

October 7, 2018  
Matthew 9:9-17  
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## **“A Table With No Edges”**

**Good morning! I want to begin by telling you that our God is working for the redemption of the entire world through Jesus Christ. In some Christians traditions that would have gotten an Amen! But I know you're Brethren so it's OK if you sit quietly and think “Yup, that sounds about right.” Let me say it again just in case it didn't sink in the first time: Our God is working for the redemption of the entire world through Jesus Christ. Amen? (I knew you could do it)**

**The entire world is a pretty big place -- an ambitious goal for our God. I want you to listen to how the prophet Isaiah describes his vision of the kingdom of God: this is what Isaiah imagines the kingdom of God will look like:**

**On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples  
a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines,  
of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained  
clear.**

**And he will destroy on this mountain  
the shroud that is cast over all peoples,  
the sheet that is spread over all nations;  
he will swallow up death for ever.**

**Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces,  
and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the  
earth,**

**for the Lord has spoken.**

**It will be said on that day,**

**Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, so that he might  
save us.**

**This is the Lord for whom we have waited;  
let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.**

**For the hand of the Lord will rest on this mountain.**

**The mountain of which Isaiah speaks is Mt. Zion, an actual geographical place, but it represents more than that: it is the royal home of God and the place where all people are called to a feast. It is the place from which God will banish death and disgrace and will bring us salvation. It is an expansive, all-encompassing vision of salvation for all people, represented by a feast of rich food served to everyone. This is a vision of a table with no edges: an invitation which extends indefinitely.**

**This vision from Isaiah 25 would have been familiar to Jesus and his disciples. They were Jews, of course, and the writings of Isaiah would have been among the holy texts which they studied and memorized. In Jesus' teaching and ministry, he often quotes from the Hebrew Bible, and his two most-used sources are Deuteronomy and Isaiah. I believe that in our text for today from the gospel of Matthew, Jesus is embodying Isaiah's vision of a table with no edges, but in a very different way: instead of this huge vision of the entire world, Jesus is living out this vision with each person he encounters. This makes for a more intimate table, but it is still a table with no edges: Jesus' table doesn't have the limits which religious leaders want to place on it.**

**Judaism had evolved in the 450 years or so between Isaiah and Jesus. It was likely never the expansive vision which Isaiah had of Mt. Zion: people are still not saved, and death and disgrace are still with us. No human structure or institution will ever completely realize a divine vision. But Jewish practice has become increasingly restricted about who can eat at a table together: certainly not non-Jews, or Jews who aren't ritually clean because of what they've come in contact with, or how often they have washed; not women, not sinners. Certainly not tax collectors, who were a very particular kind of sinner -- the kind who betrayed and cheated their own people. Let's just say the guest list has gotten pretty small.**

**It is interesting to me how much restraint Matthew shows in writing about his own calling. This is the gospel of Matthew, after all, and Matthew was a tax collector, one of those especially despised sinners. Matthew writes, "As Jesus was walking along he saw a man**

called Matthew sitting at the tax booth; and Jesus said to him, "Follow me." And Matthew got up and followed him. That's about as straightforward as it gets. It's in the next verses that all hell breaks loose, because the Pharisees see Jesus eating dinner with sinners and tax collectors, and the Pharisees are outraged. What kind of teacher is Jesus if he doesn't know or chooses to ignore the laws about who can eat at the same table? Jesus sends the Pharisees packing, saying "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners." I'm sure the Pharisees thought that *they* were the righteous: I'm not sure that's what Jesus was implying. If the "righteous" can't hear the truth about themselves, are they still the righteous?

And then the disciples of John the Baptist start in: how come we and the Pharisees fast (go without eating) often, but your disciples don't? And Jesus says, (and I'm paraphrasing freely) my disciples don't fast because I am with them, and that is cause for celebration. Can't you see that the old rules don't apply here? It turns out that setting a table with no edges is not all that popular; we like feeling like we're included because we're the righteous, and that we don't have to worry about being seated next to someone who doesn't agree with us or doesn't look like us or whom we just don't know and probably won't like.

This morning you are invited to two tables without edges. The first is this table where you are invited to share in the body and blood of Christ. All around the world, Christians will be gathering at tables today to eat variations of bread and juice or wine. This is a foretaste of Isaiah's vision of Mt. Zion and a feast which is set for all people, and the promise of God's salvation, which we know has been fulfilled through the body and blood of Jesus Christ. All who are in fellowship with God and neighbor are invited to this table. There is a special plate for children where they can receive a blessing, and there is enough for all.

The second table is the one in our Gathering Area. These are the tables where you are invited to gather after worship to share Christian fellowship. We won't make you stay if you don't want to; we can't make you eat if you are fasting; we can't make you share a table with folks you don't know or don't like. But the tables in our Gathering Area can also be tables with no edges: tables which extend

**hospitality to guests and new members, tables which extend to our deacon groups and into our homes and our workplaces: any table where we have the opportunity to share food and fellowship and continue the work of Jesus. That is also a form of communion, and an opportunity to affirm our participation in the hospitality of Jesus Christ, who came not to call the righteous, but to call people like us, at whatever tables we happen to be sitting.**

**Sisters and brothers, there is enough for all and you are invited to both of these tables where Jesus is the host. Whether your vision for this day stretches around the world, or if it just extends to someone in this congregation who you have not met or have not talked to for a while, we are participating in the communion of Christ when we eat together.**

**I will give you some directions for communion, then we will break and bless this bread so that you may come to the Lord's table.**