

**At** **Table**  
*with* **Jesus**

A BIBLE STUDY ON MEALTIME  
CONVERSATIONS WITH THE SAVIOR

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LEADER EDITION

(All Scripture is from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.)



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## **Introduction**

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At meals, much more can happen than the mere consuming of food. Around the table, as friends and family gather for a meal, relationships can be deepened, special occasions can be celebrated, important life matters can be discussed. In short, life is often shared over a meal. Many significant things happened over a meal during Jesus' earthly ministry. This study invites us to journey into the Scriptures and take a seat around the meal table where Jesus dines. May the Holy Spirit use this study to deepen our understanding of what grace our Savior extends to those who get to dine with Him, and how He continues to set a place for us to be nurtured by Him.

## Table of Contents

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Introduction .....	3
At Table with Jesus	
A Covenant Confirmed .....	5
At Table with Jesus	
Meals that Bless.....	9
At Table with Jesus	
The Abundant Provider .....	15
At Table with Jesus	
Anointed by a Sinner, Forgiven by the Savior .....	20
At Table with Jesus	
The Humble, Heavenly Banquet.....	24
At Table with Jesus	
Burning Hearts and Opened Eyes.....	29
At Table with Jesus	
A Meal for the Lost .....	34
Bibliography .....	41



## **At Table with Jesus A Covenant Confirmed**

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### **Setting the Scene**

“In the East, even today, to invite someone to a meal was an honor. It was an offer of peace, trust, brotherhood, and forgiveness; in short, sharing a table meant sharing life” (J. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*). Table fellowship was an integral part of Jesus’ ministry. Time and again at table, Jesus teaches about the kingdom of God and shares a meal in that atmosphere of acceptance, forgiveness, and peace. Yet before we sit at the table with our Lord incarnate, today we will look at how God had used table fellowship in Israel’s history to communicate His grace to His people.

### **Into the Text** Exodus 24:1–11

1. What does God instruct in verse 1? Why is Moses alone to come closer to God in verse 2? How do these instructions illustrate that the time of God’s plan of salvation had not yet fully come?

**The Lord instructs Moses, Aaron, Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu and the seventy elders to come to Him and worship at a distance. These men represent the spiritual and community leadership of Israel. Moses alone is to come closer to the LORD as His special mediator between Himself and His people. The one true mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ would one day fulfill that role personally.**

## At Table with Jesus

2. What might be meant by “all the LORD’s words and laws” that Moses told the people, what is the possible distinction between words and laws?

**While there have been varying suggestions regarding the distinction between “words” and “laws,” the “words” most likely refers to the Ten Commandments the Lord gave in Exodus 20 while the “laws” likely refer to all the ceremonial social regulations the Lord gave in Exodus 20:22–23; 32.**

3. How do the people respond?

**The people make a bold promise that they will do everything the LORD has said. Given their sinful nature, it’s not a promise they would be able to keep.**

4. What is significant about how Moses arranges the area for worship in verse 4? Compare 1 Peter 2:4–5.

**The altar at the foot of the mountain along with the twelve pillars that represented the twelve tribes of Israel indicates that the covenant is between the LORD and His people. Some may connect the visual of the altar surrounded by the twelve stone pillars with the image that the Spirit inspired Peter to use when speaking of the Church in 1 Peter 2:4–5.**

5. What tasks did Moses give the young Israelite men? What was the purpose of a burnt offering and a fellowship offering? See Leviticus 1:1–5, 7:11–21.

**The young Israelite men serve as priests as the Levitical priesthood had not yet been established. The burnt offerings were offered as a price for the sin of the people, sin which separates fellowship with God. The fellowship offerings included a common meal to express thanksgiving to God and fellowship with Him for all who could participate in the sacrifice. The sacrifices of the Old Testament pointed to Jesus, the Lamb of God, as John writes, He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2).**

## **At Table with Jesus**

6. How does the LORD begin to confirm His covenant with His people in verses 6–8?

**Note that there are two uses of blood from the same sacrifice of the young bulls in this confirmation, bookending the reading of God’s Word and the commitment from God’s people to obey everything in the covenant. The blood covering the altar as well as the people may serve a two fold purpose. First, the Law of God requires death for violations of it, so the blood seems to indicate that if the covenant was not kept by the people, they would end up like the sacrificed animals. Second, the sprinkling of the blood on the people seems to foreshadow the sacrifice that our Lord Jesus will make of Himself for the covenant violations of all people that will bring the washing away of sins and new life through the Sacrament of Holy Baptism.**

7. Following the sprinkling of blood upon the people, what amazing thing now happens in these verses?

**The amazing thing that happens is that the leaders of Israel are allowed into the presence of God even to the extent that Scripture says that they saw God. No one can see God and live, and it should be noted that God is not described in this section, only what was under His feet. It may be that, in presence of the Holy Lord, the leaders of Israel did not raise their eyes any higher than His feet.**

8. Why was it surprising that God did not “raise His hand” against the leaders of Israel?

**Moses notes that God does not “raise His hand” against the leaders of Israel. In the presence of the LORD, any and all sinners might rightly expect the blast of His righteous judgment, yet here as the covenant between the LORD and His people is made, He graciously allows the sinful representatives of His sinful people not only to enter His presence but to eat with Him. In order for this fellowship with the LORD to happen, God must grant these leaders to be in His presence by an act of His sanctifying grace.**

## At Table with Jesus

9. Discuss the reason God seals this covenant with His people with a meal.

**Discussion may vary on this question, but the leader may wish to note that in sealing this covenant with a meal, our Lord is giving a foreshadow of the gracious fellowship that He grants His followers in the Sacrament of Holy Communion which is also a foreshadow of the feast to come in the marriage feast of the Lamb and His kingdom which will have no end.**

## Final Thought

It was a hopeful, well-intentioned promise the Israelites made to the LORD. They vowed under the blood of the covenant to do and obey everything the LORD had said, both the commandments and the whole legal code given through Moses. Yet not one generation throughout the entire history of Israel, not even one single Israelite, would keep perfectly this promise. According to the legal understanding of the day, the fate of the animals sacrificed should be the fate of those who do not keep the covenant. God is not oblivious to the sin of His people. Though He could justifiably condemn them before their vow leaves their lips, our Lord does just the opposite. Even before their failed vow is made, the Lord provides a sacrifice — a burnt offering that will show that He will cover their sin with the blood of another ... another that foreshadowed the sacrifice of the Savior Himself. The Israelites will be forgiven, and the Holy Lord will mercifully suffer His failed, sinful people to dine with Him, both then and forever. This mercy will not only feed the Israelites, it still feeds His children today with the gift of salvation in Christ, for eternity.



