

IT'S MY PARTY!**Luke 5:27-32****(Read Luke 5:27-32)**

Intro: What a sermon series to begin on the first day of the BIC Week of Prayer and Fasting! This sermon and the six after it are about food – or at least eating together since I will be talking about Jesus's lessons from the dinner table.

You can tell by looking at my svelte physique that I know something about food. In my life people have loved on me with food.

When I was about 12 years old our beloved Welsh Corgi who was long on fun and short on brains came down with a mystery illness and needed to be put down, my mother took us into the house as our dad led him away. We were grieving and Mother made us our favorite meal, her homemade pizza, to assuage our sadness. Food was a love language for my mom as she made me Baked Alaska every year for my birthday. That's a labor of love – Baked Alaska is NOT an easy thing to make!

Knowing that I love Lemon Meringue pie – it became the first pie Kathy ever made for me in the first few months after we began courting. She has made me many since – and any pie she makes is my favorite.

In the first summer we were married I surprised my beloved with a chocolate birthday cake on her 20th birthday. She bit into it and laughed at the gritty icing I had struggled to make – not knowing that you made icing with powdered sugar rather than granulated sugar. It was a labor of love and she ate all of it – and has perpetuated the legend of the crunchy birthday cake in the 42+ years since.

Almost 6 long years ago when I turned 60, my daughters threw a 60th birthday party for me here at ABC that was complete with friends from everywhere and every kind of my favorite pies, cakes and food. It was a labor of love.

Inviting someone to a meal is an act of love. Acceptance comes with hospitality. Many memorable times have been had around a breakfast table, a lunch pail in the factory, or simply at a funeral meal like the ladies of ABC provided for a grieving family such as the Bob Keets' family last week.

In his book *A MEAL WITH JESUS: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission Around the Table*, Tim Chester writes:

“Luke's gospel is full of stories of Jesus eating with people:

- *In Luke 5 Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners at the home of Levi. (The meal that I'm going to cover today)*
- *In Luke 7 Jesus is anointed at the home of Simon the Pharisee during a meal*
- *In Luke 9 Jesus feeds the 5000*
- *In Luke 10 Jesus eats in the home of Martha and Mary.*
- *In Luke 11 Jesus condemns the Pharisees and the teachers of the law at a meal*
- *In Luke 14 Jesus is that a meal when he urges people to invite the poor to their meals rather than their friends*
- *In Luke 19 Jesus invites himself to dinner with Zacchaeus*
- *In Luke 22 we have the account of The Last Supper*
- *In Luke 24 the risen Christ has a meal with the two disciples in Emmaus, and then later eat fish with the disciples in Jerusalem.”*

And then Chester continues by quoting this from another commentator, *“In Luke's gospel Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal.”* (Robert Karris)

This is so true. And just think – Chester was just referring to the meals in Luke, the other three Gospels are full of additional meals – many of them describing the same ones as here in Luke. Jesus loved to party and he seemed to accept every invitation to them. I think that's why preachers ever since have followed in his footsteps – at least I have.

So that's my intro to this series. Now, finally let's look at the text I read way back before I began this talk.

He's called Levi here in Luke 5 and he is the Matthew who wrote the Gospel of the same name and Matthew makes reference to this same account in Matthew 9.

Levi was a tax collector. We know that tax collectors were universally despised – by everyone. They were turncoats – Jews who were serving the enemy and that made them unclean. They were rich because they were supposed to collect specific funds for each of the Roman subjects in the purview and turn it over. There was no specific way they had to do that, just so Rome got what she expected. So tax collectors would take whatever they wanted from their subjects with impunity – which made them even more despised. They got rich on the backs of their own countrymen.

One did not associate with tax collectors.

Jesus did.

Jesus saw a man and loved him

- Our text says *After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me."* Luke 5:27. Matthew remembered it slightly differently because was the one it was about and so he was there. He records, *As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me."* Matthew 9:9a. Matthew knew that Jesus saw through the cultural defenses and hate and saw a man for whom he would eventually die. And that's why G. Campbell Morgan points out that Jesus saw a man, and not a publican (which is the KJV name for a tax collector). Which brings to mind Dotti Rambo's words as she sang, *"He looked beyond my fault and saw my need."*
- Jesus sees us for who we are – his loved and coveted kids. Others see a rip-off artist, Jesus sees a lost and lonely soul.
 - I've worked with some pretty nasty and objectionable people through my years. I had a neighbor named Jerry who's behavior was so terrible that I hated him and that made me just as nasty and objectionable as him. I've seen parents who beat and molested their children and I wanted to do my own beat down on them when I saw the bruises I saw the bruises on their infant. I've seen children who have taken advantage of their parents so much so that their parents lived in squalor while they live high on the hog in funds they've misappropriated. I've felt incredible anger at people that I've despised.
 - Jesus loves them. Jesus knows they are the nasty neighbor or child molester or elder abuser and he sees them as people who need redemption.
 - We need to see with Jesus's eyes.
- Jesus sees every man and woman and boy and girl and he loves them and he says to them what he said to Levi . . .

Follow me

- Yep – he died for them in the same way he died for everyone. Levi was a tax collector, Jerry was the neighbor from "you know where", and I was a preacher. All sinners. *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, Romans 3:23.
- **ALL have sinned!**
- Jesus said to this despised tax collector – FOLLOW ME – and our text says of Levi, *And leaving everything, he rose and followed him.* Luke 5:28. He left his tax collector table and his adding machine and his cash box and his official Roman receipt pad with his official Roman seal and he followed Jesus. This worthless dreg of society was being asked by the Son of God to be a follower. The God of the universe looked at him and saw infinite worth. Who wouldn't follow that? Who could turn down an invite like that? Not Matthew. He left everything and followed Jesus.
- But first . . .

