

“An Unexpected Table”
Suffering Servant
Downton
April 3, 2022

We're in a series preparing for Good Friday and Easter called The Suffering Servant - the main idea is that Jesus arrives in ways we don't expect. He's an unexpected King with unexpected compassion who, as we'll see this week, invites unexpected people to his table.

If you have a Bible, go with me to **Luke 22**. And I would imagine if you grew up in church or not, this is story might be one you're probably familiar with, especially during this time of the year. This is the passage known as the Last Supper - and this part in Jesus' life is included in all four Gospel accounts, which is a pretty big deal. Let's read it together:

Luke 22:1-2, 14-20

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. **2** And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people...

14 And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. **15** And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

16 For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." **17** And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. **18** For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." **19** And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **20** And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Now when you think about this story, I don't know what image might come to your mind. But I'm reminded of this painting by Leonardo, my favorite of all the ninja turtles.



There's a whole lot of tiny details going on in this painting that we don't have time to get into - but

when this was painted some 600 years ago this painting was considered revolutionary for its time. But there's a few things I want to highlight that Leonardo wasn't super accurate on.

- Pastor Jon during week 1 brought up that most images of Jesus in our Western world are white -

which Leonardo in the 15th century, living in Western Europe, captured Jesus and all these characters as quite white.

- Everyone is all on one side of the table. Which I don't know how you eat dinner - we eat around the table
- Lastly, dining tables 2,000 years ago were significantly lower to the ground. You didn't sit in chairs, you basically laid out on the ground. This is why in v.14 it says Jesus "reclined at table." It actually looked more like this:



- So as you can see, it was a pretty laid back atmosphere. I mean, people look like they're on the verge of taking naps. The tone of sharing meals in ancient times was often this unhurried affair. People were in no rush to go anywhere, the focus was on the people you were sharing a meal with, the people you identified with.

You enjoyed spending time with them because they were your people - so why be in a hurry?

- It kinda reminds me about how every year among the pastors we do a pastor retreat where we get away for a week to spend time together and think and pray through life and ministry and the highlight of the trip is always the final dinner meal where we intentionally take 3-4 hours kicking back and sharing a meal together, and Jon Ludovina tends to cook all the food, and if you've been around our church family long enough you know Jon cooks the best food ever. Like, before I moved to Columbia 5 years ago I didn't know about good BBQ.
- But anyways, all this to say in biblical times, sharing meals together was a huge deal. And I would argue that for most of us, with so many fast food options, and DoorDash, and just generally being in a hurry to get to the next place - we don't tend to perceive sharing meals to be a huge deal, like, we don't tend to put much thought into the people you ate with.
 - But back then, **who you shared a table with said a lot about you.**
 - And this was especially heightened in Jesus' time. That who you shared meals with was an indicator of who you were and who your people were. Your table was an identity marker.

And that's actually the reason I wanted to show you this painting because the thing that made Da Vinci's Last Supper so astounding and, for the time, a masterpiece, wasn't the historical accuracy of it, but his brushstrokes' ability to capture the distinctiveness of each person present at the table... to capture their emotions and personalities and dispositions on that night. In fact, if you were to look closely at it, you would see that each one kind of tells their own story. In his own way, Da Vinci captures the relative

diversity of that room.

And that's what I want us to consider this morning: **have you ever thought about the actual people Jesus chose to eat with?**

Like, I know many of us have heard some of their names and maybe a story or two about them, and, bare minimum, we know they are Jesus' disciples but I'm asking if you've really thought about this mixture of people and what it says about Jesus when he says, "I have earnestly desired to eat *this* meal with *you*."

So imagine with me, you're a fly on the wall here. It's about 8PM, the sun is going down quickly, and we're on the second floor of a house. And there's this long low to the ground table with candlelights all around and a simple passover meal consisting of some pieces of bread, some herbs, and some cups of wine scattered all up and down the table and notice the people on Jesus' guest list:

Around this table, there's **James and John** that we met a couple of weeks ago. Two brothers, appropriately nicknamed the Sons of Thunder. Two brothers from a family fishing business. They were known to be a bit bold and a bit brash. Not afraid to put themselves first like we saw a couple weeks back.

And then, of course, there's **Peter**. The oldest of the bunch, who kinda gives off those first-born energy vibes. He's something of a leader amongst the crew and, at times, sees it as his responsibility to take care of things. He'll be confident and proclaim Jesus is the Christ in some moments. Ready to fight for Jesus if necessary, and then just a few hours after this meal, he'll shrink back and be a coward.

Going around the table you've also got there the disciple **Nathaniel** who church tradition says was a bit of a Bible nerd and a spiritual seeker looking for answers, following Jesus and trying to figure it all out - "Is this guy who He says He is? I hope so." But then you've got sitting next to him the disciple **Thomas**, who's the opposite of a seeker, he's a doubter and skeptic. We see him later in the Gospel of John after Jesus has been still doubting and wondering "Is this guy who He says He is? Because I'm not so sure about that."

