meal for friends and strangers on Thanksgiving day. If you or someone you know has no where to go on Thanksgiving, they are welcome here. Jesus loves it when the house of God brings strangers together.

Pastor Will Willimon says:

"There's a lot we don't know about Christ. But one thing we know for sure is that he brought people together. He begins his ministry by

assembling twelve disciples, people who had nothing in common... except that Christ had called them to walk with him. Jesus got into trouble for uniting despairing sinners and presumptuous saints. He saves us by assembling us, by putting us in a group, by teaching us to call those whom the world regards as strangers or enemies as "sister" and "brother." Anybody who says, "Love one another...bless those who persecute you...pray for your enemies" has got to be somebody prejudiced toward unity, reconciliation, union, communion, community."

Welcoming to our table people we are not familiar with is not an easy task for all of us. Welcoming someone who is clearly different from your normal group may be a challenge. There is a reason that Sunday mornings are still the most segregated time in North America. Many of us have a hard time inviting people who are different from us to be our friends first and then invite them to join us in worship. That is the best way to grow a diverse church family. Diversify your own circle of friends, first. Then you will be more authentic in sharing your faith life, too.

It also helps to educate yourself and your family about ways you might be subconsciously shunning people who are different from you with out being totally aware of it. Educating kids while they are young protects them from isolating themselves and missing out on the joys of having a variety of friends from different cultures and traditions.

When my kids were in Junior High one of their required summer reading lists contained a fascinating book called *The Cay*.

The book deals with the healing of racial prejudice between two people stranded on an island. The story goes: When World War II breaks out, 11-year-old Phillip Enright and his mother board the ship called the S.S. *Hato* to Virginia because his mother feels it is unsafe living in Curaçao with the German submarines surrounding the area. But the ship is torpedoed, and Phillip is stranded in the sea with an old black man named Timothy. After many days drifting at sea, Phillip is blinded by the suns glare on the water. So Timothy finds an island and builds them a hut for shelter. With few supplies, they live stranded together for two months, fishing and collecting rain water.

The Cay is an island only 1 mile long and 1/2 a mile wide. Initially, they have huge difficulties

working with each other, because young white Phillip has grown up with racial prejudice against the elderly black Timothy. Over time, Phillip learns to overcome his disrespect for Timothy and develops a strong bond of friendship. He realizes Timothy is equally worthy as he says to himself:

"I had now been with him every moment of the day and night for two months, but I had not seen him. I remember seeing that ugly welted face on the ship. But now, in my memory, it did not seem ugly at all. It seemed only kind and strong. I asked, "Timothy, are you still black?" His laughter filled the hut."

To create harmonious diversity in your life and in the life of your children and grandchildren, read books like *The Cay* and those by Patricia Polacco. She often writes about people from different ethnicities living harmoniously in her children's books. There are other things you can do with older kids like watch a movie like the movie *Race* (about the true story of Jesse Owens).

For Christmas one year, Kathryn got the American girl doll called Addie, (the one whose ancestors were slaves). Kathryn loved her Addie doll, as much as her other American girl dolls but by then she had African American friends in school, too. **If you have older teens watch the old movie: Look Whose Coming to Dinner!** and discuss racism still happening today. You can build a bigger table by promoting a message of love over difference like the parents of this adorable little girl: (show [video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSGftZKrL7M))
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JSGftZKrL7M>

Children are not born with racial prejudice, they learn it from those around them. Help the children in your life become comfortable making friends anywhere in the world. It is our job to help bring the kingdom of God to earth as it is in heaven, now. It will happen, peace and harmony are our destiny. The evolution of humans is ushering in a future where we all have similar looks and skin color.

National Geographic published an article about what humans in the United States will look like in 2050 based on the multi-ethnic trends happening today. By 2050 this is what the average American will look like.



Isn't she beautiful? Big eyes, lovely skin. So much better for dealing with all the UV rays from the sun! Less skin cancer in the future! They showed a female face because by 2050 there will be 7 million more females than males in the US out of a total of about 430 million people.

So we might as well do all we can to live in harmony now and set the pattern for the future. Respond to God's call to embrace people who are different from you. Bring all your hopes and fears to the table for God's healing grace. We are all still welcome at God's table of grace even when we try and fail. Even if you just start now to bring more diversity into your life, you will be forgiven for being slow about, "Loving your neighbor (of all ethnicities and genders and status and faiths) as yourself." Amen

As people who have been fed, go now to feed the world indiscriminately and abundantly.

As those who were given hope, take the light of hope to others near and far by spreading God's love.

As people who have been forgiven, go and forgive all and serve all.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen

**Rev. Dr. Cindy Alloway
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405**

