

## **“Jesus Rediscovered: At the Party”**

*Luke 7: 36-50*

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This is the weird and scandalous truth about Christianity: the God of the cosmos, the Creator God, came to us in the man Jesus who becomes the very presence of God.

And we discover, as we read our Scriptures, that this Jesus was no lonely hermit who renounces the world. He never shuts himself away from people in order to not be tempted by the ways of the world. He was no holy hermit. We soon find out that he was a wandering rabbi who did some of his best teaching at the dinner table.

Jesus was accused more than once of being a **“glutton and a drunkard; a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”**

Yes, Jesus did go alone into the desert to pray. But those were times when he needed to re-charge so that he could have the energy to do the stuff that came more naturally to him.

Jesus was constantly interacting with people—mixing it up with a crowd. And most typically of all, eating and drinking with gusto at parties. He loved the give and take of public debate.

As a social, communal person, Jesus had no interest in carrying out his mission by himself. He called disciples to come along and join him.

And his life has implications for our lives also. His life implies that if we are to be fully human, we must live our lives through a web of relationships and connections with others, including God. Notice that the focal point for our church worship life together is at a dinner table – where we celebrate Holy Communion or the Lord’s Supper, together.

The term “solitary Christian” is an oxymoron. When we see Jesus’ life, we know that we cannot do this faith solo.

Jesus had some whining critics who complained: **“The disciples of John the Baptist fast often and go about with long faces.”** (In other words, we can tell they’re religious; they look so miserable.)

**“But your disciples are always at parties, and eating and drinking.”**

And Jesus’ answer? **“When the groom shows up, do the wedding guests look sad? No! It’s time to celebrate!”**

Jesus is encountered most meaningfully at the dinner table, sharing food and drink with friends.

A Pharisee invited Jesus to a dinner party. No sooner has grace been said and the wine is poured than an uninvited woman, who is described as a sinner, shows up with an alabaster jar of ointment and makes a scene. She stands weeping, and begins to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continues kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. And, as you can imagine, she causes an uproar.

Now listen, even in our time when nothing much shocks us anymore, this would shock and disturb most of us if we witnessed this kind of intimate act at the dinner table!

The Pharisee mutters in a voice loud enough to be heard by everyone at the table: **“If this guy were a real prophet, he could see what a low, sinful sort of woman this is.”**

Jesus replies to the Pharisee, **“Simon, do you see this woman? I show up here expecting a good time, and you didn’t embrace me and kiss me, or give me a foot massage. But she knows who she is, and she knows who I am, and she has just made your boring party real.”**

To make his point, Jesus then tells a story. **“A man was owed ten dollars by one debtor, ten thousand dollars by another. He forgave both debtors. Now think hard, which man was the most grateful?”**

**“Well ...I guess the one who was forgiven more,”** answers the Pharisee.

Jesus says, **“Can you see this woman as I see her? Her sins, which are great, have been forgiven, so her gratitude is a bit extravagant.”**

So, we find out, as we travel with Jesus, that it was not just that Jesus went to parties. It was that he ate and drank with sinners

Now the Pharisees were the good, pious, holy, biblically knowledgeable religious leaders of Jesus’ day. They weren’t bad people. But, the Pharisees do stand for all believers who – in self-righteousness and smugness – infuriate Jesus by their division of the sinners and the saved, and their unwillingness to party with God.

There were many Pharisees who invited Jesus to dinner, only to regret the invitation the minute Jesus spoke at the party.

But, these Pharisees **kept** inviting Jesus back to dinner – despite his bad manners and his infuriating challenges. On another Sabbath evening, Jesus is at a Pharisee’s house. And, once again, after the opening blessing, Jesus notices

an unfortunately afflicted man. He senses their objection to him healing this man on the Sabbath.

**“Alright – all you Bible scholars,”** says Jesus. **“Now, I know it’s wrong to work on the Sabbath. But, riddle me this: Is it kosher to do good work on the Sabbath? If you had an ox in the ditch, wouldn’t you rescue him? Then why would I not heal this poor suffering man?”**

And the Pharisees stare in silence at their food.

Then, noticing how some of his fellow guests had jockeyed for the best seats at the table, Jesus speaks out rather bluntly and tells them:

**“Hey... Don’t push your way up to the best seats at the head table. Take the lower seats, in case you are embarrassed when the person who was supposed to sit there arrives and you have to move down.”**

Of course, there is shocked silence. Who speaks this bluntly at a dinner party? You’re supposed to be polite. And, what’s the point of a party anyway, if you can’t look for a way to move up the social ladder or schmooze with the boss?

And then Jesus turns on the host of the party.

**“As for you, when you give a party, don’t invite your stuffed-shirt friends and cronies who can repay your invitation. Invite those who really appreciate a free meal and a night on the town – the poor, the maimed, the blind, and the lame... the people in low places who know how to party.”**

Now, there’s confusion around the table. Don’t you usually invite those who you have the most in common with – who attend the same clubs and are in the same social status? What’s the point of inviting to a party someone who can never invite you to his party in return?

And here’s a warning: Jesus can have the same effect on you if you invite him to dine at your table, or if you accept an invitation to dine at his. He is often an uncomfortable guest and an even more abrasive host. He asks us pointed questions as we party with him.

But, there you have it. Jesus tells us that the kingdom of heaven is a party with a bunch of people whom you wouldn’t be caught dead with on a Saturday night. It’s God’s idea of a good time.

The book of Revelation says our destiny is one day to party with Jesus forever – to sit down with him at **“the marriage supper of the Lamb.”** In his eating and drinking, partying, and outrageous table etiquette, Jesus portrays that promised party at the end of time.

We dress up and engage in revelry because parties offer us a respite from the dull, humdrum world where we live Monday through Friday. But in **his** partying, Jesus is showing us a glimpse of a world that is healed, finished, redeemed, and restored to what God originally intended. It is Jesus' open-handed invitation to join in the fun.

This is what reality will be – not just on Saturday night but for all eternity, not just for the fortunate few but for everybody – once God gets God's way and the promised kingdom comes.

The Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, or the Eucharist is meant to be the party that prepares us for the big party – so that one day we'll be fully able to obey Jesus and party with God and our all our neighbours forever, with great joy and celebration. The Kingdom of God is party time.

Jesus was always partying – eating and drinking with just anybody. He was the guest of religious sinners and non-religious sinners. The only party he paid for himself was at the Last Supper – a meal in an upper room.

At that party, after he offered us bread and wine, he shocked us by telling us that his body would be broken for us and his blood would be poured out for us.

**“Eat your fill. Drink up,”** he said.

And someone would have said, **“How much do you think this feast is costing him?”**

Everything.