And then there's two of my favorites - Matthew and Simon. There may not be two more polar opposites in the bunch. **Matthew** was a tax collector by trade. Which was one of the most despised jobs you could have if you were a Jew. Jerusalem was under Roman occupation and part of the agreement was Rome would leave them alone so long as they swore loyalty to Caesar and paid taxes to Rome. So the Jews were essentially forced to give their money to their own oppressors, and who collected the money? The Jewish tax collectors. They were seen as traitors by their own people. And oftentimes, tax collectors embracing their role as being despised by their own would often exploit people, asking them to pay more to Rome and pocketing the money for themselves and if anyone said no to them, they could easily just send some Roman guards to come rough them up.

Then you've got right near him **Simon**. And Simon was part of this political group of Jewish nationalists known as the zealots, and these mugs hated Rome down to their core and were immensely religious. And

the zealots believed that the only way the kingdom of God was going to be ushered in, and the only way the Messiah was going to come was through violent force. In fact, if you read extra biblical material, like 1 Maccabees, some 200 years prior you have a guy like Judas Maccabee leading this Jewish revolt against Greece and winning. And so Simon, is part of this tradition that says, “See what happens if we all just group up and take these people down? God will be on our side. Let’s gooooo.”

And then, of course, there is also Judas Iscariot. Alongside the rest, gathered around the table is also the one who would betray Jesus. The one who would ultimately turn his back on the Messiah. The one who would sell him out for a bag of silver.

Now those are just some of the more well-known ones but can you imagine a more mixed up, backwards, hodge podge group of people?

- Like could you imagine people more opposite than Matthew and Simon? Matthew who was playing all nice and cozy with Rome collecting taxes from his people whereas Simon who wanted nothing more than to tear Rome down and anyone who sided with them.
- You’ve got James and John, who have these white collar jobs, trying to play favorites with Jesus, while looking down on everyone else. You’ve got Peter, who comes from a blue-collared job, who’s filled with all this gusto and bravado talking a big game wherever he goes.
- You’ve got Nathaniel and Thomas, the seeker and skeptic.

And if you’re familiar with the Gospels, you know this rag-tag group of people that follow Jesus go on to learn from Him, and serve with Him, and share near every moment with Him for THREE YEARS. These people from all these different backgrounds, Jesus slowly over time transforms them into this new community that transcends class and political lines. This would have been a group of people that if you were on the outside looking in, that NO ONE would have seen coming...

Luke 22:15

And he said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

No matter their socio-economic background, or their political affiliation, or their personality differences or even where they’re at spiritually with Him - whether it’s a skeptic, a seeker, or an enemy - **this is the group Jesus brings together to share his last meal with. These are the people Jesus identifies with as His people.**

And when you look throughout the Gospels you see this is Jesus’ MO. Who he shares meals with is one of the bigger reasons why he gets in trouble by the religious elite, he’s bucking up against the cultural norms of that day:

Matthew 9:10

And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples.

Remember what we said about how back then who you shared meals with was a huge deal?

Matthew 9:11

And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

The religious elite are shocked by this. These people eating at Jesus’ table were totally unexpected. Back then the cultural norm was you eat with people who are generally speaking, most like you - people who come from the same social class, with the same religious upbringing, with the same background. And yet Jesus, God incarnate free from sin, the King of the Universe subverts all of this and the Pharisees are like a deer in headlights saying, “Hey doesn’t Jesus know who they are and what they do and where they come from? What’s he doing hanging out with those kinds of people?”

Matthew 9:12-13

But when he heard it, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means: ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”

Jesus invites and identifies with the spiritually marginalized. Those who realize their need for God, who know they cannot on their own come to God, **God comes to them** by inviting them to the table to share a meal with him.

And I know many of you might be familiar with these passages and you don’t quite see the big deal, but for just for a moment, consider how wild this is!

Colossians says that Jesus basically upholds the universe by the words of his mouth. That’s the kind of authority and power He has as God. He’s literally like Thanos, could just snap his fingers and make the world cease to exist - *this* Jesus is the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the God of the Universe in the flesh *chooses* to recline at the table with people like this.

Even coming back to Luke 22, when you think about it... there really wasn’t anything remarkable about the 12 disciples either. For all practical intents and purposes, they are forgettable people, too. Acts tells us they are ordinary unschooled men. We have absolutely no reason to remember their names other than that Jesus chose to call them *his* people.

This is actually what the meal itself tells us...

Luke 22:19-20

And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” **20** And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

Do you see what he’s doing with this meal... he’s saying the truest true thing about you is your need for me and what I am going to do for you.

The *reason* he wanted to share this meal with them is because this meal was about what He was getting ready to do for *them*.

