

The Table Of Joy

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. The first part of today's reading comes from Philippians chapter 2 verses 1 through 13. Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in Spirit and of one mind.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interests of others.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, and being found in appearance as a man. He humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him that name, or gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

[1 : 3 4] Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.

Our second reading comes from Matthew chapter 21, verses 23 through 32. Jesus entered the temple courts, and while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him.

By what authority are you doing these things, they asked, and who gave you this authority? Jesus replied, I will ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.

John's baptism, where did it come from? Was it from heaven or of human origin? They discussed it amongst themselves and said, if we say from heaven, he will ask, then why didn't you believe him?

But if we say of human origin, we are afraid of the people, for they all hold that John was a prophet. So they answered Jesus, we don't know.

[2 : 5 0] Then he said, neither will I tell you by what authority I am doing these things. What do you think? There was a man who had two sons.

He went to the first and said, son, go work today in the vineyard. I will not, he answered, but then later changed his mind and went. Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing.

He answered, I will, sir, but did not go. Which of these two did what the father wanted? The first, they answered, Jesus said to them, truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you.

For John came to you to show you the way of the righteousness and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him.

This is the word of the Lord. So let's pray together. Loving God, we give you thanks for the gift that is this morning, for the joy of seeing the family grow and see your spirit at work among all of us.

[4 : 0 0] And Lord, now with our hearts open after we've sung to you and prayed to you and heard your word, fall fresh on us, Lord. Fill each and every hungry heart today with what you know it needs to go into the world and nourish others.

In Jesus Christ we pray. Amen. So you heard me say at the beginning, at the greeting time, that we're wrapping up this idea of coming to the table.

We're going to talk about the idea of a table of joy. But before we start today, I want you to think about something. You probably won't have to think too hard on this, but I want you to put into your mind, I want you to bring to the front of your remembering some people you love, some people you like, who are not followers of Jesus.

Folks that you're really hoping will get it, but haven't. Those folks who really wonder why this is how you choose to spend your Sunday mornings.

Now that said, let's talk about what we heard today. Because we find Jesus in an interesting moment. Doing something that Jesus normally does.

[5 : 1 5] Which is having to deal with church folks. So Jesus is at the temple and he's teaching. And the elders and the priests come up and they say, tell us why you're doing this.

On what, who's gave you the right to do these things? And Jesus, of course, being Jesus, says, well, okay, I'll tell you, but you got to answer a question for me first.

Now, this one takes a little thinking. It's not really hard to unpack why, but here's the key. So, Jesus asked them, okay, if John was right, and this is my paraphrase of it, if John was right, okay, when he was baptizing folks and he did it the right way, where do you think he got his right to do that from?

I mean, John didn't go to seminary. John didn't check all of this out with all of you. So, where did his power come from? And they don't really have an answer for that.

Jesus pushes it even further. Because he tells this parable, short one, pretty self-explanatory about a father with two sons. And the first one, he says, go work in the vineyard today.

[6 : 4 2] And he says, no. But eventually changes his mind and goes. And the second one, says, go work in the vineyard with your brother.

And he says, I will, but then doesn't go. And who actually did what the father wanted?

Of course, it's the first one. Now, why is that important for us? You see, guys, the reason why this particular story hits close to home today is the idea of the impact of what these folks did.

Because what Jesus wants these religious leaders to get is, what's this really about for you? Why does this really matter at all?

Because if we all got to clear your hurdles, if we got to go through the things you say go through in order to understand heaven and get into heaven, okay, but let me ask you this.

[7 : 5 1] John came and didn't do any of that. And yet, these people who were outside of the faith, these people who were left behind, these people who you cross the street when you see coming because you think they're so bad.

John talked to them and they changed their lives. They got the message. They felt the movement of Christ in their hearts and bore fruit because of it.

Which of those do you think feels like what God really wants to have happen? And so, let's let that sink in for a minute.

Because the reason why I want us to sit with that is because those people that you were thinking about, those names, those faces that were scrolling through your head a few minutes ago, how do you think they're going to hear the message of God?

How do you think they are going to understand what Christ really wants? It's because people who claim Christ, people who love Christ, will go into the world and show them and show them a Christ that they want to be a part of.

[9 : 28] But, if we show them a Jesus that's all about rules and all about what you can't do and all about I'm right and you're not, who wants to be a part of that?

who feels welcome at that table? Because that's what this is ultimately about.

You see, the challenge for us today is, are we building and extending a table that people want to join?

