

Come to the Table Sermon Series – Week 4

The Awkward Dinner Party

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Sermon Preached: Sunday 6th July 2025

Preacher: Pastor Jason Sander

Location: St Peter's Lutheran Church, Loxton

Sermon Text: Luke 11:37-54

Let me pray.

Loving Father, as we gather around your word, we pray for your Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and to teach us and grow us in the likeness of Christ. Holy Spirit, come and be upon my words to hear that what I say to your people gathered here would be pleasing to you. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Have you ever been to an awkward dinner party? At a dinner party where things got a little bit awkward? Well, those moments when someone says something too honest, too controversial, too real.

Suddenly everyone's just staring down at their plates and that eerie silence just falls upon the room. That's what I imagine happened when Jesus spoke up at the dinner table in today's reading.

Jesus, he doesn't engage in friendly banter around the table.

He calls out what he sees, not to be rude, but to demonstrate once again, to demonstrate who can sit at God's table, to demonstrate who is welcome in God's family. It's one of the most uncomfortable dinner parties in Luke's gospel.

So let's grab a seat at this dinner party and take in what Jesus says what he does and how that can apply to us today.

So it all starts, this awkwardness starts when Jesus doesn't wash before the meal. Now it's not about hygiene, it's about religious ritual, one that Jesus refuses to engage in. And the Pharisees who's invited Jesus to his house, he is surprised that this holy man Jesus skips this important ritual.

If anyone would do it, it should be him. What does Jesus say? Well he says, you clean the outside of your cup and dish and inside you're full of greed and wickedness, selfishness. That's the only start of what Jesus will continue to say.

See, Jesus stated at the Pharisees, they would debate the process of how you clean a cup. Do you start on the outside or do you start on the inside? That was a real issue for them. We might think that's a little bit silly, bit trivial, but for them it was important.

The Pharisees were so focused on the appearance of godliness that they had all the right rituals, the right clothes, the right prayers. And they even created more rules to grow in righteousness, to enhance the existing rules that they had. And they were doing all this to appear great on the outside, to appear righteous, yet inside Jesus points out their hearts are far from God.

As we can draw that God sees beyond the outward appearance, he knows what's going on in here. That's where Jesus wants to do his work, to transform us into his likeness, to grow us in love through his forgiveness. That's in this next part where Jesus, he really goes for it because he pronounces three woes on the Pharisees.

What's a woe? It's a warning, a declaration of judgment that comes from a place of sorrow. That's how we don't understand it in the Bible, a woe. So he says to the Pharisees, you tithe, even your herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God.

You love the best seats and greetings in the market. You neglect the love and justice of God. You are like unmarked graves.

People walk over you and don't even know it. There's a bit of background here on the Pharisees, and some of us, we do know what the Pharisees were like, but in case you don't, they were lay people. They weren't pastors or priests.

They were lay people. They were hyper focused on interpreting Scripture and obeying it. They created new rules so they could keep existing rules to determine who was in and who was out.

They were extremely zealous about their Jewish faith, and they championed this idea of the Messiah coming. So they agreed with Jesus on many things. However, they also believed that by separating themselves from impurity, from impure people, that they could excel in their righteousness.

So by Jesus hanging out with the sinners and the light refusing to participate in certain rituals, teaching his disciples the wrong things was extremely troubling for them. They weren't bad people as such. They just missed the heart of God, the heart of the Scriptures.

They're ignoring justice and mercy while debating what herbs you should tithe. Yes, literally, there was a debate if mint counted as part of your offering to God. That's why it's mentioned there.

The more scrupulous you were, you would tithe your mint. Now, don't put any mint on the offering plate today. It's not what I'm saying.

It just shows you how far they would go to try and be righteous. And so the main point that Jesus is making here as he has a go at them is that their example was leading people astray. They were leading people away from God, not toward him.

They were leading people to walk on unmarked graves. There, the Pharisees unmarked graves. In other words, they were causing people to unknowingly become unclean by walking on the ground where a body rested.

That was one of the Jewish laws. You become unclean if you walk on a grave. Even if your shadow is passed on it, you can become unclean as well.

The Pharisees, they were unmarked graves. People just wouldn't know if they're walking on it or not. There was no direction.

Through the Pharisees and all their rules and rituals, it's actually causing more harm for people. See, when our faith becomes more about being seen rather than being transformed, we aren't just damaging ourselves. We risk misleading others too.

