

Bible reading: [Luke 5:27–33](#)

(1) I wonder what your most memorable meal has been.

It could be fish and chips in the back garden or a barbeque with some friends. It could be when you celebrated a special occasion. Or a church lunch.

I'm sure you can think of a number of memorable meals that you've enjoyed.

For me, it's not so much the meal but the people you share it with.

Apparently, the word, 'Companion' comes from 'panis', which is the Latin word for bread.

Originally, the word was used to describe someone with whom you shared a meal.

A companion is someone you literally share bread with.

Over the next 6 or 7 weeks we are going to be in Luke's gospel thinking about what we learn from Jesus and about the nature of the kingdom. And on each occasion the context is that of a shared meal.

Let me put this up on the screen (2) The Son of Man came.....

I wonder how you would complete that sentence.

Maybe something like, The Son of Man came to preach the word. Or the Son of Man came to establish the kingdom of God. Or the Son of Man came to die on a cross.

The title 'the Son of Man' comes from Daniel Chapter 7 and it describes someone who will come and receive God's authority over the nations.

I think if you had asked some of the Jews of Jesus' time, they would have said something like this; the Son of Man will come with an army of angels or the Son of Man will come in power and glory to vindicate the righteous and defeat those who oppress us.

And yet, in the gospels that sentence is completed in 3 different ways;

(3) **'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many.'** (Mark 10)

(4) **'The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost.'** (Matthew 18 & Luke 18)

(5) And finally, **'The Son of Man came eating and drinking.'** (Luke 7 & Matthew 11)

The first two statements answer the why question – why did Jesus come? – he came to serve and to give his life as a ransom, he came to seek and save the lost.

The third statement is more of a how statement – how did he come – he came eating and drinking.

Listen to what Jesus says to the Pharisees in Luke Chapter 7

(6) **'John the Baptist came neither eating or drinking and you say he has a demon, and the Son of Man comes eating and drinking and you say, look, a glutton and a drunkard. A friend of tax-collectors and sinners.'** (Luke 7:33 -34)

John the Baptist is criticised because he's all pure and holy and sackcloth and ashes, but Jesus is criticised because he's seen a bit of a party animal. There's just no pleasing some people, is there! And of course, to make the charge that someone is a glutton and a drunkard, there had to be something in Jesus' life to prompt such a charge – even if it's exaggerated.

I mean – you couldn't call someone who is teetotal a drunkard. Or someone who is always dieting a glutton.

And when you read Luke's gospel in particular, there is a lot of eating and drinking going on and Jesus is generally right in the middle of it.

Was Jesus a glutton or a drunkard – of course not. But at the same time his favourite activity seems to be a long meal often stretching into the evening – a grilled fish, a loaf of bread, a

pitcher of wine. Friendship, laughter and talking God stuff is often how Jesus ministered to people – ***'the Son of man came eating and drinking.'***

It's interesting that in the Old Testament the Jews used the image of a banquet to describe the coming kingdom of God – for example, Isaiah Chapter 25 verse 6,

**(7) *On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare
a feast of rich food for all peoples,
a banquet of aged wine—
the best of meats and the finest of wines.***

That made me think of Luke Chapter 15 where Jesus also uses the image of a banquet to describe the kingdom of God.

(8) You will be familiar with the parable of the prodigal son, who takes his share of the inheritance and heads off to a distant country where he squanders it all on wine, women and song. He is tired and hungry and all alone – and even craving pig food.

Luke tells us that he came to his senses, and he said to himself, ***'how many of my father's hired servants have food to spare and here I am starving to death.'***

He just longs to be gathered around a table – even if it's just with the servants. So, he makes his way home, cap in hand, to be greeted by his ecstatic father, ***'Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'*** So, they began to celebrate.

This is a parable of what God's kingdom is like and about what God is like. And we find ourselves at a banquet with food and wine and party poppers. ***'My son is home.'***

What do you think God is like? What is your mental image of God? The Old and New Testaments give us a whole kaleidoscope of images that stretch us in all sorts of ways because there is no one image that even begins to do justice to what is God like – but central to Luke's gospel is the image of a God who comes to eat with us – to share a meal with us.

And what is even more surprising is the kind of people Jesus shared meals with – because they are not the kind of people we would expect.

You see, the kind of people Jesus shared meals with tells us a lot about Jesus. And equally, the kind of people we invite round to our homes for a meal will say quite a lot about us.

Sharing a meal with someone is probably the primary way we extend friendship to people and build friendships. A shared meal is friendship – it is life shared together.

And one of the things I have missed so much over the last 18 months is not being able to share church lunches in the way we did before we were hit by the pandemic.

But just thinking even further back – who have you invited to your table for dinner, and by implication, into your life.

(9) In Jesus' day, inviting someone round for a meal was complicated. If you were Jewish, it was partly complicated by the food laws. There were laws on how food was to be killed and how it was to be prepared and even how it was eaten.

