



# CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

## ***Just Good Table Manners\_ - The Twelfth Sunday After Pentecost - 8\_28\_2022***

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God, our Father, and the Lord, our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

This past Tuesday, I went out to dinner with a group of wonderful folk, a dinner that I was totally looking forward to all day long. It was the end of a very busy day. And basically I'd been running, running, running, and finally got to the dinner. And as soon as I got to the dinner, and everybody was seated and we were all so excited to see each other and be with each other and just, I was kind of, sort of relaxing and taking stock of my own self, I realized, oh my God, I'm so thirsty. Because I hadn't drank any water, it seemed like, for hours. So thank God, the place where we went, there was a wonderful wait staff. And fairly immediately they came and started filling all the water glasses with some wonderful cold ice water. And I was so excited.

So when I went to go get my water glass, I froze because on the right side of the table setting was a water glass, and on the left side of the table setting was another water glass. And I didn't know which one was mine. And I was like, oh my gosh. So as the water was temptingly condensating and all the lovely drips of water were falling on the glass, I was like, I hope someone in this dinner party is thirsty and starts to drink some water so I would emulate them. And I looked around and it was at that moment that everyone just started talking and did not stop, and no one drank a glass of water.

The irony of this is it's happened to me before. I was at another dinner party and there were two glasses of water. I was thirsty, so I took the wrong glass and I drank from it and I put it down. And then without thinking a little bit later on, I took the correct glass and drank from that one and put it down. And the poor person who was sitting next to me, realized that I actually drank from both glasses and really loud said, "Manisha, you just drank from my water glass and your water glass." At that point, everyone who was at the table stopped talking and they looked at me. Then we had to figure out who hadn't drunk from their water glass, so they could share it with this poor person who was sitting next to me who had the bad luck of sitting next to a two-handed water glass drinker.

So as I grabbed both of my water glasses and put them over on the correct side, I realized, oh my gosh, I'm so embarrassed. Obviously, people know that I don't know good etiquette or table manners. I've heard manners are something meant not to make you feel comfortable, but to show others that you're caring for them. So it's not out of regard for yourself, but regard for others. But I also

felt that table manners and etiquettes actually give you great opportunities in public life to trip you up so that you can be mortified or embarrass yourselves, and people can judge you accordingly, or you can judge others accordingly.

And maybe that's why Jesus offers us some advice, a little bit of etiquette at a dinner party. Maybe he's trying to protect us from those cringeworthy moments. And so he says, when you go to a dinner party, don't sit at the head table only to have that host come to you, tap you on the shoulder and say, you're in somebody else's seat. And then in front of everybody, you got to scrape back your chair, pick up your purse and your water glass, and you are shunned to Siberia at table 20 where all of the misfits and the people who are the last-minute invitees and the pity invites and the relatives that nobody really knows. That's where they're all sitting.

Don't do that to yourself, Jesus says. Instead you start at table 20 where all the misfits and the pity invites and the relatives that nobody knows about are seated. And then you wait for the host to come to you and say, oh my goodness, you need to be closer to where the in-crowd is. And then in front of everybody, you will be elevated to new soaring pecking order heights, because those who exalt themselves, they will be humbled. But those who humble themselves will be exalted.

So this little passage is stunning to me because Jesus, the Creator of the whole entire universe, the one that comes down to Earth to save us from sin, from death, from the devil, from evil, the one who gives himself self-sacrificially in the most beloved gift of all out of pure love, whole-heartedly hangs on the cross for us and dies. This is the same Jesus that's teaching us humans how to play musical chairs. Is that what a dinner party is all about? Don't sit there. Sit here. What are dinner parties about? Are they about the seating chart?

At some funerals, one of my favorite scripture passages is sometimes read, and it's from the Book of Isaiah. It speaks of a dinner party, a feast that's on top of the mountain, that the Lord invites everyone to, all peoples, all nations. At this wonderful dinner party, there's massive amounts of the richest food available and the finest and well-aged wines that you can drink. It's the best of the best. And there, the Lord wipes away all of our tears. The Lord takes the disgrace from each and every one of us and the Lord finally swallows up death forever.