## At Table with Jesus Meals that Bless

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### Setting the Scene

Many things commonly happen when friends get together for a meal. There may be laughter, stories told, memories revisited, another building block to the relationship is added, and certainly, there is food that nourishes. Yet something even more was considered to have happened during meals in Jesus' day. "Table-fellowship means fellowship before God, for the eating of a piece of broken bread by everyone who shares in a meal brings out the fact that they all have a share in the blessing which the master of the house had spoken over the unbroken bread" (Arthur Just, *Luke-Concordia Commentary*, p. 232). And when the Almighty Lord sits at the table, something far more life-giving is present than food. Christ comes to the table of sinners and brings the gift of salvation and sanctification.

### Into the Texts Matthew 9:9-13 and Luke 5:27-32

1. What gracious invitation does Jesus extend to Matthew? How does Matthew respond? Why was it surprising that Jesus had extended this invitation to him?

**Jesus extends to Matthew (Levi) the invitation to be His disciple. We learn from Luke 5:29 that Matthew responds by hosting a feast where Jesus is the guest of honor. It is surprising that Jesus extends this invitation to Matthew because he was a tax collector. Tax collectors did not enjoy a good reputation among other Jews. In fact, they were generally despised and lumped in with "sinners."**

## At Table with Jesus

2. What implications are there in the fact that Jesus goes to Matthew's house for dinner, especially considering the guest list that comes as well?

The implications of Jesus coming into Matthew's home for this feast are two-fold. For the "righteous" leaders of Israel, Jesus has entered the home of an unclean person to do the intimate thing of dining with him. From their perspective, they may conclude that Jesus has voluntarily made Himself unclean. However, from Matthew and his party guests' perspective, Jesus has granted them an amazing blessing. Those considered righteous in the days of Jesus' earthly ministry would consider sinners unworthy of eating with them, and indeed all of Matthew's dinner guests are unworthy to dine with Jesus for none are worthy of such an honor, and yet Jesus graciously deigns to eat with these "sinners." They are allowed to eat with Him only through His gift of forgiving mercy.

3. How do the Pharisees respond to the situation?

The Pharisees grumble at Jesus' disciples, questioning why Jesus eats with those they judge as beneath them, labeling them "sinners." One can almost imagine the event as it unfolds. Jesus is gathered in the inner courtyard of Matthew's home, reclining at the table with Matthew and his sinful guests, while the Pharisees lurk just outside the gate. When one of Jesus' disciples comes near, they hurl their grumblings at them.

4. How does Jesus directly address their accusation?

There does seem to be an accusation in the Pharisees grumbling that Jesus has violated proper conduct in accepting Matthew's dinner invitation. While the Pharisees and their scribes address Jesus' disciples here, Jesus, when He hears them, directly addresses them. He notes that those who consider themselves healthy do not need a doctor, but the sick do. Jesus had not come to call those who concluded they did not need His forgiveness because they were already righteous by their own deeds. He came to call sinners by His grace.

### At Table with Jesus

5. What does Jesus mean when He quotes Hosea 6:6 — what is the difference between mercy and sacrifice?

**Mercy and sacrifice may be one and the same external act. The difference is a matter of the heart of the one doing the mercy or sacrifice. The Pharisees believed they deserved both the company of Jesus as well as the place to sit in judgment over others and over the actions of Jesus with others because they had earned it as well as a righteous status before God. They had earned such things by their “sacrifice” of keeping God’s law according to their interpretation, therefore, they did not need grace from Jesus. Yet our Lord would desire mercy, a steadfast love that comes from the heart rather than a sacrifice that should be reckoned as a status earned before God. Besides, with the curse of sin, even those who thought themselves righteous were not at all righteous in God’s eyes.**

Luke 19:1–10

6. To where is Jesus heading as He is passing through Jericho?

**Jesus was heading to Jerusalem to die for the sins of the world and rise from the dead.**

7. How does Luke describe Zacchaeus?

**Luke describes Zacchaeus as a chief tax collector, the only time the term is used in the New Testament. This would seem to imply that Zacchaeus is in charge of the tax collectors in the area, and Jericho was a major center for collecting customs on goods traveling from east to west. Given the reputation that “rank and file” tax collectors had as being unscrupulous in their work, Zacchaeus was probably, to say the least, unpopular in Jericho. Luke says that Zacchaeus is also rich, and describes him as being small in stature which will play a role in his story.**

### At Table with Jesus

8. What embarrassing acts does Zacchaeus do in order to see Jesus?

In order to see Jesus, Zacchaeus both runs and climbs into a tree. A self-respecting Israelite man in that day would neither run nor climb a tree as both acts might be seen as humiliating. In a part of the world that values modesty to this day, in order to run, a man would have to lift his robes and expose his legs. If one were to climb a tree, again, he might expose himself as he climbed in his robes. So Zacchaeus' acts show the extent to which he desired to see Jesus.

9. Why **must** Jesus stay at Zacchaeus' house that day?

Jesus does not need to abide with Zacchaeus for His own benefit. The word "must" indicates that our Lord knows He needs to abide in Zacchaeus' home so that this lost sinner might be found and receive the gift of Christ's mercy. In this we might see a pattern of our own lives, the Lord abides in our homes as well through work of the Spirit in His Word and the daily remembrance of our Baptismal covenant, and as He does, we receive His gift of mercy and salvation.

10. *So he came down at once and welcomed Him gladly* (Luke 19:6). How does this phrase imply that a meal was served in Jesus' honor?

For Zacchaeus to gladly welcome Jesus into his home would have called for Zacchaeus to show hospitality to his Guest which would have entailed providing a meal for Jesus that would also reflect the grace and forgiveness that our Lord has granted Zacchaeus by coming to be a guest in his home.

11. How does the crowd react to Jesus going to be Zacchaeus' guest?

The crowd is displeased with Jesus' choice of lodging. They grumble that Zacchaeus is a sinner, but really their negative comments are directed at the fact that Jesus has gone to be with him, not unlike the religious leaders in Luke 15:2, Matthew 9:11 and elsewhere.

