

# **Finding Ourselves at the Table**

**Sermon notes for the sermon  
given by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young  
Presented on Sunday, March 13, 2011**

Years ago, when our sons were in elementary school, they had an assignment to interview family members. They were to hear and record the stories from parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles in an effort to understand the family and the history that had shaped their lives. At first our boys were not very excited about this assignment. As they began to interview their family members and started to hear the stories of our family they became very excited.

They learned about their grandfather who was raised in a family of German descent. Their grandpa Roos even taught them to say "schmacks goot" which Cindy and I believe means "tastes good" but we really aren't too sure. They learned how grandma Young had lived through the bombing of London during WWII and how Edith Bond met Barton Young in a London pub and after the war were married. When they interviewed their uncle Bob they learned that we was a U.S. Army veteran of the Viet Nam war. Through all of this Andrew and Stephen learned some of the stories that have been woven together into the tapestry of our family tree.

I believe that it is important for us to become familiar with the stories of our families. It helps us to understand ourselves better. I helps us to see why certain things are important to us and why we do things the way we do. We also begin to comprehend our family values and the principles that have guided our lives. Who first brought you to church? Who wakened you each Sunday morning encouraging you to get dressed and saw to it that you arrived to

church for worship and Sunday school? Who told you the stories of the Christian faith and helped you to understand why those stories were important to your family and you? Was it your family tradition to spend Sunday afternoon or evening gathered as a family to read from the Bible and sing the hymns of faith? As a child were you instructed not to play on Sunday? The stories of our families help to ground us and play a formative role in determining our values and the guiding principles of our lives.

Each Sunday we gather in this holy place to worship and praise God we begin our worship with a prayer of confession. The purpose of this is to remind us who we are in relationship to God. As we come into God's holy presence we come to see ourselves as God sees us – not necessarily bad people but most assuredly people who stand in need of God's mercy and salvation. Our first reading today helps us to see our position very clearly. We need to find ourselves in the story of the first humans, Adam and Eve. What would we have done if we were in their place? How would we have responded to God's command not to eat of the fruit of the tree in the center of the garden? It is easy to look back and now knowing the story ask to ourselves what were the two of them thinking? Or, God was not being very realistic; didn't he know that they would eat that fruit just as sure as a child will touch a hot oven when told not to by mother? To understand the situation that Adam and Eve were in we have to be able to find ourselves in the story while forgetting the rest that follows.

For God the issue was obedience and God understood that obedience is a characteristic of a being that is free to obey or disobey. God's desire for Adam and Eve was that they would freely choose to obey God. Without the freedom of that choice there can be no obedience. God wanted them and us to know that humanity is

humanity and God is God. God was looking for a benevolent partnership in which each party freely entered into a mutually beneficial relationship. The reality is that we all would have chosen what Adam and Eve chose. In fact, we continue to do it to this very day each time we choose to tell a lie, cheat, exact revenge, harbor thoughts of evil, manipulate others for our own benefit, fail to do the right thing, walk away from another in need, give in to feelings of violence and hatred. Just as Adam and Eve needed to come clean with God and see themselves as God saw them, so we, when we come into God's presence and see ourselves in God's light need to bow in true humility and confession.

In the first chapter of his book 24 Hours that Changed the World Rev.

Adam Hamilton writes about Jesus' last meal with his apostles and disciples. He helps us to understand some of the dynamics of the Last Supper and gives us a glimpse of some of those who partook of the holy meal. It was the feast of the Passover where Jews remembered how God had set them free for the tyranny of Egypt. The Passover meal is a celebration of freedom under the reign of God. On that night as Jesus celebrated this sacred meal filled with the stories of his people throughout the ages, Jesus wove into the tapestry of the Passover and new story. A story of his death, his broken body, his spilled blood that would become a celebration of freedom from sin and death. Rev. Hamilton challenges us to see ourselves in this story; to find ourselves at the table. He writes on page 22, "When have you been Judas? When have you been Peter or the other disciples? When have you betrayed Jesus or denied or deserted him? The reality is that all of us will at some time betray him – every one of us....All of us will disappoint God."

Finding ourselves at the table helps us to understand why that table is necessary – without it we have no hope. By freely choosing to set

with Jesus, with God and with our brother and sister sinners, we freely choose to be obedient to God. The story of the Last Supper becomes part of who we are before the meal begins, while we eat and drink, and as we rise from the table. All are welcome at this table and all are needed at this table. Jesus did not tell Judas that he could not come and eat and drink. Jesus did not forbid Peter from celebrating the Passover of faith even though in a few short hours Peter would deny every knowing Jesus. Jesus did not look at all the others and call them out because they would desert him and live him all alone to die a criminals death. If the table of the Lord was meant for only the perfect people Jesus would have been all alone in that upper room.

In the Gospel according to John there is no account of the Last Supper. In fact, the beaten, crucified and dead Jesus is seen by the writer of John as the Last Supper, literally. Instead, Jesus in John's Gospel washes the feet of the apostles. He washed the feet of Judas, and Peter, and James and John. He washed the feet of those who would betray, deny and desert him and ended the foot washing with these words, "I do not call you servants any longer...but I have called you friends." (John 15:15) Friends? The ones who would turn him over to the authorities? The ones who would save their own skin by saying they never knew him? The ones who when all was said and done would run into the darkness hoping to hide from the enemy? Even now, as we look at our own stories and remember the ways we have betrayed our own family stories, and remember the ways we have betrayed, denied and abandoned Jesus we can hear his voice calling us friends.

Rev. Hamilton tells the story of a couple from his church that had stopped coming to church for quite some time. He spotted them one Sunday as he was greeting worshippers after service and told them

how good it was to see them. The husband then shared that he had stopped coming because he had done something that he was ashamed of and felt unworthy to be in God's presence and with God's people. We do ourselves and God a favor when we come to see that Jesus celebrated the Passover of our redemption with those who he knew would disappoint him and desert him. Jesus even washed their feet and called them friends. Everyone is needed at the table you and me and many more yet to come to the feast who have chosen to separate themselves for whatever reason. It is up to us to see that they are invited, feel welcome, and feel needed.