

The Table Where Jesus Meets Us

MARK 2:13-17 AND ISAIAH 25:6-9

In the Bible, a table is a place of meeting. It is where strangers become friends, and people discover they belong.

Jesus often met people at a table. He never stayed at a safe distance, but always came close and shared food. He gave people time and made room for them.

In Mark 2, Jesus was walking by the lake when he saw Levi sitting at his tax booth. Levi was a tax collector. Many people would have avoided him. Tax collectors worked for the Roman rulers and were often known for taking more money than they should. People saw them as dishonest and unclean. They were not the kind of people anyone wanted near.

But Jesus saw Levi, and he didn't give him a sermon. He didn't list everything Levi had to fix before he could come near. Jesus simply said, "*Follow me.*" And Levi got up and followed him.

Then Mark tells us something striking:

"While Jesus was having dinner at Levi's house..."

A step seems to be missing. Jesus called Levi, and then suddenly Jesus was sitting at his table. But perhaps this tells us that when Jesus calls people, he does not call them from a distance. He draws near, shares life and sits down with them.

At Levi's house, many tax collectors and people with bad reputations come to eat with Jesus and his disciples. The religious leaders were shocked. They ask:

"Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

That is a fair question if we think of meals only as food. But in Jesus' world, eating with someone meant much more. It showed welcome. It showed friendship. It said, *"I am willing to be with you...You are not invisible to me."*

Jesus' answer was simple:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but those who are ill. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

Jesus was not saying that some people have no need of God. We all need God. We all need forgiveness, healing, and a new beginning. Jesus is speaking to people who thought they were already in the right place, already safe, already close to God because they kept the rules and avoided the wrong people.

But Jesus shows that God is closer than they imagined. God is not only found among the respectable, the successful, or the religiously confident. God looks for those who know life is broken. God comes near to those who carry shame, regret, failure, grief, loneliness, and fear.

The table matters because it is one way Jesus showed people what God's kingdom is like.

God's kingdom is not mainly a place somewhere far away. God's kingdom is not rules and regulations, a classroom of doctrine. The kingdom of God is God's reign coming near: it is God putting right what has been damaged, lifting those who have been pushed aside, forgiving sin, healing wounds, and bringing people together in peace.

When Jesus ate at Levi's house, he was not simply having a pleasant meal. He was showing, in a living and visible way, that God's kingdom was coming near. The people whom others kept outside were being invited in. The people whom others named only by their failures were being treated with dignity. Jesus was gathering a new family around himself.

That is why the religious leaders were troubled. However, Jesus welcomed people because he loved them enough to call them into a new life. He met them as they were, and he called them to follow him.

Every time we gather around the communion table, we remember this. We do not create God's welcome; we receive it. We do not decide who is worthy; Jesus is the host. We come alongside one another as people who need his mercy and love.

The prophet Isaiah gives us a beautiful picture of where God's story is going. He sees the day of His people's resurrection, a day when God will prepare *"a feast of rich food for all peoples."* It is a great feast, full of joy and life. And at that feast, God will remove the cloud of sorrow and death that lies over the world.

Isaiah says:

"He will swallow up death for ever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces."

This is more than a picture of comfort after a hard life. It promises that death will not win. God will bring life where death has done its worst. He will heal what has been broken. He will wipe away tears, not by pretending that suffering did not matter, but by overcoming it with his faithful love.

For Christians, this promise points us towards the resurrection of Jesus and our resurrection still to come. Jesus rose bodily from the dead and we will too on that day. His resurrection begins God's new world. It tells us that God has not abandoned his creation and that death does not have the final word.

There's been a lot of fear about Artificial Intelligence, robots, wars in Europe, but these are nothing compared to God's kingdom promises. All we do is trust that one day the enemy, fear, and tears will vanish.

Isaiah's feast is therefore a promise of the day when all who trust in God will share fully in the risen life God has promised. It will be a day of joy, welcome, healing, and deep peace. No one will be forgotten. No grief will remain unhealed. God himself will be with his people.

At communion, we receive a small but precious foretaste of that future. Bread and wine are ordinary gifts, but they point beyond themselves. They remind us that Christ gave himself for us; they also point us forward to the day when he will make all things new.

We look back to the cross. We look around at one another in peace. And we look forward in hope.

Being close to God is not mainly about finding the right words, having strong feelings, or believing in a doctrine. It is about receiving the welcome Jesus gives. It is about coming honestly. It is about allowing him to sit with us in the real places of our lives: our joys, our wounds, our questions, and our need.

Communion is not a reward for people who have managed a perfect week. It is food for people on the journey, in different stages of faith. It is a meal for those who need Jesus.

At this table, Christ doesn't give us a theory; he gives us a meal. In the bread, we remember his body given in love. In the cup, we remember his blood poured out for us. We remember his death, but we also remember his resurrection and look forward to our resurrection. Death does not have the last word. Isaiah's promise is moving towards fulfilment: God will wipe away every tear.

At Levi's table, Jesus showed that no one was too far away.

At this communion table, Jesus says again: *"Come. There is a place for you."*

So let us come with trust. Let us come with humility. Let us come with gratitude. And let us receive once more the love of the One who comes near, makes room for us, and invites us into the joy of God's great feast.

Rev. Dráusio Gonçalves minister@dundeenortheastchurch.org.uk