

There's No One Unwelcome Here: A Table for Justice - [Luke 11:37-52](#)

Norwalk Christian Church, October 28,, 2018, Come to the Table Series, Non-lectionary, Proper 25, Year B

Marti asked me last week what I thought about the kids being encouraged to wear their Halloween costumes to church this morning. And I thought--what a great idea. If I thought I could've gotten away with it, I would've worn mine, too.

I'm Han Solo this year. And I know what you're thinking--what a great choice, because I really look like a young Harrison Ford. I thought this year I'd live into this natural role.

Dressing up for Halloween is fun, and I'm so glad to see...(talk about what costumes kids are wearing.)

But it does seem odd wearing costumes on a Sunday morning. But can we be honest for a moment. It's not *that* odd dressing up on a Sunday morning. We Christians--we're good at playing dress up, looking/acting better than we really are. We put on a happy face. We act holier than we really are. Christians are good at playing dress-up.

To carry on the Halloween theme, our text this morning is kind of scary, isn't it? We aren't used to seeing Jesus this mad, this confrontational.

When we decided on our "Come to the Table" worship series, we expected stories of Jesus at table with outcasts, sinners, those rejected by the world. Jesus, at table, declaring the truth of our sermon title, that lyric from the song Andy and our choir sang earlier, "There's no one unwelcome here."

But then, there's this story. It may not seem like it, but this, too, is a table story from the Gospel of Luke. It begins this way, "While [Jesus] was speaking, a Pharisee invited him to dine with him; so [Jesus] went in and took his place *at the table*."

Again, we are table with Jesus. He's the invited guest of a Pharisee, but we aren't told what motivation this Pharisee has for inviting Jesus to table. Maybe he was compelled by Jesus' teachings. Maybe he was offended and wants to set Jesus straight.

Whatever the intention, Jesus' behavior at the table was certainly not intended.

Maybe you, like me, flinched as you heard read Jesus' words from the table. This isn't what we expect from Jesus. Where is the grace and forgiveness? One of the religious lawyers at the table, a scribe, says what everyone's thinking, "Teacher, when you say these things, you insult us too."

The confrontation begins seemingly innocently. Jesus doesn't wash his hands before the meal. It's a little gross, but before we get too self-righteous, let's admit: the line after worship for coffee fellowship is usually longer than the line for handwashing.

But this isn't about hygiene, is it? This is about purity. What have you touched? WHO have you touched that will make you unclean? Sitting at table with someone--this was intimate. It was a sign of acceptance. But throughout your day, you might come in contact with unclean people. It happens. And so, you washed your hands, because you didn't want their contaminants making it to your table.

So, wash your hands! It may prevent germs, but, more importantly, it prevented the wrong people from being at your table.

And Jesus, doesn't wash his hands. He didn't forget. Jesus is picking a fight.

Already in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus has welcomed in a "sinful woman" to a Pharisee's table. He's fed the masses. He's dined with people with whom a good Jew would not dine. And in our story today, Jesus accepts the Pharisee's invitation, not to become buddy-buddy with the religious leaders, but because he has a point to make.

He sits at the table with unwashed hands to provoke them. And when they call him on it...he lets loose.

"You fools," he says. "Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? Woe to you Pharisees! For you tithe, but neglect justice and the love of God! You love to have the seat of honor in the synagogues. You love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces. But Woe to you! You are like unmarked graves that people walk on top of, without realizing it. You load people with burdens hard to bear, and you do not lift a finger to ease them. You build the tombs of the prophets whom your ancestors killed. You not only don't enter the kingdom yourselves, but you hinder others from entering."

It's no surprise, Jesus' hosts are indignant. How dare he, insult them at *their* table.

I forgot to include the next two verses in our reading, but they tell us the Pharisee's reaction: "When [Jesus] went outside, the scribes and the Pharisees began to be very hostile toward him...lying in wait for him, to catch him in something he might say."

Normally, on Sunday, when we are invited to Christ's table, we usually don't say, "Come to the table, and be confronted and insulted by Jesus." If we did, who would show up.

If you thought all would be comfortable and non-confrontational at the table, then you shouldn't have invited Jesus to dine with you. But we must tread carefully here, for we need to hear what Jesus is actually saying.

His anger is directed towards the Pharisees--the religious leaders--not those who are deemed unclean. And his anger isn't at their imperfections, their perceived unworthiness, their flaws and even sin.

Jesus' anger is not directed at who they are, but who they claim to be.

Because they dare show up at the table of God in a costume. Outside, they dress up in their holy robes. For Halloween this year, they're dressed up as Religious. They're holy. But it's not just cosplay--they believe the role is who they really are. They believe they're better than everyone else.

When they walk in the marketplace, and people say, "Hey, there's a holy man." They say, "I know." If they dressed as Han Solo, they'd think they were the real Han Solo.

And the plan was, that Jesus would come to their table, and tell them what a good job they were doing. He would reward their generous tithes, and praise them for being holy.

But Jesus isn't the judge of a costume contest. He's preparing a table for justice.

And he sees right through their holy robes, their law-keeping, their hand-washing, and their religious beliefs. Underneath the costume of holiness, he sees what's really there, and it's not pretty. They are an unwashed cup. An unmarked grave. They're filled with hate, and bigotry. They pretend they're holy by declaring that you are not. They justify their place at the table by keeping others away from the table of God.

And if there's anything that will set Jesus off, it's someone keeping someone else from the table.

I don't know what it is with God and tables, but when the prophets picture what the Kingdom of God will look like, it's a big table filled with a lavish feast, where every nation, every tribe and tongue sit, dine together, and eat their fill.

That's why we gather at tables now--so we get used to live in God's kingdom. That's why Jesus invites us to the table today, just as we are.

If you've got a Halloween costume on, that's okay. But if you're wearing a religious costume today, if you think that your skin color, your religious beliefs, your sex, or sexual orientation or money, power, knowledge, and good behavior makes you worthy to be here--well, think again. Your costume may fool others and fool yourself, but it doesn't fool God.

But this is the good news--you don't have to have a costume. You don't have to have clean hands. You don't have to have it all together--and neither does anyone else.

For this is Christ's table--not the church's table. This is Christ's table. And there's no one unwelcome here.