Levi threw a party

- He must have grabbed a few shekels from the cash box as he left his table because our text says, *Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.* Luke 5:29. When something awesome happens to you, you share the news. You can't keep it in and you want others experience it too. In Levi's case he wanted everyone he knew, who was just like him – in the despised tax collection business – to meet this Jesus who had invited him, a scum of the

earth tax collector who worked for the bottom feeding Romans, to be his disciple. They NEEDED to meet Jesus.

- And he also wanted to celebrate his new life. Morgan writes, *“This man celebrated his renunciation with a feast. He renounced everything. He had left his toll, left his calling, broken with Herod, and abandoned the Roman Empire. He cut himself adrift, but he did not call his friends together and emphasize his sacrifice. He made a feast in honor of the renunciation.”*
- Following Jesus means giving up everything else. And when that happens heaven rejoices and Jesus comes to the party. He’s just glad to be there. But of course, and as usual . . .

The religious people, who had it all together, didn’t approve

- Chester makes a great point, *“Nothing makes you feel better than being able to look down on other people. Pharisees needed tax collectors to make them feel righteous.”* Actually tax collectors were just one category for Pharisical superiority – but this was a convenient example for them of Jesus’s poor judgment. Chester goes on to say, *“The problem here is not the party. The Pharisees knew God’s kingdom was going to be a party. Their objection is with the guest list.”* The Pharisees look at these despised dinner guests and here they are partying with God’s alleged Messiah. This guy who thinks he is God is sitting down and eating with his enemies and they just couldn’t get it.
- As Chester looks at the meals of Jesus, he points out that *“The parties of Jesus are celebrations. The Pharisees are mourning over the absence of God and his kingdom.”* But just think about it – they were the ones who were excluding themselves from that kingdom. They were the holdouts.
- So, holding their nose, even as they were looking down it, they ask Jesus, *“Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?”* Luke 5:30b. And Jesus answers, *“Why do I do it? . . .*

Because the sinners are the very people I want to reach

- When Jesus made a disciple of another tax collector, a sawed off little man named Zacchaeus, he had to answer a similar question because closed minded religious people learn very slowly. In that case his answer was, *For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.* Luke 19:10. Morgan puts these words into Jesus’s mouth, *“I want to reach them because they are sinners, because the malady of sin saturates them. I am here as the Great Physician to deal with that very malady.”*
- Jesus came to save sinners. So he sat down and ate with them and loved on them and they knew they were loved. There’s something about Jesus that makes tax collectors and sinners want to be with him. And Jesus eats with them - a sign of friendship and fellowship.
- When the Pharisees looked puzzled – after all their view was blocked by their hand holding their nose, Jesus goes on, *“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”* Luke 5:31-32. That sounds a lot like what Jesus said about Zacchaeus. And the Pharisees still didn’t get it. They were asking Jesus to be like a doctor who avoids sick people. They wanted him to be the ER physician who sees a case of Ebola come through the door of the emergency room and knowing that treating the patient could very well mean his own infection and death, tells the emergency workers to *“Turn the gurney around and get that hopeless case out that door!”*
- But for Jesus there are no hopeless cases – that’s why he stopped at Levi’s table that day and under Zacchaeus’s tree on another day and invited himself into their lives. Here’s a good place for me to say IF THERE IS ANYONE IN THIS ROOM WHO FEELS LIKE A HOPELESS CASE OR CONSIDERS SOMEONE ELSE A HOPELESS CASE – THINK AGAIN!!!!!!! No one is beyond redemption as long as they have breath. Chester writes this, and I want you to listen closely, *“Let’s marvel at how gracious God is. In Jesus God is doing something so new and so gracious that it takes us by surprise. Indeed, it’s so gracious it’s scandalizes us. God is so indiscriminate. He chooses all the wrong sorts of people. He invites everyone to his great party. He invites the best and the worst, the highest and the lowest. He invites you.”*

Conclusion: Too often the Church has been like the Pharisees. We have held our noses and looked down our noses and demanded that everyone be as clean as us before they can enter our holy presence – not even realizing that such thinking was a stinking load of dirt in itself. Jesus didn’t clean ‘em up first. He invited them in and his grace began the scrubbing process. The Church must be a place where no one gets left behind because they are in some kind of despicable condition.

We are going to see as we continue this study how Jesus got himself killed because of the way he ate – it wasn't the cholesterol, it was the company he kept as he ate. Chester writes, "*When Jesus eats with Levi and his friends, the message is clear: Jesus has come for losers, people on the margins, people have made a mess of their lives, people who are ordinary. Jesus has come for you. The only people left out are those who think they don't need God: the self-righteous and the self-important. Sadly that includes many people.*"

Please let that not be us! Let's not be like the Pharisees who are going to take lots of hits over the next six weeks. Let's be like Jesus. One more quote from Chester and we're done, "*In Levi's party salvation comes to the margins of society. That's good news to people at the margins today - and to everyone else. But if we reject salvation at the margins, if we reject those whom God accepts, if then we reject the grace of God. We miss out on the celebration.*"

Don't miss the celebration. It's God's party and he will save if he wants to. Amen.