I'm sure you have all heard of the word, 'kosher' which refers to clean food.

And so, one of the challenges in sharing a meal with someone was how could you be sure the food was kosher? Was it clean? Was it okay for you to eat?

And so immediately there is a barrier set up between you and someone of a different tribe or culture or ethnicity.

You had to be careful about crossing certain boundaries if you wanted to stay kosher.

But it wasn't only the food that was a potential challenge.

The company you kept could also make you unclean if you were a Jew.

So, it mattered not only what you ate but who you ate with.

The thinking was that if you ate with someone who was unclean then you would also become unclean which would then mean going through a ritual cleansing process.

What is interesting about this story in Luke Chapter 5 is that Jesus seemed to believe the exact opposite. For Jesus, it isn't sin that is contagious but love that is contagious.

But there is also one other complication regarding shared meals in Jesus' time. The Pharisees were the religious establishment of the day and they had a particular set of religious and political beliefs.

Remember Israel had been occupied for many centuries at this point – you had the Babylonians followed by the Persians followed by the Romans.

Why was it that God had allowed his people to live under oppression? Why had they had to live under foreign occupation?

Well, according to the Pharisees, it was because too many of God's people had not been keeping the law – they were not observing God's commands. For the Pharisees, liberation would only come when the people returned to a strict observance of the law.

(10) And the Pharisees had a name for those who paid little regard to the law – they were called 'sinners'.

It's them over there that are the problem. It's them over there that you need to avoid.

And it is into this complex situation that we find Jesus sitting at a table eating and drinking with the wrong people.

Tax-collectors who have colluded with the Romans and sinners. The very people the Pharisees despised and avoided like the plague.

And yet, Jesus is sitting with them and eating with them and welcoming them. This was a politically subversive act. Jesus is going against all that the Pharisees hold dear – talk about unsettling things.

Was Jesus simply being controversial?

Of course not. For Jesus this was about relationship.

'Come' says Jesus, **'you're welcome, pull up a seat, share some food, let's spend some time together.'**

We are not surprised when the Pharisees ask Jesus, **'why do you eat with tax-collectors and sinners?'**

How does Jesus reply, he says **'it isn't the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.'**

(11) Sadly, the word 'repent' often carries negative connotations or conjures up a negative image in our mind – especially if you have ever seen people standing in shopping malls or street corners with a big sandwich board with the word 'repent' blazoned on it.

(12) The word for 'repent' in Greek is metanoia and it's a combination of two words, Meta means to change (so, we get words like metamorphosis). And noa comes from the mind. And so, to repent means to change your mind or to see differently and think differently and understand differently – and to follow through on that new understanding.

(13) If you want someone to think differently or to change their mind, how do you start that process?

The Pharisees began by labelling people or putting people in boxes. You over there, you are the problem, and you are the ones who need to change.

The thing about labelling is it usually does 2 things:

First of all, it makes you feel better about yourself. Because if they over there are the problem then I'm not. Labelling people feeds the notion that we are alright, and we don't need to change. Secondly, labels tend to stick. And if you are constantly being told that you are no good and you have no value and you are just this horrible sinner, and nobody is remotely interested in getting to know you because your worthless – then why would you want to change?

The starting place for enabling people to change is by giving them the belief that they are truly worthy of respect. That they are worthy of love and belonging.

That's how you change someone's mind about themselves or at least that's how the process begins – whereas, labelling just reinforces the sense of worthlessness.

And Jesus starts from that place where in effect he says you are truly worthy of respect. That's what a meal was all about.

If anyone could exclude others, it was Jesus.

If anyone could point the finger, it was Jesus.

And yet here he is welcoming those on the outside – giving them dignity.

'Come, pull up a seat, sit and dine with me.'

Because if you are going to change then you have to believe that you are worth changing. You have to believe that you are worthy of love and belonging.

And that's exactly what Jesus does. He shows them that they are worthy of love.

When I think about those tax-collectors and sinners who sat round that table with Jesus – when was the last time someone invited them for a meal? When was the last time, if ever, they were treated with love and dignity?

We have a God who invites us into a relationship, invites us to a table and to a shared meal.

Ultimately, its an invitation to experience God's love and forgiveness and acceptance.

Let me finish with these words from Mike Scott of the Waterboys:

(14) Bring the unforgiven

Bring the unredeemed

Bring the lost and nameless

Let 'em all be seen

Bring 'em out of exile

Bring 'em out of sleep

Bring 'em to the portal

Lay them at my feet

Bring 'em all in, bring 'em all in, bring 'em all in

Bring 'em all in, bring 'em all into my heart.

Isn't that what Jesus did? And it so often took place round a meal.

The question is;

Who am I inviting for a meal or meeting up for coffee? Who am I extending friendship to?

How about you?