12. How does the fact that Zacchaeus stood up (v. 8) further suggest that they were eating a meal at the time of this exchange?

### **At Table with Jesus**

**Meals were commonly eaten at low-lying tables while reclining on short couches or pillows. The fact that Luke indicates that Zacchaeus stood up may suggest that his declaration happened while they were dining.**

- 13.** As a result of Jesus' presence in his life, what fruit of faith does Zacchaeus now show? How might Zacchaeus' actions be reflective of God's Word in Exodus 22:1 and 2 Samuel 12:5–6?

**Zacchaeus is truly repentant for his sin and bears the fruit of faith in Christ's mercy by declaring that he gives half his goods to the poor. He also promises to restore fourfold to anyone anything he has gotten by ill gain. This declaration may also reflect that he was aware of the directives regarding restoration found in Exodus 22:1 and 2 Samuel 12:5–6. In his repentance, Zacchaeus' actions now seek to fulfill the directives in God's Word.**

- 14.** What joyful declaration does Jesus make in verses 9–10 and to whom is it addressed? Why is Zacchaeus a "son of Abraham?" See Romans 4:1–3, 12.

**Jesus' declares that salvation has come to this house this day! His grace-filled words are similar to what He will declare to the thief on the cross later in Luke 23:43. Zacchaeus does not earn this salvation by his willingness to give to the poor or restore material goods to those from whom he has extorted. This good news comes to him and his entire household only by the grace of Jesus. While the first part of the statement is directed toward Zacchaeus, the part where Jesus says, "because this man, too, is a son of Abraham," would appear to be directed toward the crowd that had been grumbling about Jesus staying with Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus is a son of Abraham by receiving the same faith in the Messiah that Abraham had. He has received this faith because the Messiah, Jesus, came to seek and save the lost, of whom this tax collector was but has now received salvation from Jesus.**

## **Final Thought**

It is no mistake that Jesus' table fellowship outside Jerusalem and the events of Jesus' ministry begin (Matthew) and end (Zacchaeus) with Jesus having a meal with a tax-collecting sinner. There is a similar pattern found in both Matthew and Zacchaeus' encounter with the Messiah. Jesus extends a gracious invitation. There is a joyful and immediate response. There is a celebration meal where the Savior is the guest of honor and an outside crowd murmurs, objecting to Jesus' fellowship practices. Yet the Messiah will not be dissuaded from His mission of which these tax collectors are examples. Jesus sits down to dine with sinners while they are still sinners, but before the final course is finished, Jesus has brought them to repentance and granted His gift of salvation. Can anything different be said when our Lord graciously invites us to dine at His Holy Table?



## **At Table with Jesus The Abundant Provider**

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### **Setting the Scene**

Cut off from any means to sustain them locally, and having far too few personal resources to care for their needs, the disciples are confronted twice with the same situation in the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000. The people need to be cared for and fed, but how can this be accomplished with so little. Fortunately, the One for whom the crowd had gathered is more than able to provide for their need and then some. But are these miracle events merely two versions of the same story, or is there something unique to be gained from each event? What insights are there in these meals with Christ for the Church today?

### **Into the Texts** Matthew 14:13–21; Luke 9:10–17; Matthew 15:29–39

1. What were the causes of Jesus' journeying to Bethsaida (Matthew 14:1–2, Luke 9:7–10)?

**Matthew and Luke provide us details regarding how Herod the tetrarch had had John the Baptist put to death, and was now making inquiries about Jesus. Jesus, possibly not wanting an encounter with Herod, and perhaps to personally reflect on John's beheading, withdraws with His disciples, privately, across the Sea of Galilee to a place near the town of Bethsaida.**

2. How does Matthew describe the area in 14:13? What happens to interrupt this private time? What does Jesus do for the crowds according to both evangelists?

### At Table with Jesus

Matthew describes the place as a solitary, desolate place, but the solitude is interrupted as the ever-seeking crowds hear that Jesus has come to this place, so they follow on foot and join Him. As Jesus sees the crowd, He has compassion on them, and, setting aside His own time, He heals their sick. Luke also notes that Jesus speaks to the crowds about the kingdom.

3. What practical problem comes up as the day continues? How would the disciples address it? What does Jesus suggest to them?

As the day draws to a close, the practical issue of what to do for a meal comes up. The disciples suggest that Jesus sends the crowds from this desolate place into the surrounding towns to buy food for themselves. Jesus, however, suggests that the crowds do not need to leave but that the disciples should give them something to eat.

4. Discuss how the early Church used the symbolism of this meal in its teaching?

According to the notes from Dr. Just's *Luke-Concordia Commentary, 1:1-9:50* (p. 383) the artistic image of a basket of bread with fish came to be used in the catacombs as a symbol of the Eucharist. This symbolism is likely drawn from the Old Testament image of bread as a symbol for the spiritual sustenance provided by God for His people in the wilderness wanderings of the Exodus, combined with the early Christian use of the letters from the Greek word for fish (ICHTHYS) which became a credal aid regarding who Jesus is: Jesus (Isous) Christ (Christos) of God (Theou) Son (Yios) Savior (Sotar).

5. What might Jesus' instruction of how to seat the crowd suggest? See Exodus 18:21, 25 and Isaiah 35:7.

Because Jesus orders the people to sit on the grass where Matthew had described the place as "desolate," some has suggested that this is a Messianic image being fulfilled of the desolate places becoming a lush place full of life. Jesus gives instructions to His disciples in Luke to have the crowds sit down

## At Table with Jesus

in groups of fifty, reminiscent of the instructions God gave to Moses regarding the organized division of the Israelites. However, that fact that the disciples are going to divide a group of 5000 men, as well as women and children, into groups of 50 to eat a meal may suggest something greater. It is unlikely every person in every group would be so well acquainted with each other that they would be inclined to eat a meal together. This division seems to represent the new community that is to be formed with the Church, where bonds are based on Christ who is at the center and is the head of this new community.

6. What do the actions of Jesus with the loaves and fish reflect?

Jesus' actions with the bread and fish are reflective of the start of a typical Jewish meal. Jesus, as head of the meal, takes the five loaves and two fish which is also how Luke begins his description of the Last Supper and the meal at Emmaus. He looks up to heaven (a unique action from Christ for the blessing of a meal), and He blesses the food. This blessing was to remind the recipients that the meal was from God — a gift of His grace and favor. See Exodus 23:25 and Psalm 132:15.

