

*On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely.*

*7When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. 8“When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; 9and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. 10But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. 11For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” 12He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. 13But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. 14And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

I feel a little bit like a preschooler today. You have seen a three year old with a plywood puzzle, trying to make a piece fit where it does not belong. No amount of shoving and twisting will work, the child learns. But sometimes that learning takes a while.

Well, I'm sitting down with my puzzle right now. I have a space all cut out in which Jesus belongs. The edges are smooth, gently rounded, no sharp angles or protrusions. Jesus is love - kindness. He is gracious. When he enters the room there is peace.

But now I'm holding a piece of his life that I want to fit into my Jesus space. This piece doesn't seem to want to fit. Will you look at it with me? Maybe you can see a way.

Jesus was invited for a dinner party. A leader of the Pharisees, a devoutly religious man prepared this meal for people of his social class, his friends.

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These people were not ignorant of their Scriptures. I suspect each of them could have quoted

the passage from Proverbs that we read earlier that says the very same thing. To have some stranger come in and start lecturing them about where they sat, must have really offended them. It is as if Jesus was trying to pick a fight with them. And then he turned on the host.

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Now how do you think that host felt to be lectured in front of his guests? Embarrassed? Shamed? Angry?

This Jesus does not fit. He is not the nice person I think he should be. Try as I may, I cannot make him fit into that nice smooth, rounded space where I think he belongs.

The Pharisee who invited Jesus was only doing what everyone does. We invite our friends into our homes - only our friends.

His guests were only doing what we all learn to do, looking out for old number one because if you don't no one else will. But Jesus criticized them.

I'm not going to invite the poor into my house. They might bring lice with them. They might return to rob me. Or they and I might just feel uncomfortable the whole time that we are together. I like to be with people like me.

I'd rather give money. They can stay where they are and I'll stay where I am. They can stay with their own kind and I'll stay with my own kind. I'll give some of what I have, but I won't give them me.

I won't give them me.

And now I understand just what it means that God took our flesh in Jesus. He was not satisfied to send rain and sunshine, to provide food and clothing and shelter. God is only satisfied to give us himself.

Jesus sat at table with Pharisees and tax collectors. God in Jesus came close enough to be touched, close enough to be infected with lice, close enough to be uncomfortable in a social situation. The very thing that I fear happened to him, for he was robbed not of a VCR or jewelry, but of his life – all because God was only satisfied to give us himself.

Even today: He is not ashamed to let us eat and drink of his own self, his body and blood. Rich and poor, adulterers, liars, cheats, fearful people, gossipers, people who distance themselves from the poor, the lame, the blind and the crippled. Jesus is not ashamed to give himself to you.

Jesus is love. But not in some perfectly wonderful world where everyone is good and loveable as a teddy bear. Jesus is love in this world where people are bent and twisted inside and out.

Jesus chooses to spread his banquet for all people, to invite us to get acquainted with one another here.

Jesus wants us to escape from the prison of our so small worlds - to give our very selves to one another.

For we are all invited to a great banquet, the poor, the blind the crippled, the lame, and you are invited. Jesus will be the host and love will be our food and drink. And we will never grow weary of the fare nor of the company. For all eternity this feast shall be our delight.