

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25

BETHANY LUTHERAN CHURCH

ELKHORN, NEBRASKA

NOVEMBER 21, 2004

PASTOR WENDA FRY

1 PASTOR WENDA FRY: Yesterday I went to Super Target
2 over there on Center Street and it's not one of the stores I
3 know.

4 You know what that is like? You have some stores
5 that you know and some you don't know.

6 I had a gift certificate and I had a couple items I
7 wanted to get for myself and then I had another list of
8 things.

9 So I came in there, and I don't know if you have
10 been there or not, it's probably the same in other Targets,
11 but you have about fifteen thousand choices of carts, and
12 four different styles of carts.

13 And so I walked in there and I was kind of at a
14 loss because they have things on them, they are enormous,
15 these carts are enormous.

16 So I finally found like a regular basket and I
17 started on my way down the aisle.

18 I got a little gift for my sister-in-law, her
19 birthday is next week, and then since I didn't know the
20 store I was kind of rolling my cart and looking down the
21 aisles and trying to look up at the same time since I don't
22 know the store.

23 And all of a sudden I heard a frustrated parent
24 say, "So how would you like to go sit in the car?"

25 Of course it caught my attention and I looked over

1 and they were a family that had one of those buses that you
2 can get, and as I glanced over I noticed the father kind of
3 had the youngest child sort of at an angle and they were
4 trying to get things worked out and that's when I recognized
5 they were a Bethany family.

6 (Laughter)

7 And then they recognized who I was and they almost
8 immediately had an explanation.

9 "Jack wants to sit in the front seat."

10 So I got a little closer to that bus and I looked
11 at it, because I hadn't really noticed how it was all
12 arranged and everything, and actually there are two seats,
13 they are for little tiny people, they are about the size of
14 my Bible, two seats, but one is in the front just a little
15 bit more than the other one and Jack wanted to sit in the
16 front and that was what the problem was.

17 And I said to Liz and Dave, "I remember those days
18 when we approached the elevator in the hotel we had to quick
19 decide whose turn it was to get to push the button on the
20 inside in the elevator."

21 I had a quick flashback to that, it's Sydney's
22 turn, it's Adrian's turn.

23 I also had a flashback to when we would get ready
24 to go out to the old Studebaker, my dad had an old blue
25 Studebaker station wagon, there were six of us, there were

1 no seat belts then, and the four of us girls had to sit in
2 the back seat all crushed in.

3 So whenever I could, whenever I thought about, "I
4 dib the window seat, "and I would shout it out.

5 And usually my sister and I were faster runners
6 than the other two, the youngest and the oldest, they always
7 had to sit in the middle.

8 Do we still dib, kids? Do you guys still dib? I
9 dib something.

10 We would dib the window seats or the front seat
11 whenever we could.

12 Adults today buy a little bit flashier car than
13 they did last time.

14 Our son Adrian, he's 17, he wants to upgrade his
15 cell phone look.

16 These are just ways, they're no different than
17 little Jack wanting the front of the bus at Target.

18 These are just ways that we boost our self-esteem
19 and our dignity because we feel like we never really have
20 enough of that; esteem or dignity.

21 In the Bible story for today Jesus is invited to go
22 to a place for lunch.

23 He actually does this right after Sabbath worship,
24 and how do we know that?

25 If you would like to turn to that. Let's look a

1 little bit at the story.

2 Jesus barely gets to the dinner and he starts
3 pointing out and he starts noticing that there are people
4 who want the front seat.

5 They want the window seat. They want the place of
6 honor. They want a little upgrade on their cell phone look.

7 He notices that right away. Chapter 14, Verse 1,
8 you kind of have to back up a little bit so that we
9 understand this story about table fellowship.

10 "On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house
11 of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the Sabbath,
12 they were watching him closely."

13 We learn a lot in that. First of all, we learn
14 that Jesus went to worship.

15 He went to Sabbath worship and we learn that one of
16 the religious leaders, one of the leaders of the synagogue,
17 invited him over for dinner.

18 Verse 7, "When Jesus noticed how the guests chose
19 the places of honor, he began to teach."

20 That's what it means. Whenever in the Bible it
21 says he began to tell them, or he told them a parable, in
22 other words, he began to teach.

23 "When you are invited by someone to a wedding
24 banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor in case
25 someone more distinguished than you has been invited."

1 Jump down to Verse 10, "But when you are invited go
2 and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host
3 comes he may say to you, friend, move up higher, come here,
4 sit up closer to me."

5 Verse 11, "For all who exalt themselves will be
6 humbled and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

7 So he's barely at the luncheon table and he begins
8 to teach.

9 He teaches a little lesson on humility. Don't
10 think of yourself as better than the next person.

11 And maybe it was quiet in the dining hall. Maybe
12 that was a sign for him to go on, maybe teach a little
13 further, because he had an interest there, one of the guests
14 said, "Blessed is anyone who eats bread in the kingdom of
15 God," and there's a little exclamation point there, which
16 means that this person kind of wanted to sidle up next to
17 Jesus and, "Lord, what is this thought? What do you think
18 of this idea? I think anyone is blessed who eats with you."

