Building for the Next 50 Years Dinner

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I was at a dinner recently – a fundraising gala for a local ministry – the young man next to me, a third year med student from Corpus Christi leaned over to me and whispered, “Which fork is for salad?” I explained the beauty of start out and work in.

Table etiquette matters. Does the fork go on the left or the right?  If you have both a red and a white wine glass, which goes closer to your plate?  And where is the water glass--inside or outside of the wine glasses?  Seating charts or chair of choice? And who is in charge of making sure conversation flows?

Table fellowship embodies our religious tradition – consider Passover, potlucks, casseroles for the families of new babies and after funerals, food for the hungry, a plate of cookies for a new neighbor, communion.

My new friend form Corpus Christi wanted to get it right, wanted to be proper . . . there is a Middle Eastern proverb that Jesus might have known: *I saw them eating and I knew who they were.*

We’ve just finished a wonderful meal. Did you notice the etiquette of those at your table?

Jesus offended a lot of people with his table manners. He ignored the finger bowl by his plate.  He ate whatever was put in front of him.  He thought nothing of sitting down to eat with people whose lives declared their flaunting of religious rules.  People saw him eating and knew who he was: someone who welcomed everyone, even or especially those excluded by polite society, by eating with them.

Those we include around our tables tell us who we are.  Our literal tables include meals at Hospitality Apartments for family members here to be with loved ones at the Medical Center; AniMeals on Wheels so that elderly people are able to feed their pets food we’ve donated and sorted instead of being forced to share their much-needed human food; a communion table where every person is welcomed and loved and celebrated; meals at Grace Place; meals prepared with our first Sunday food offerings.

I’ve seen you eating and I’ve known who you are – you are creative, resourceful, generous, and welcoming. We’ve made tables and space in some unlikely ways. We’ve set up tables and chairs outside, in the sanctuary, Meeks House, Narthex, and on the porch. We’ve managed beautiful receptions with only a small refrigerator, a microwave, and many volunteers. We’ve added folding chairs, we’ve scrunched over, we’ve talked louder, we’ve made room and we’ve made more coffee.

And now, it’s time, it’s time to make new space, more space, to expand . . . we will need to expand our creativity and sharing for this to happen and I know we can. I have watched us live into the welcoming church we are with what we have, imagine what we can do with more space. Imagine who we will welcome. Imagine how we will live into the call of God to provide hospitality and spiritual home within our community and within our walls.

*I saw them eating and I knew who they were.*

Perhaps there are times and places for small family tables.  And it is important that our tables get stretched and expanded. As you have made and continue to make your pledges, picture a Fellowship Hall with tables and chairs and plenty of room – room for every person here and for the people we don’t even know yet – tables of welcome.

*I see us eating and I know who we are.*

*We are people who love, people who work together, people of generosity and welcome.*

Amen