7. What is the end result of the meal?

The end result of the meal is that the entire crowd ate to the point of satisfaction and there was food to spare as seen in the twelve baskets the disciples gathered after the meal.

8. Where does the feeding of the 4,000 take place (Mark 7:31)? What happens immediately before this feeding (Matthew 15:21–28)?

The miracle of the feeding of the four thousand takes place in the region of the Decapolis. This region lay to the southeast of the Sea of Galilee and had a Gentile population, many of whom were probably in this crowd. It is also interesting to note that just before this miracle, in the Gospel of Matthew (Matthew 15:21–28), Jesus heals the daughter of the Canaanite woman. In that miracle of healing, we see Jesus commending the faith of a Gentile woman before His disciples.

### At Table with Jesus

9. What does Jesus' healing ministry in Matthew 15:30–31 seem to reflect? See Isaiah 35:5–6.

Jesus' healing ministry is a fulfillment of prophecies, like the one in Isaiah 35:5–6, that reveal that when the Messiah comes, He would bring the touch of God's healing for physical sufferings as well as spiritual. This also foreshadowed the blessed reality that in Jesus' resurrection there is the hope of our own physical resurrection with glorified bodies that will no longer suffer the effects of sin.

10. What is the cause of this miraculous event in Matthew 15:32? How do the disciples respond in verse 33?

Wherein the feeding of the five thousand, the disciples come to Jesus, asking that He send the crowds into the towns to buy food for themselves, Jesus initiates the conversation with His disciples. Wherein the feeding of the five thousand, the crowds had been with Jesus for a day, in the feeding of the four thousand, the crowds had been with Jesus for three days without food. Jesus has compassion on them and is concerned that if they were sent away, they might not have the physical strength to make it to a place to find food. Notice there is a shift in the disciples' response to Jesus from the first feeding miracle. In the feeding of the five thousand, the disciples were looking for the crowds to care for their own needs. Now, as Jesus tells His disciples that He does not want to send the crowds away hungry, the disciples simply ponder how they might find a solution to the situation in such a remote place.

11. Compare and contrast the two miraculous feedings? What insights can we draw from them?

Answers will vary on this question. Participants may want to discuss how both Jews and Gentiles are likely partakers in these meals where Jesus is clearly the provider. The leader may want to guide participants to discuss how our Lord graciously, abundantly provides for us today.

## **Final Thought**

They were remote, solitary places for both Jew and Gentile, yet they were the places where Jesus was, so it was the place of life. As crowds follow Him, bringing along their sick and lame, Jesus provides abundantly. He heals. He teaches the good news of the kingdom of God. Then He offers a meal ... not just a snack to physically get them on their way. Rather, these meals may be representative of a new community being formed ... centered on Christ ... gathered around His Word where His compassion addresses their needs ... and equally fed by Christ through the service of His disciples, both Jew and Gentile, under the same blessing from Jesus. That community is still found today ... still being taught God's Word, cared for, and fed under the same blessing of our Messiah. And His provision is still enough and surpassing to meet the needs of all that come.



## **At Table With Jesus** **Anointed by a Sinner, Forgiven by the Savior**

### **Setting the Scene**

Jesus' ministry is compelling people to form an understanding of who He is. John the Baptist asks in prison through his disciples if Jesus is the One to come or should they look for another. The Pharisees and experts in the law regard Him as a teacher and perhaps a prophet (which would be exciting even to them since there had not been a prophet for some 400 years before John's arrival). In today's lesson, a Pharisee, Simon, and his colleagues will have the honor of dining with the "possible prophet." Yet they will only get a meal because they will be skeptical and scandalized when Jesus reveals His true identity at the table. The greater blessing will be imparted to the uninvited guest who will come to know that Jesus is the Savior.

### **Into the Text** Luke 7:36–50

1. Skim over Luke 7:18–35. How do these verses (especially vv. 29–30) help set the context of today's lesson?

**In this section we really see three groups all forming ideas about Jesus. John and his disciples are to be encouraged as they see Jesus fulfilling what Isaiah and other prophets said would happen when the Messiah came. The Pharisees and experts in the law, having already rejected Christ's forerunner in John, are also not ready to follow the Messiah. Finally the "sinners" heard Jesus' words and were seeing the ways of God. This reference in verses 29–30 may even be where the sinful woman in our lesson hears first of Christ's gospel.**

## At Table with Jesus

2. Discuss the nature of such a meal that would be hosted by a Pharisee.

**The meal Simon the Pharisee hosted was quite possibly a haburah meal. This was a Sabbath evening Seder (Friday night) which began with the hallowing of the Sabbath day. It would have included as an integral part of the table fellowship a time of teaching by an invited guest — this time, Jesus.**

3. What uninvited “guest” now appears on the scene? What does she do that shows her love for Jesus and how might her actions be taken? See Psalm 2:12 and 1 Kings 19:18. Why might she have taken such bold actions?

**Note that the woman’s kissing of Jesus’ feet can be seen as an act of worship as the Old Testament references show. She takes these actions (even the bold action of showing up at the Pharisee’s house, inviting upon herself not only ridicule but perhaps far worse) because somewhere before, she likely has heard the gospel proclaimed by Jesus.**

4. What does the host Pharisee conclude about Jesus in light of the woman’s actions (v. 39)?

**Note that he assumes that because Jesus has allowed this sinner to touch Him, thus making Him ceremonially unclean, that He could not be a prophet. Thus, by Jesus’ acceptance of the sinner, this righteous Pharisee is rejecting Him.**

5. What is the point of Jesus’ parable to Simon in verses 40–43? What is the causative action of the debtor’s love?

**The parable obviously shows that those who have been forgiven much first respond in love to the one who forgave. Thus the cause of the woman’s love is Christ’s forgiveness not the other way around.**

6. What do Jesus’ comments in verses 44–46 reveal about the woman’s heart toward Christ? About Simon’s heart?

## At Table with Jesus

**Jesus' comments show that this woman has a heart that is responding in humble, repentant love to Christ's forgiveness of her. Simon on the other hand by violating nearly every custom of hospitality is showing that he has no love for Christ at all ... and by implication, has not received forgiveness, having a hardened heart.**

7. How do the parable in verses 40–43 and the last portion of verse 47 help us to understand that the woman's love for Jesus is a result and not the cause of her forgiveness in the first part of verse 47?