Now, that sounds kind of simple because we sit here and we think we do the right things, right? We know this, we love Jesus, we get it, we're here and we're nice people.

But the problem here isn't about being nice. This isn't about how polite we are. This is about do we go into the world and look like and act like Jesus?

[10 : 49] And that's not about how nice we are. We have to take a long look in the mirror around whether or not that's what we're doing.

You see, because it's not hard for us to get this twisted. Most of us know who Gandhi is, right? Mahatma Gandhi. And I've used this quote before but it hits different today because I want us to think about this.

Gandhi, this worldwide leader who had all this impact, became the model for so many people about non-violent resistance and peace and justice in the world. he was actually a really well-read scholar of Jesus.

He knew the Gospels very well. He knew the story. And because he knew the story and he would talk about it from time to time, when he was being interviewed once, the interviewer asked him, said, well, if you think so highly of Jesus and you believe in a lot of what Jesus had to say, why haven't you actually converted to Christianity?

And he said, it's because you Christians are so unlike your Christ. Think about that for a minute.

[12 : 07] That when he reads about who Jesus is, but when he interacts with people who have on the t-shirts, people who have the bumper stickers on their cars, people who have the jewelry around their neck, he's like, I'm not seeing that dude in the way you're behaving.

And that should convict all of us a little bit. Because we need to ask ourselves, is that what the outside world is seeing in some of us?

Now, why does that matter? Because if we talk about this notion of the table and we can't come to the table, the challenge we've got to ask ourselves is, well, what are we inviting people to?

Because the Apostle Paul has this great notion here. You heard that read in the letter to Philippians. And I want you to hear these words again. And I want you to think about what the Apostle is trying to get at the letter to the Philippians is a bit challenging.

It has some really powerful stuff in it. It has some amazing statements in it of faith. Now, scholars will tell us that the letter is probably actually a couple of letters pasted together.

[13 : 33] Okay? That said, that doesn't change its power. What we want to know from this letter is we don't really know what was actually wrong in Philippi that made Paul want to write this.

Now, he writes it from prison and he wants to thank them for a gift. But all that being said, he also is trying to address a problem. We're not clear on the specific of the problem, but what we do know is this, is that it was causing the church to fracture.

Because he keeps talking about an appeal to unity. And the reason why it's important is as he's trying to do that, he tells us this. Hear these words. Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility, value others above yourselves. Not looking to your own interests, but each of you to the interest of others.

Now that hits a little different when you're thinking about the idea of who are we when we go into the world in the name of Jesus.

[15 : 05] Jesus. Because when we think about the table that satisfies us, we think of the reasons why we're here instead of watching the Jags play.

We think about why we're here because we love each other and love him enough to get out of bed or if you are at home, don't have something else on but have this on.

the reason why we're here is because of the difference he's made for us. Because we know what it means to be a part of the Lord's table.

But the challenge that we seem to have is that we don't seem to be reflecting that to the rest of the world in a way that the rest of the world is getting. But hear this again.

Now, the reason I want you to think about this is because if you have claimed Jesus, if you know Jesus, if he's made a difference for you, then how well are you being able to reflect that to people who don't get it?

[16 : 12] Because that's exactly what Paul is saying. You see, this first verse, it has if in it, but it's not if the way we normally use if in 2023.

It should read more like because or since. Okay? So I'm going to read it again and I want you to hear it that way. Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, since you've known the comfort of his love, since you've had the common sharing in the spirit, because you have felt his tenderness and his compassion, then make my joy complete.

See, that's what he's trying to draw out of folks. It's like because if you are saying that Jesus makes this difference for you, then how do we go into the rest of the world and the rest of the world not get that Jesus has made a difference for you?

Are we looking just like everybody else? When the storms and the crises of life hit, do you show a table? Do you show a Jesus that has actually changed how you hit storms?

Do you stand confidently? Do you stand faithfully and courageously when the world starts to come at you? Or do we act like the world?

[17 : 43] Can you show folks that being nourished at the Lord's table actually makes you go into the world more loving, more compassionate, being a difference maker for God because God has made a difference for you?

Or are we just as tight-fisted, just as angry, just as hard and cold as everybody else?

Because if Jesus has made a difference for you, then how different do you feel, look, and act than the rest of the world?

Because for those who are looking for the reason, those who are searching for the answer, those who are broken and hurt and tired and angry because of the way this world has made them feel, and they look at you, and wonder what difference does it make?

If your walking, living, spoken testimony can't answer that, why are you surprised that they don't want to come to the table?