And how do the guests on the mountain respond? Are they vying for the best seat in the house? No. They say, see, this is our God, the one who has come to save us. This is the Lord for whom we have waited, let us rejoice and be glad in this salvation. And they party like it's 1999 because everybody's there. All people are rejoicing and that's a dinner party worth emulating.

Perhaps Jesus was teaching us that those of us who think that where we sit or whom we dine with matters, well, you are going to get what you deserve. You're

going to have to play a game that has winners and losers. And you're going to have to think about how to manipulate situations to allow you to get what you want. Or you can do things like Jesus. and then what matters about where you're sitting and who you're with is whether you're breaking the social norms and you're experiencing the gift of everyone, anyone, and every person who you're sitting next to being the person of honor in your midst. And in fact, Jesus actually has some advice for the host if you host a dinner party. Rethink your guest list. Invite people who can't repay you. Why? Because they can't repay your generosity, their gratitude is forever.

I read a story by an author and radio show host named Brent Hansen. And it's about this evangelical Christian friend he had named Michael. Michael bought a former gallery in an arts district and he converted it into an evangelical Christian coffee shop where evangelical Christian rock stars and bands would come and do big concerts and they'd have evangelical speakers come. And this is in the midst of this really boho district that has really cute art lofts and feminist bookstores. And this space that he bought was really well known because over the years, every year, it had hosted an exhibit that benefited AIDS research and featured art that most certainly would not be considered evangelical nor would align with evangelical values.

So once Michael, the evangelical bought the place, everybody in the area assumed that the annual arts show that was the largest in the area was toast. Everyone, except Michael. And so when he ran into the art exhibit directors who told Michael that they were looking for a different venue, Michael said, no, no, you don't have to. Come to the venue. And in fact, not only that, I'm going to pay for all the fancy hors d'oeuvres and all the great wines. I'm going to offer the best of the best. And the organizers asked him, are you sure you want people like us and art that you won't approve of? And Michael said, everyone is welcome.

So on the night of the show, he was dressed up in a tuxedo and he stood at the door with some chocolate covered strawberries. And he gave everyone who walked in a bear hug. It was as if he heard Jesus' words, when you throw a banquet invite those who cannot repay you and you will be blessed.

This is not hard. Jesus shows us how to do this each and every week up there. Right? Jesus hosts a dinner banquet every time you and I gather when we have the Eucharist. And now it's important for you to remember that you and me, we're the ones who cannot repay Him. We're the lame ones. We're the misfits. We're the ones who are crippled by our own faults. We're the ones who are blind to the needs of justice and mercy in this world. We're the ones that Jesus invites and we can't repay Him. And we are invited to the best banquet that exists on the face of this earth.

Now I do agree, you kind of, sort of have to use your imagination when you receive one of those weird wafers, but if Jesus can turn water into wine, He surely can turn that wimpy little wafer into the best meal that you ever had. And I admit that I need the Eucharist each week. Why? Because I need to remember the kingdom values, that everyone is invited to the table and that we don't deserve it, and there's nothing we can do to repay it. And we are each the guests of honor. I need to remember that I am a guest of honor every week. And I need to remember that you are a guest of honor. This is just not hard. This is just good table manners.

When I was in seminary, I had a core group of friends that we would lunch with every day. And we'd go to the cafeteria and we all sat in the same place and it was very, very wonderful and holy. I loved lunches with my good core group of friends. Somewhere in the early mid-semester, a new student showed up and she sat in the cafeteria all by herself... for one day, because the next day we all knew where we were going to be sitting. It's just good table manners.

May you have good table manners so that everyone you sit with, whether you're at the head table or at table 20, will feel welcome and feel like a guest of honor. May you be invited by hosts that you cannot repay so that you may have gratitude until the resurrection of Jesus Christ. May you have a lunch table that is always, always expanding and giving seats to everyone who's in the cafeteria. And in case you forget, like me, may you always remember this pneumatic device to know which water glass is yours. Everyone has a right to assuage their thirst.

Amen.