**Again, the cause of the woman's loving gesture is Jesus' forgiving love. He does not forgive based on her great love for Him**

8. When Jesus forgives the woman her sin what is He saying about Himself? What role would He play in His parable of the two debtors? How do the other guests receive His pronouncement of absolution?

**When Jesus forgives the sin, He is indicating to the dinner group that He is God — for only God can forgive sins. He is also putting Himself in the role of the lender in His parable. The implication is that both the woman and the invited guest all have a debt of sin owed to Him. The other guests are at best skeptical. Their question in verse 49 would seem to indicate scandal and disbelief.**

9. What does the woman receive from Jesus in verse 50?

**The woman receives not only forgiveness but the blessings of salvation and peace. Note those who come to Christ's table in repentant faith receive the same blessings from fellowship with Him.**

## At Table with Jesus

### Final Thought

Not everyone who merely eats and drinks with Jesus receives the greatest blessings He imparts at the table. Important religious leaders, honored guests, dine with the Messiah at Simon's home, but they do so seeing no need for their repentance ... no need for Jesus' forgiveness. They had a meal, but not true fellowship that leads to salvation. However, a rejected, uninvited guest, a sinner, is not welcomed by the "righteous crowd" to sit and dine, yet her Lord graces her with something that will sustain her to eternal life — His forgiving love. It is her repentant heart that shows itself in her humble love for Christ. When we come to Christ's table with a repentant heart, what great things our Lord freely gives!



## **At Table with Jesus The Humble, Heavenly Banquet**

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### **Setting the Scene**

A great banquet had been prepared by one of society's elite, and the upper crust of the elite were all in attendance, all seeking to see and more importantly, be seen as guests of honor. Into their midst comes one who has no honor, no place of power or recognition, a man with a disease that would make him, to say the least an unwelcome guest, the one who should take the humblest spot at the banquet ... if any spot at all. Yet there is Another there who could rightly take the highest place of honor at the head table, but this One has come to take the humblest spot of all, to be the servant-Savior. Jesus elevates this diseased outcast with the greatest honor, to receive the healing grace of God. The gift is there for all at the banquet, but will the powerful and proud who are carefully watching Jesus humbly receive the invitation to His banquet?

### **Into the Text** Luke 14:1-24

1. Read Luke 6:6, 7:36, 13:10 and 14:1. What pattern do we see emerging in these verses regarding Jesus' Sabbath activities?

**We see here the pattern of Jesus teaching (and at times healing) on the Sabbath and eating meals with the Pharisees. Dr. Just in *Luke — Concordia Commentary* 9:51-24:53 asserts that in each of these four instances Jesus has probably taught at the synagogue. While we cannot say with absolute certainty that this is case in each instance, it would make sense and be worth mentioning to your group.**

## At Table with Jesus

2. Discuss the phrase “prominent Pharisee” that Luke uses to describe the host of the banquet.

**The phrase “prominent Pharisee” literally means “one of the ruling Pharisees.” Whoever this is, he is most likely a representative on the Sanhedrin which means he’ll be one who presides over Jesus’ trial and vote for His death in the near future.**

3. When did the Pharisees begin to “carefully watch” Jesus? See Luke 6:7. Why were they carefully watching Him?

**The Pharisees begin to carefully watch Jesus at the first controversy of a Sabbath healing. This phrase does not mean that they are watching Him for a sign He’s the Messiah. Rather, they’re looking for reason to get rid of Him.**

4. According to Leviticus 13:2–3 how was the man who had dropsy to be viewed by the Israelites? How then would his presence at the dinner been received by the other guests?

**The man with dropsy is considered ceremonially unclean ... later in Leviticus the law even declares such a man could not serve as a priest as well. The invited guests would have sought to avoid this man and treated him with disdain, perhaps even talking among themselves how he shouldn’t even be there.**

5. What question does Jesus pose to the “honored” guests before healing the man? What response to this issue had been given in Luke 13:14? What response do these elite now give?

**By Jesus asking them to say if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath, He heads off what will likely be their criticism that will come when He does heal the man. Their silence reveals hardened hearts. They know one should fulfill the great law to love one’s neighbor, even (or especially) on the Sabbath, but they can’t bring themselves to have such compassion. In fact, the reference in Luke 13:14 indicates that healing was believed not to be done on the Sabbath.**

## At Table with Jesus

6. How does Jesus heal the man? What is the implication in his method of healing?

**Note the Jesus touches the man. By implication, Jesus is now also ceremonially unclean (even though the man was healed). This may bring to question Jesus' status at the banquet. Is He an honored guest, or because of His willingness to welcome and even touch the diseased man, has He not placed Himself at the humblest spot at the party.**

7. How does Jesus again raise the issue of showing compassion on the Sabbath in verse 5? What is the response by the religious leaders in verse 6?

**Again, Jesus puts the issue before the party goes, this time he uses two odd things to put together, a son or an ox. Point being, you'd rescue your child, you'd even help your animal ... how much more should God help His children on the Sabbath.**

8. What issue does Jesus now see among the honored guests? How does He address it in His first parable? What is the faith lesson to be gained from this?

**Note the main point in Jesus' first parable is that as we come to His banquet, we ought come in humility, for our Lord will exalt us before all, by His grace, to His place of honor.**

9. What "meal etiquette" lesson does Jesus offer for the host in verses 12–14? Who will bless such a gracious host (v.14a) and when will that blessing be fully realized, showing that this is more than just a statement about how to host a good meal?

**Like the first parable, this "etiquette" lesson tells us that at Christ's banquet, the ones invited (which is everyone) in no way can pay Him back. Those who were diseased were considered to have some issue with sin. God invites such people to fellowship at His table. Again, His salvation is inclusive and sinners are welcomed as family members at Christ's table. Those who follow Jesus'**

## At Table with Jesus

**pattern of love for the outcast will find themselves honored by God Himself at the resurrection.**

10. What is meant by the “banquet beatitude” spoken to Jesus in verse 15?

**It’s one thing to eat a free meal. It’s far greater to dine in heaven for there the banquet does not end.**

11. In Jesus responding parable, how do the invited guests respond to the banquet host’s invitation to come?

**The invited guest all have, in their own thoughts, more important priorities of either wealth or family. The invitation to the heavenly banquet is turned down for these things. They reject the gospel for something less.**

12. How does the owner of the house respond to his servant’s report about the refusal of his guests to come? What two groups are now brought to the banquet? Why do the servants have to “make” those found on the roads and country lanes come to the banquet?