[19 : 13] That's what we got to wrestle with. you see, because we know our stories, we know the difference it makes, and what we've got to deal with is this idea that this table changes us, this table nourishes us, this table inspires us, and just as we've talked about for the past few weeks, you've got to remember what being at the table is like.

When we started this series, we talked about how powerful table moments can be. Because most of us can look back at our lives and know that the table was a place of joy.

It was there where our relationship strengthened and deepened. It was there where we lived that thing we like to call family and friendship. It's there where we put aside all those other distractions.

And not only were we fed physically, but we were fed emotionally and spiritually by one another. Most of us have the luxury of being around tables like that today.

And for us, we who claim Jesus, we are at a table like that right now. Because we know what that means.

[20 : 50] You see, the thing that's weird about this is sometimes when we talk about this notion of table, we know that there are folks among us whose experience in family dynamic was not healthy and good and a safe place to be.

for those of you who may be in that place, understand we hear you and see. But if you've experienced a table that has been positive, where someone did care for your soul and your heart, where you were received just as you are, where you knew you were loved and safe, that you didn't have to earn your seat, where you could simply participate fully, joyfully, and openly, that's what the table of the Lord is like.

You see, we talk about this in terms of a table of grace. And that's what we mean by you don't have to be perfect. Because if any of us had to be perfect to sit at the Lord's table, none of us would be there.

But what kind of joy does it bring to your spirit to know that he receives and loves you in spite of all the ways in which you have not done what Jesus wanted to do?

And all the ways in which you have fallen short and broken his law. Think about what Jesus did on the night in which he gave himself up, the night in which we now understand the table.

[22 : 30] Because Peter, who was going to deny him, was at the table. Judas, who was going to hand him over, was at the table.

And he still washed everybody's feet. And he still sang with them and ate with them.

and all of them would soon abandon him. That's who is at the head of this table.

So you don't have to earn your seat. And we know that. We know that by virtue of our own lives, by our own experiences with him. So for you, when you go into the world, do you show the world a table of grace?

Or do you show people a table where you've got to do what I want in order to sit here? You have to play by a certain set of rules in order to sit here.

[23 : 36] You've got to be worthy to sit here. Or is it for you a table of grace? Do you show the world a table of peace?

A table where we can sit and exhale and rest and enjoy one another? Or are we constantly in turmoil? Are we constantly battling back and forth?

You see, the thing about many of those religious leaders that Jesus was talking to is they did this thing that I, from an academic background, called majoring in the minors.

Some of you have probably heard that term before. People major in the minors. Here's why we use that. That there are the things that are really important. The foundational big rocks that everybody needs to pay attention to.

And then there's the little pebbles around all of that stuff. There's the little surface stuff on top. Now, do you spend all your time worried about this little superficial stuff on the top?

[24 : 38] Or do you care about what's really important? Do you major in the minors? And that's what Jesus was telling them. These people who listened to John got baptized, repented of their sin, got right with God, and started to live different lives.

And you guys don't seem to care about that at all. You're more worried about whether or not they wore the right stuff to church. Majoring in minors.

love. When you are fed at the table, do you show the world a table of peace?

Or do you spend more of your energy worried about things that don't really matter? do you show the world a table of love?

The heart of that Philippians passage is about how much Jesus loves us all. It talks about how he was willing to put aside who he was in glory. It talks about how much he was willing to humble himself because he wanted to make sure that all of us would be in our best and right relationship with God.

[26 : 02] And because we couldn't do it, because we wouldn't do it, he did it for us because he loved us that much.

When others come to the table, are they loved? Are they loved? We can go back and forth at the table.

See, I'm an only child and I was raised by a single mom. And so we didn't compete at the table. There was always plenty, there was always enough.

Now, some of you who are raised in larger families have this other dynamic at the table. Because when certain dishes get passed around, you kind of want to make sure you get your piece.

enough on your plate. Right? See, I didn't understand this until I had three kids of my own. And trust me, you know, one of our favorite things to do is have breakfast for dinner and one of the girls' favorites when they were smaller was waffles.

[27 : 14] If you want to see a WWE cage match break up, see who gets the most waffles on their plate. But see, the thing is, we could disagree with that.

We can have those moments around the table, but at the end of the day, even though we do that, we know that this is a place where you are still going to be welcome.

You can have that kind of dynamic and even play and compete and that sort of thing, but you know that this space is safe for you. That you are received, loved, just as you are.

And that's what Jesus has done for all of us. How well did those outside of your experience with Jesus see that reflected in you?