We can lead people away from the heart of God through our attitudes and the way we relate to others. I see at this point a teacher of the law. So Pharisees could be teachers of the law, but they were like lawyers.

They knew their stuff well. And he says, teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too. Imagine that at that table.

Jesus doesn't apologise or defend himself. He sort of pulls himself closer into the table and he says, you continually load people down with the burden after burden, but you won't lift a finger to help them carry that burden. You honour the prophets that your ancestors killed, and you build their tombs like you're above it all.

You make sure people see the inscriptions that connect you to that prophet. Again, in Jesus' day, there was this, I guess, this sort of popular thing that wealthier people would build a tomb in honour of a prophet from the past, and then they would then inscribe on it that how they were somehow connected to that person. So they dedicated it to themselves in a way.

And Jesus says, you're honouring the very people that your ancestors killed. It doesn't make sense. But the last thing he says then is, you've taken away the key to knowledge.

In other words, it's possible to know scriptures and still miss the point, to miss the heart of God. See, the law experts had turned God's word into a system of control. Instead of a path to life.

See, Jesus hits them pretty hard here. He draws on the account of the prophet Zechariah, who was murdered in the temple for speaking the truth of God. So these ancestors, they defiled the sacred space by murdering someone within it.

It was the ancestors or the experts of the law who ignored God's messages in the past. Now they honour them. What hypocrisy.

So all the prophets' blood shed and martyred them in the past. It will fall on this generation, Jesus is saying. And this occurred when Rome destroyed the temple in 70 AD.

There was judgement for what they had done. Jesus calls out their hypocrisy, and they're not happy. See, we might not be Pharisees or first century lawyers in the Jewish world.

We can fall into the same pitfalls, the same attitudes, the same thinking like the Pharisees. Maybe we focus more on outward appearance than what's happening inside here. So how are we living a life of repentance and faith, returning to our baptisms to receive the gift of God's grace, daily, seeking God to transform us daily? Are we more concerned with religious correctness than with loving our neighbour? See, what Jesus is essentially saying, it's about accessibility to God and his forgiveness, to see our need for a saviour and draw it into him.

I think for us as those of us who are maturing Christians, who have been walking the walk for a while, maybe we can walk alongside people and help them to enter into the Scriptures, to come to know God and grow in knowledge of him and love for Jesus. See, Jesus disrupted

that dinner because he loved those people, too much to stay silent. And he loves us too much to let us settle for our heartless faith too.

To the moment as Jesus cries out words on his people, he's exposing their brokenness and their sin. Sometimes people don't like to hear that, as was the case with the Pharisees. But Jesus didn't come just to expose sin and to cry woes on people, he came to forgive us and to transform us.

And so he deals with that awkward problem of sin. He dies an awkward humiliating death in our place so that we can sit at his table. This awkward dinner party points to another meal, to another table.

That was on that night before Jesus was crucified, he shared a meal again. That time he took bread and broke it saying, this is my body give a few. He poured out wine saying, this is my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins.

And at that table Jesus didn't call out hypocrisy in those words, he offered grace just as he does today. And he invites us, he invites you to his table today. Not because we've got it all right, but because he has.

Not because we're clean, but because he can cleanse us from the inside out. We are righteous because Christ has made us righteous. Not because we follow the rules, but because of what Christ has done for us.

We share his love. We go out into the world to share his love and his message of hope. So maybe we need to allow Jesus to challenge us like he did the Pharisees, to let him make our hearts uncomfortable so that he can awaken us to his grace.

Because in the awkwardness of truth, there is forgiveness and restoration. Come to the table, not with perfect hands, but with open hearts. Jesus sees us, loves us and welcomes us, warts and all.

Let me pray.

Father God, we give you thanks for the gift of your son Jesus Christ. We thank you for the life that he has given us by giving up his life.

We thank you that we are made righteous. We are made right in your sight through what Christ has done. But you know, Lord, we still struggle in this life, this world, and it's temptations, they're sin, and we do make mistakes, but we know it doesn't stop us from stopping you loving us, but you want the best for us.

You want to keep on cleaning us and helping us to grow. So Lord, if there's any of these little awkward things on our hearts at this time, things that you're speaking to us and wanting us to change and to grow in, we hand them over to you now. We ask that you would walk that journey of healing and restoration and that you would help us.

We thank you for your forgiveness and your healing power. Help us to be vulnerable before you, Lord, each day, so that you can grow us, shape us, transform us more and more like your son Jesus. In his name we pray. Amen.