**The owner is angry with the invited guests. Note his servants are first to go out to the streets and alleys (terms used for passages within a city) to find new guests who are the outcasts of that city. When there’s still room, the servants are to go to the country roads outside the city. The parallel is first are invited the downtrodden of the Israelites, then as there is still room in heaven, the Gentiles are brought in too. The servants have to compel the ones outside the city to come in because in Jesus’ day an invitation from a foreigner to dinner would be at first turned down.**

13. What ominous warning does Jesus give at the end of this parable that again reveals it’s more than a simple story?

**The warning is clear. Those who do not receive Jesus’ invitation of forgiving grace will not dine at His table in eternity. Note how this statement bookends the parable with the guest’s statement about eating in the kingdom of God at the beginning of the parable.**

## **Final Thought**

It's one thing to be invited to a friend's banquet. It's something far more to be invited to "eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." We in no way have the means to pay back our Lord for the table He sets for us. He is above all the One who deserves to sit at the head table in the place of highest honor. But the Master of this banquet tenderly welcomes in us poor guests, gives us the place of honor, and serves us the finest fare, His gracious gospel, His very body and blood, His gift of salvation. For His part, our Lord takes the humbler place. While we feast on His love, as Isaiah says, our Lord feeds on something else. "He will swallow up death forever." Taking our place of humiliation, Jesus gives us His seat of honor, and the eternal banquet joyfully begins to His glory.



## **At Table With Jesus Burning Hearts and Opened Eyes**

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### **Setting the Scene**

It had looked like all was lost. The One who had shown such promise, of whom they had hoped would redeem Israel, now lay dead for some three days. Some women from their group had reported Jesus to have risen, but as these disheartened disciples make their way to Emmaus, their hopes seem far from alive. Yet in the next hours, as they make their way home to an evening meal, they will be joined by a “Stranger” who will kindle their hearts again with the promise of God’s Word and will open their eyes in a meal symbolic of the Church they will share in founding.

### **Into the Text** Luke 24:13–35

1. How does Luke establish the setting for this event?

**Luke carefully provides the details of this encounter. He gives us the day it took place (on that first Easter) as well as the location for the encounter (on the road from Jerusalem, where God’s plan of salvation had been fulfilled, to Emmaus, where the first recorded journey away from the cross and empty tomb was taking place) as well as the length of the journey (about seven miles from Jerusalem which may have been the distance of a round trip from Jerusalem to Emmaus).**

2. What exactly were the two disciples discussing?

**The disciples were discussing all that had taken place in Jerusalem throughout Holy Week including the report from the women that must have seemed unimaginable that Jesus had risen from the dead.**

### At Table with Jesus

3. How does Luke introduce Jesus to the situation?

Jesus draws near to the disciples and journeys with them. However, they were kept from recognizing Him. Luke does not provide details for us as to whether or not this prevention of recognizing Jesus is miraculous or is it that Jesus simply keeps a covering over His face. However, their inability to recognize Jesus on the road allows them to focus on His teaching that will take place along the journey and sets them (and us) up for their moment of recognition in the breaking of the bread.

4. What does Jesus ask them? How do they answer? What does their answer reveal about their Christology? The Christology of chief priests and rulers?

It almost seems as if Jesus plays the role of His disciples' disciple as He asks them to share the content of their conversation, and to relate what has happened in Jerusalem in recent days. Jesus' question stops them in their tracks, and even their facial expressions indicate that they do not yet believe the good news that Jesus has risen. Their response to Jesus indicates that they do not have a fully developed understanding of Jesus and His role as the Savior. They knew He was a prophet, "powerful in word and deed before God and all the people." They knew that He had been handed over by the chief priests and rulers of the people to the Romans to be crucified, but they did not quite see that Jesus' crucifixion was all part of God's plan of salvation for they then say that they had hoped that He was the one who would redeem Israel. They did believe the Messiah would redeem Israel, but their understanding of redemption at this point does not include the gift of salvation that comes with Jesus' death and resurrection. These two disciples were aware that some of the women had seen the empty tomb and had reported about the angels who said Jesus was alive and that other disciples had went and found the tomb as the women had said, but to their knowledge at this point, no one had seen Jesus alive, and their language seems to indicate that they doubted Jesus' resurrection. The chief priests and rulers have an even poorer understanding of Jesus as the Christ for they hand Him over for crucifixion. If they believed He was the Messiah, this would have been an unlikely action on their part.

## At Table with Jesus

5. Why might Cleopas have been mentioned by name? See John 19:25.

There is a tradition in the early Church that Cleopas and Clopas refer to the same person. Clopas, mentioned in John 19:25, is the brother of Joseph and would thus have been Jesus' uncle. Many have speculated as to whom the unnamed disciple is. Some suggestions have been that it is Cleopas' wife who was an eye witness of Jesus' death. Others have suggested the unnamed disciple is Cleopas' son, Simeon, who was later the head of the Jerusalem Church. However, Luke gives no clear indication of this person's identity.

6. How does Jesus switch roles at this point? (vv. 25–27) What passages of Scripture could you imagine Jesus using to teach these disciples about His mission as Messiah?

Where Jesus first seems to play the role of an inquirer, asking His disciples to inform Him about their discussion and the events that had taken place in Jerusalem over Holy Week, now in verses 25–27 Jesus takes on the role of teacher for these disciples, gently chiding them for lack of understanding of the Scriptures as they point to the work of the Christ, and then teaching them from all the Scriptures about Himself. Allow participants to discuss what Scriptures come to mind that they could see Jesus using to teach these disciples. The leader may wish to refer participants to passages such as Psalm 22, or Isaiah 53 that clearly teach of the Messiah's role as the one who would suffer and die for our sins.

7. How does the action shift focus in verses 28–29?

As they reached their destination at Emmaus, Jesus pretended to be going on, but the disciples practice hospitality with their still as of yet unknown traveling companion and urge Jesus to stay the night at their home where they will offer Him a meal.