Because that's what this is about. this is a table of joy, a place where we come and we have that dynamic and we laugh and we cry and we deal with things, but we know that when we get up from this table and when we are at this table, that special thing inside of us just flows and we feel like we always want to feel.

[28 : 48] It's because joy isn't about circumstances. We said this before, but it bears repeating today. Remember that joy isn't about your circumstances.

You can be going through it. And believe me, we know there's folks in this room that are going through it. But are you in touch with your joy?

You see, because what makes you happy is about your momentary circumstances. Am I warm enough? Am I sitting next to people I like? Did I have a big enough breakfast? All those sorts of things.

Those are the stuff that make you happy. But your joy comes from being aware of your relationship with God. Pay attention to those words.

You need to be plugged into and aware of your relationship with God. Because God's love for you doesn't change. What changes is we get out here, we get busy, we get distracted, and we forget about that.

[29 : 47] And then we wonder why we don't feel as joyful. See, but joy flows from that. When you're aware, when you're plugged in, when you're in a regular conversation with God, that keeps your joy close.

It's when we get distracted by that other stuff, we simply forget about it. Joy is not about circumstances.

And if you want to feel that joy, just stay connected. Friends, that's what this is about. When we come to the Lord's table, and you say those words, and you realize what Christ has done for you, you realize what it means to be able to remember his sacrifice in his love.

You remember how he's poured himself, his peace, his joy, his grace, all over your life. And you go from this place into the world.

Does the world see in you something that they want a part of? Or do they see something that is a question mark?

[31 : 14] See something that doesn't feel like this Jesus they've heard about? See, because that, friends, is what this is ultimately about.

We who have been at the table, we who know his joy, need to spread it in every way we possibly can. Don't just get it and hold it and hoard it and think it's all about you.

You heard the apostle say that. Value others among yourselves. Let that be a difference maker. Let your love be real. Just as we sang earlier today, share the Lord.

Share the Lord. Reflect him into those lives in a way that will make them understand that this isn't just about giving up an hour on Sunday.

That this isn't just about a whole set of rules about what I can't do. That this isn't just about memorizing a book and being able to say things. It's about a grace, a joy, a peace, and a love that's so much more than I will ever know out here.

[32 : 35] Come to the table and then extend the table. Amen and love. Loving and gracious God, thank you for the gift it is to know you in this way.

Thank you that this is a table of grace that we don't have to earn seats at. Thank you that this is a table of peace where the worries and struggles of the world fall away.

Thank you that this is a table of love where we are received and we care for one another in ways that bring out our best. Thank you that this is a table of joy.

That elusive sense of pleasure and goodness that comes from being in right relationship. That it flows from you, that you are the ultimate source.

That it's not just simply about the food and it's not just simply about the company, but it's your spirit that brings us all together. Lord, we thank you for this gift.

[33 : 41] Help us to share and invite others to it. In your blessed and most holy name. Amen. You have been filled at the Lord's table.

Let it nourish your soul. Let it refresh your mind. Let it fill your heart. Because now we go into the world, a world that may not understand who Jesus is, a world who may not see the Lord except in you.

so share and extend the table of joy. As you seek to live your faith this week, there are many opportunities to put faith into practice. First, we have fish fries starting this week.

So if you haven't signed up for a role to play, or if you're thinking about a way you can be in service as we reach into our community this way, make sure it gets onto one of our clipboards.

We were looking for some more folk, especially in the dish room. So if you are able to help in that way, please sign up or see me or Mary Bobscene in the back.

[34 : 44] If you also want to go further and learning, make sure you pay attention to our questions, Jesus asked Bible study. We are meeting at 11 and 7 on Thursday.

You don't have to have been here for the previous sessions in order to pick up where we are. So if you want to take a deeper dive into what Jesus was talking about, feel free to join us on Thursday.

There are also other ways you can be of service to our community and to our connection. So please use your bulletin in the upcoming newsletter as a resource and you'll see all these different opportunities to learn and serve.

That said, let's receive our benediction. The table of joy requires much from us. It asks us not to rely on expecting to feel good all the time in order to do some good in the world.

It shows us that we can have fuller, more invigorating lives when we choose to cultivate the practice of joy by staying fully present to ourselves and to each other and by staying open to the unexpected movement of the spirit.

[35 : 52] The grace of God the Father abounds. The invitation of Jesus Christ, God the Son, is wide. And the power of the transforming Holy Spirit will surprise us each and every time.

May the blessings of joy that you find here go with you and move through you to others wherever you go this week. In all God's children's head. Amen.