Jesus knows that deep down into their soul there is something bigger and greater than all of our socio-economic backgrounds, or political leanings. He knows there’s something all humans actually have in common over and above class, or education or gender. Something that supercedes all our little divisions and animosities, our conflict and struggle, our personality differences and quirks... deep down every single one of them is in need of rescue.

We need mercy and grace for sin. Hope and healing from a world broken by evil, chaos and suffering. We need rescue from our captivity to sin’s power...

Jesus is saying, I have come to be that for you. In me, the truest true thing about you is my body broken, and my blood shed in love for you.

This is what unites you. This is what breaks down every “ism” that would divide you. For whoever you are, wherever you’re from, and whatever you’ve done or had done to you... As crazy as it sounds, everyone is welcomed and invited to dine at Jesus’ table.

And if Jesus invites these people around his table, then you’re invited around his table too.

You too, are on God’s unexpected guest list, and He welcomes you and wants you to take on this unrushed, unhurried posture and to be with Him. To experience His presence afresh knowing with full confidence that you didn’t earn your place at the table. You didn’t earn your keep. You’re welcomed in, no matter what.

Jesus knows full well where you’re at right now. He knows you way better than you know yourself. He knows your desires both met and unmet, he knows what you’ve done last year and last week, he knows your background and your past and all of that. And he says to you “I earnestly desire to be with you.”

- I think for some of us our default position when it comes to God is to believe He is always disappointed and low-key frustrated with us. That if we just clean ourselves up, and sin less, and get our act together, then we can come to him. But here Jesus says, “No bring all that to the table - your brokenness, give me your weariness, give me whatever baggage, bring me all of it...because

I earnestly desire to be with you.

- Maybe you've fought porn addiction all your life, God invites you to the table.
- Maybe your marriage is not where you want it to be, God invites you to the table.
- Maybe you've felt the weight of depression and anxiety and mental unhealth for far too long, Jesus says bring that all to the table...don't let that keep you from His invitation. In fact, it's because of your inability to come to Jesus on your own, that Jesus comes to you and says "Hey, you're invited in."
- Maybe you've been brought up in church your whole life and think you're a good person, and maybe you're like John and James who have a bit of a chip on their shoulder. Jesus would say, "Listen I hate to break it to you, you didn't earn your place at the table, I earned it for you - and you're still freely invited in - so come on."

Whatever it is. God wants you. There is no one too far gone that He does not invite into His feast. And he doesn't ask you to get yourself fixed first, but rather says "come to me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." He's not waiting on some future cleaned up version of you. He's after you in the here and now.

- And I don't know specifically what you're wrestling with this morning - maybe it's unforgiveness you've been festering in your heart for years, or maybe it's shame and guilt over what you did last week, I don't know what you're going through but I do know that whatever it is Jesus has paid for it in full and He welcomes you in and at a certain point you need to look off of yourself and look onto King Jesus
 - Because Jesus who in His love and mercy, not only invites us in but identifies with us even in our sin. Who just mere hours after this final meal will be betrayed and handed over and crucified and become the embodiment of all our sin. All our brokenness. All of our mistakes. All that we've done and all that's been done to us - Jesus identifies with us by dying on a cross. He's treated as the most marginalized of human beings, left alone and abandoned outside the city, so that each and every one of us can be brought in.

Jesus just a few hours from this Last Supper event willingly suffered a lonely criminal's death so that you could have a seat at the table, and he did it with joy knowing that while it was agony to suffer he knew what was on the other side of that - it was so that you could be with him. Jesus in all his infinite knowledge and wisdom, saw you one day seated at his table, and he endured the cross knowing you were going to be invited in.

And in a few days, we'll remind ourselves of this when we celebrate Good Friday. That God has made a way for us for all of us to come to the table no matter what.

And then in just a week we remind ourselves that death was not the end for Jesus. Where we remind ourselves more than ever that we don't worship a dead Jewish teacher. We worship a risen Servant King. We don't worship someone who gave His life away and that was the end of the story. We worship the ascended and reigning King Jesus who through His resurrection demonstrates once and for all - that whatever the cost, whatever the price, there is kingdom life on the other side. That even when we don't

see it, when we give of ourselves and invite in and serve, the kingdom goes out and darkness is pushed back because Jesus has made a way for us to come to the table.

Conclusion / Communion

In fact, this is what communion is all about. In a way its a re-invitation every single week to come to Jesus' table once again. Where we're called once again to re-identify with our King and His Kingdom. We identify that the truest thing about us is our need for a Savior and that this is met through the body and blood of Jesus broken and shed for us. And we look ahead to the day when one day Jesus

So if you're broken, come to the table, Jesus invites you. If you need a Savior, come to the table, Jesus is here to be with you. If you know you can't save yourself, come to the table, Jesus is glad you're here.