### **At Table with Jesus**

8. Discuss the significance of meal in verses 30–32.

Some think that this meal is a celebration of Holy Communion due to the formula that Luke uses that sounds similar to the beginning of the words of institution, that Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to them. While this may have Communal overtones and participants may see a parallel that the Church does recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread at the Sacrament, since Luke does not mention wine being given, nor does he write that Jesus says this bread is His body, this is not a Communion meal. The leader may wish to note that the phrase, “Then their eyes were opened” is similar to what Moses wrote when Adam and Eve first sinned in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:7). This may be reflective of a theme in Luke’s Gospel of the great reversal of God’s grace that sinners’ eyes once opened to sin and death now are opened to recognize Jesus who is the Savior. It is interesting to note that the disciples do not seem to take much note of the fact that Jesus vanishes from their sight. Rather, their focus is on how Jesus spoke with them and opened the Scriptures to them while they were traveling together.

9. What is the response of the disciples in verses 33–35?

While evening has already come, these joyful disciples immediately journey back to Jerusalem to tell others that they had seen Jesus, how He had taught them, and that they recognized Him in the breaking of the bread.

10. What further lessons are here for the Church today?

Answers will vary from participants on this question, but the leader may wish to draw the group’s focus on the fact that we confess who Jesus is based on the content of the whole of Scripture that reveals the Messiah through the work of the Holy Spirit. This question may also lead to a discussion of how Christ is recognized as truly present in Holy Communion.

## **Final Thought**

Indeed, Jesus was only a visitor, a sojourner, in Jerusalem during that first holy week. He had come from heaven and was soon to return, having accomplished His Father's will for our salvation. Yet before He physically departs, He draws near to these two ordinary followers. They too are about to embark on a journey of following this Messiah. But before their journey begins, He will equip them well. They will be taught all the things concerning Himself from God's Word, and their hearts, once slow to believe, will now burn with that Word. They will also have their eyes opened to recognize that their Savior will be with them in the breaking of the bread, where He will continually welcome and feed His children His very grace that will sustain them ... now sojourners themselves in a world where they will proclaim what He has done ... until such time as they become permanent residents of a new Jerusalem, where the Lord of Hosts will set them down at His marriage feast, and their eyes will be opened to recognize Jesus face to face forever. In the Emmaus disciples we see ourselves — the life-long journey the same, the provision of our Savior, the same, and the sure hope of setting at His table forever, the same.



## **At Table with Jesus A Meal for the Lost**

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### **Setting the Scene**

While Jesus has been the dinner guest of honor many times in this study, in today's lesson, Jesus is the host of the dinner party. He graciously welcomes and dines with those who have come to hear Him, the tax collectors and "sinners" who are blessed to sit down with the Lord incarnate and share a meal with Him. However, there is a group peering in from outside the party, the scribes and Pharisees, who express their dissatisfaction with Jesus' fellowship practice. Our Lord will respond in an engaging "table talk" that will reveal His amazing forgiving grace.

### **Into the Text** Luke 15:1–2

1. What is the setting of the parables described in Luke 15:1–2?

**Luke briefly sets up for us that those with a poor public reputation, tax collectors and "sinners" were gathering to hear Jesus speak His Word, but as the scribes and Pharisees draw near they add the detail that Jesus has received these unsavory guests and is eating with them.**

2. What was the significance of Jesus welcoming sinners and eating with them?

**As noted earlier in this study, Jesus, in dining with anyone, has received them by His grace. No one is worthy to sit with the Lord and partake at His table, so the fact that Jesus is actually welcoming and eating with sinners seems to indicate that they have received His forgiving grace so that they might dine with Him.**

### At Table with Jesus

3. What two main audiences are now listening to Jesus' parables?

**There are two groups that will hear Jesus tell His three parables, those "sinners" who joyfully hear His Word and receive the blessing of dining at His table, and those religious leaders of Israel who consider themselves righteous by their works. They have absented themselves, perhaps even standing outside the gate of the inner courtyard of the home where the party surely was to be taking place, because they despise the company Jesus is keeping**

### The Lost Sheep Luke 15:3–7

4. How does the shepherd respond to losing one of the hundred sheep?

**The shepherd has an amazing love for the lost sheep. He is willing to leave the ninety–nine out in open country to seek out the one lost. Such an action may seem unrealistic. It's only one in a hundred, and it's only a sheep which may be considered not that valuable to Jesus' audience. But such is the love of the shepherd in the parable, and of the Shepherd telling the story.**

5. Discuss the detail that Jesus goes into in describing the actions of the shepherd in finding the lost sheep and his joy in finding it.

**Jesus says that the shepherd seeks after the lost sheep until he finds it. That may not seem like much of an image, until one considers the weather and the local geography in which Jesus tells the story. One can almost imagine a shepherd tracking through the rugged terrain of the Judean countryside in blazing temperatures, seeking out this one lost sheep despite his own hardships. Once found, the shepherd then carries the sheep back on his shoulders (again regardless of his own weariness), and calls the community near to celebrate with him that his lost has been found.**

6. How does Jesus connect His parable to its real–life application? What exactly did the sheep do to repent in the parable?

## At Table with Jesus

Jesus makes sure His listeners do not miss the point. This parable, along with the next two, has a spiritual significance. Those around Jesus' table have been found by Him. As they are at His table, they have received His forgiving grace. Thus Jesus makes the point, especially to those standing outside in judgment, that there is more rejoicing in heaven over the one who repents than over the ninety-nine that need no repentance. It is interesting to note that the sheep did not "do" something in order to repent. It was simply found by the shepherd and carried home by him. Even our repentance is not a work we can claim of our own, but a gift in us by the work of the Spirit through Word and Sacrament.

### The Lost Coin Luke 15:8-10

7. What circumstances in the parable are different from the first parable which help further Jesus' point in teaching?

Jesus pushes His audience even further in this second parable. If having a shepherd as the main character (considered to be an unclean profession by the religious leaders) was not enough, now Jesus casts a woman as the main character. Now also, instead of one in a hundred, it's one in ten. Now, it is also not livestock, but liquid currency.

