

“A Place at the Table for You”

(Luke 22:1-13)

Pastor Espinosa

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. The 40 days begin to today and it is easy to feel as though we don't have a place; that during this holiest of seasons, that there is still something very much missing in our lives. Where is our place of peace in the midst of the changes and chances in this life? Where is our place of joy when there are so many sorrows? Where is our place to belong and feel secure when our families can sometimes feel like they're on a precipice, our jobs threatened, our own emotional stability sometimes a little questionable because the stress is real? When we feel this way – when we are confronted with the blunt force of sin – we don't exactly feel as though we have a place of peace, serenity, or safe-haven; or a place at the table if you will, where the LORD welcomes us and assures us that He will give us peace. Recently, one of my children asked, “Why can't we just live in a world where nothing bad happened?” This child asked the question for many of us.

Sometimes we think we can generate these places on our own. We all have our favorite memories, our “top-tens.” One of my top-tens is this one: Traci and I went to Maui. We drove the road to Hana in a jeep. We got to the seven sacred pools. We got into one of them and swam across it. We climbed a rock and literally got behind a waterfall. Just me and Traci in Maui. No one else around. A gorgeous day, behind a beautiful water-fall...a place of peace...a place for us.

But lest we had begun to idolize Maui as if Eden had been restored, the Lord got us back to reality: in Maui we also got a flat-tire, had to avoid poisonous insects where we were staying, and in one of our “fun” adventures venturing into a lava tube, I realized that I wasn't having any fun at all: I found myself rather in cramped quarters in pitch black. All of a sudden the little paradise was feeling like a little Hades! Not planning on doing that again.

I mention the contrast though because this is why it is so difficult for us to feel as though we have a place. Sometimes we feel as though we just can't catch a break. You know the saying, “One step forward, and two steps back.” Again, why can't we just live in a world where nothing bad happened?

This contrast is rich in tonight's Gospel from Luke 22. See the contrast. It begins with what is of darkness. In the midst of a holy time – the Passover – there was evil intruding upon the holy: verse 2, "the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put [the LORD] to death"; verse 2, there is "fear"; verse 3, Satan entered Judas; verse 4, "betrayal" is planned; verse 5, money and greed are mixed in, etc. Darkness assaults the holy. Disruption invades peace.

But the LORD is doing more than just alerting us to the real conflict, He is teaching us about it. He is equipping us: all of this first section of the Gospel is about the action of man. Man's instigation; man's program; man's lack of faith and rejection of the LORD, man's work; man's pride; man's lust. And we see that the real issue is not so much about what is in the world, as much as we see what the real issue and threat is. It is very close to home indeed. It's ourselves.

Why were the chief priests and scribes seeking to put the LORD to death? It was on account of their sin; but let's not keep the word "sin" in the abstract: it was on account of their rebellion against God. They wanted their positions of power to remain intact! Why did they fear? Because they were committed to acts of darkness. Why did Satan enter into Judas? Because Judas turned from the LORD and would not believe. Why did they betray the LORD? Because their hearts were full of greed; because they loved the things of the world more than the things of God. This is sin. Not really so abstract. Sin always has an excuse for God. Sin rejects God's Word. There is always an excuse for breaking His Law.

Why do we feel as though we have no place? Because we keep pushing God away. It is not as if He has not given us a place. He has, but we get up and politely say, "No, thank you." "Your way God can't be my way."

Tonight's gospel will continue on Maundy Thursday at verse 14. Verse 14 begins the institution of the Lord's Supper. God makes provision to be with His people in the most powerful and intimate way and yet people say, "No thanks." But God says, "It is my body and my blood." But the sinner says, "No it isn't, it is only bread and wine." Then God says, "It is for the forgiveness of sins." But the sinner says, "It isn't that important." And God says, "In it, I grant you life and salvation!" The sinner says, "No, I value other things more...like the things that will turn to dust some day; the things that will turn to nothing." And insanity

overtakes truth; foolishness is preferred over wisdom; death is sought out rather than life.

The dialog continues: the Lord says, “forgive as I have forgiven you.” We say, “No, I want to hate.” The Lord says, “abide in my Word.” We say, “too busy for that.” The Lord says, “walk according to my Spirit.” We say, “But I like to walk according to my lust.” The Lord says, “Repent and live.” We say, “I want to go my own way.” This is when evil tries to overtake what is holy. This is when faith is shrouded by fear. And this is when we lose our place. Imagine: trying to live life while rejecting the Author of Life. We remove ourselves from our place of peace; there is no peace; we have no place in rebellion.

Thank God for the second half of our Luke 22 gospel! The second half of our reading is not at all about what man does, but rather about what Christ does for us! Verse 7, the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. In the midst of evil’s invasion, God provides a sacrifice to cover evil; verses 8 & 9, Jesus sends His disciples to prepare His gifts; God sends His ministers and gifts for you! Verses 10-12, Jesus makes all of the arrangements to prepare a place for you: He prepares the house and for you it is His Holy Church; He prepares the meal and to this day, that meal is prepared for you (the Holy Supper). You are always welcomed to receive His body and blood; and He shows you how to reach this place of peace, rest, and restoration: at verse 13: “they went and found it just as he had told them.” The LORD takes you there by the power of His Word. What He speaks comes into being. He speaks created faith into you in the face of fear (and what is now your faith overcomes fear).

He gives you a place even when you want to get up and walk away. He keeps that place at the table open for you, because He is love, 100% unconditional love. And His unconditional love has power to enable you to keep your place at table with Jesus. His Word draws you and keeps you. In the Spirit, you find yourself embracing rather than forfeiting your place!

That same child of mine that asked about why bad happens, said something else on the very same day: it wasn’t despair this time, but it was faith that spoke. My child spoke up in their classroom about advocating for foster children. This child spoke of conditions before they joined our family and about conditions now.

This child spoke of hope and inspired the entire class. The teacher emailed me and told me that half of the class (including herself) was in tears.

That sinner I described that gets caught up in the darkness receives an Advocate. He speaks for you. He defends you. He adopts you. And whereas your soul was once starving, it is now well-fed and nourished. And whereas you did not belong and were not the people of God, you belong and ARE the people of God.

You were once lost, now you are found. You were once blind, but now you see. You were dead. You are now alive on account of Jesus who has prepared a place at His table for you. Because at this place at the table is where you are fed the Bread of Life. He forgives your sins. His table always keeps His blood covering you; at this Passover table, the blood of Christ covers all sins. He grants you new life. The old life is overcome by His life in and through you. He gives you a new purpose: you don't live for yourself anymore. You live for Him. This is what the place at the table does. We confess what we are apart from our place at the table: "I am dust and to dust I will return." But at Christ's table, you are raised up. He is your life. He is your Lent. He is your renewal. In Him, you have a place. In Him, you will always have a place. At His table, you have a place.