8. What elements stay the same to deepen the teaching?

There is still the same basic structure in this parable. There is an item lost. Someone makes a careful search, and when the item (this time a coin) is found, the main character calls others near to rejoice that the lost is found. Some have seen in the second parable the role of the Church. If Jesus can be seen as the shepherd finding the lost sheep in the first parable, then the woman might be Christ's Bride, the Church, who, illumined by the lamp of God's Word, searches to find the lost in this world. Of course, Jesus could still be seen as the main character in this parable as well, as the One who is seeking the lost.

### At Table with Jesus

9. What constitutes repentance in this parable?

**Again, note that the coin does not do anything to be found. Rather the emphasis is on the action of the one who has sought and found the lost**

### **The Lost Son, The Elder Son, The Surprising, Loving Father** Luke 15:11–32

10. What shocking request does the younger son make at the start of the story? How does the father respond?

**It would likely have come as a shock to Jesus' audience that the younger son asked for his share of the inheritance. While there were provisions for such things to happen in Jesus' day, the request would have been considered scandalous. To make such a request while one's father was still alive could easily be taken to mean that you wanted your father dead so you could get what was coming to you. The father in Jesus' story, likewise, does the shocking thing of dividing the property and granting the younger son's request. It is a reckless love the father shows this younger son.**

11. What does it mean that the younger son "got together all he had and set off for a distant land?"

**As the majority of wealth that any family might have in Jesus' day would have been based in their property and flocks, one can almost imagine the younger son in Jesus' story, running around the village, looking for some unscrupulous person with whom to strike a bargain, selling his father's property and livestock at a ludicrous price to convert his inheritance to cash to set off for some far away land. Even planning on leaving the family and community would have been considered scandalous as family and community were valued.**

12. Discuss how far the son sinks before he comes to his senses.

**Jesus places this younger son in the worst possible set of circumstances for His Jewish audience. The younger son first squanders his father's gift in foolish**

### At Table with Jesus

living. He then finds himself in need during the famine and hires himself out to a local pig farmer. Hired laborers were not like modern day laborers of our time. They sought to attach themselves to others who may or may not pay them for their work. Thus, Jesus relates that no one gave this younger son anything. The situation, however, is worse. This son is hired out to a gentile and a gentile who raises unclean animals—pigs. The fact that this son longs to fill his stomach with the pods these unclean animals eat illustrates just how desperate things have gotten for him.

13. What seems to be the thrust of the younger son's initial thoughts of repentance?

The younger son comes to his senses and realizes that even the hired servants in his father's household have it better off than he does. He also acknowledges his wickedness that has harmed his relationship to his father and his relationship to God. However, in offering to become like one of the hired servants, it would seem that this son would still attempt to work off his sin and guilt. Therefore, this son still has, to say the least, an incomplete understanding both of his sin and of the grace the father will bestow on him.

14. How does the father show surprising, life-saving grace to his son? How does this grace seem to mold the son's repentance?

Jesus gives us beautiful details in describing how the father restores this lost son. Before the son could reach the father, "while he was still a long way off" (Luke 15:20) the father sees him (perhaps indicating that the father had been keeping watch for him). While he was still a long way off may also indicate, while the son was still some distance from their village where the townsfolk (knowing what this son had done earlier in the story) may seek to deal justice to him if they reached him before the father did. The father sees his son and has compassion on him. The father then demonstrates amazing love for this lost son. He first runs to him which would have been considered in Jesus' day an undignified act for an older Jewish man. Before the son can speak, the father already shows him forgiving acceptance through his embrace and kiss. It may be in the telling of the parable that the son's speech is simply cut off by the

### At Table with Jesus

father's instructions to the servants, but it also may be that the son, in receiving grace from his father, realizes his unworthiness of such forgiving love, and thus his repentance is genuine in the midst of grace.

15. How does the older brother indicate that his relationship with his father is also in a lost state?

The older brother's actions and words show that his relationship to his father is also lost. He refuses to come in and join the celebration, even though in the culture in which this parable is first told, it would have been the expectation that, as the eldest son whose father was hosting a banquet, he would have come in and assisted with the details of the party so that his father might have the freedom to socialize with the guests. His words to his father also indicate that his service to him has not been one of love. The son says that he's been slaving for his father, always obeying him, and that he doesn't see the reward in it that he was expecting. His words regarding the younger son, also indicates his anger at his father's grace as well as the fact that he no longer considers the younger son to be his brother.

16. How does the father show surprising grace to the elder son?

First, the father leaves the party to go out and entreat his older son to come join the feast. Note that the father leaves the house twice to go find each son. Both instances are acts of grace. The father also does not treat this older son harshly or even as this son's arrogance toward the father deserves. Rather, the father assures the older son of his place in the household, that he is always with the father, which is a blessing itself. He also reminds him that all that the father has is his. However, the father also does not apologize for his grace toward the younger brother. They had to celebrate that the family member who was lost is found. The one who was dead is alive!

17. Why does Jesus leave the parable unresolved?

Answers may vary on this question. Jesus does not tell us if the older son comes into the party. Could it be that Jesus leaves the parable unresolved

## **At Table with Jesus**

**because His desire is still that those who have refused to come to His table, because they look down on others that are there, might receive His gracious invitation?**

18. How might these parables inform the life of the Church today?

**Jesus' parables remind us of our Lord's great joy when He brings the lost to the gift of His grace. As we rejoice that our Savior has granted us that gift of His love through the work of the Spirit in Word and Sacrament, may we as His Church, also rejoice when others receive that same gift of grace.**

## **Final Thought**

Our Savior hosts a feast and two sets of guests are welcomed to be a part of the fellowship. The first group is the “sinners” who joyfully enter at the welcome of Jesus, to hear Him share the good news of how the lost are found and there is rejoicing in heaven. The second group, the self-righteous have come near, but have not come to Jesus' table because of the other sinners that are present. Jesus tells three stories that build in their intensity and are all about His amazing love. The first is one lost in a hundred, and only a sheep. The second is one lost in ten, and only money. The third is one in two or actually two lost, and now it's not only livestock or money, it's a father's children. In His stories we hear the longing of our Lord to joyfully welcome the repentant home. Some are sitting at the table, receiving His grace. Will the others come into the celebration and receive the same grace? Christ's Gospel call goes out to all, and may that joyful welcome to all always go out from His House!



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Rev. Whitby served as the LWML Pastoral Counselor from 2009–2013. He is grateful to his wife, Marguerita, and children, Bradley and Kathryn for their loving support.



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