19 And he said that's a good thought. Let me tell you
20 a story.

21 And then he goes on to talk about when you give a
22 dinner or a luncheon, you are not supposed to think about,
23 let's see, who had us over for dinner last?

24 You are not supposed to think, who do we owe a
25 dinner to and then invite them.

1 Jesus says don't think like that. Think about it
2 in a different way.

3 When you give a dinner, invite the poor, and the
4 lame, don't invite your rich friends, don't invite
5 like-minded people.

6 We can fairly assume that the Pharisee in Verse 1
7 of Chapter 14 thought that this rabbi was like-minded.

8 We don't go out for lunch after church with people
9 that we don't think like us or are friends who aren't
10 like-minded.

11 We go out with people who are like-minded. We
12 invite people over to our homes for lunches and dinners who
13 are like-minded.

14 That's what this Pharisee thought. "I like that
15 rabbi. I like what he has to say. I'm going to invite him
16 over to my house for lunch."

17 Right now, when Jesus says don't invite your rich
18 friends but invite the poor and the crippled and the lame
19 and the blind, it most definitely fell silent in that dining
20 hall.

21 And the reason it fell silent is because that
22 Pharisee, he was a religious leader, we can pick that up
23 from Verse 1, he would have known the Torah really well.
24 He's a leader.

25 He would have known the Pentateuch, Genesis,

1 Exodus, Leviticus, Deutoronomy.

2 He would have known those first five books of the
3 Bible really well, especially the parts in Leviticus that
4 say who can do what when.

5 Leviticus 21. You can check it out later if you
6 want to, but it says that no one is welcome near the altar,
7 and in the Old Testament and now even to our day the altar,
8 the table, is the symbol of God's presence.

9 It means God is present with us, but in Leviticus
10 21 it says that no one who is disfigured in any way, no one
11 who is blind, or poor, or they have a limp, or are crippled,
12 or are diseased in any way, they are not welcome near into
13 the presence of the lord.

14 They can't do a priestly act and furthermore they
15 are not welcome into the assembly hall of worship.

16 That Pharisee would have known that scripture. Do
17 you see why I say that it would have fell silent in the
18 dining hall?

19 Because Jesus is changing things up. He's so good
20 at changing things up.

21 He's a radical rabbi and suddenly the Pharisee
22 realizes, oh, oh, I thought this was going to go well, but
23 there is a little tension in the air.

24 I've got a clip. Brad, are you ready for that?
25 See if you recognize this.

1 ("I've Got Friends in Low Places"

2 by Garth Brooks)

3 That's one of the best songs ever, right? You
4 recognize that, Garth Brooks, the great two-stepper, that's
5 a song about someone who doesn't care about social graces.

6 Sorry I showed up and wrecked your black tie
7 affair.

8 And Jesus would say to that person, it's okay,
9 because I'm not big on social graces either.

10 The story today in Luke Chapter 14 is not about
11 having good table manners.

12 It's not about avoiding public embarrassment. It's
13 not advice for ambitious hosts or rude guests.

14 The words today from the Gospel of Luke are for
15 hungry souls.

16 These are words of Jesus to people who are
17 depressed, or discouraged, or divorcing, or dying.

18 That's what these words are for. They are not for
19 ambitious hosts.

20 It's not about seating charts, showing up in your
21 boots and wrecking a black tie affair, things we care about.

22 These are words for people who are bruised, or
23 used, or abused.

24 These are words for people who hunger and thirst
25 for right living and right relationships with their spouses

1 and their friends and their parents and their children.

2 Jesus is not talking about how to avoid public
3 embarrassment.

4 These are words for you and for me. These are
5 words for people who are poor in spirit.

6 You've had a rotten week. That's what these words
7 are for.

8 You have had a stressful week. You just found out
9 that your husband doesn't want to be married to you. That's
10 what these words are for.

11 These are words for people who have hurt someone
12 else through gossip.

13 The lame, people like you and me, who often make
14 excuses.

15 I just got married. I'm having a party. My
16 parents are down for the weekend. I can't come.

17 These are words for you and for me and further they
18 are words for people who cannot fix a feast for themselves.
19 They can't do it.

20 They are words for people who have maimed and hurt
21 the body of Christ. They need to be called to
22 accountability.

23 These are words for people who are sometimes, maybe
24 a lot of times, blind to the needs of others, who are also
25 poor in spirit or hurting in some way.

1 That what these words are for today, and not only
2 that; Jesus is saying to each and every one of us, do you
3 know anyone like that?

4 If you know anyone like that who is poor in spirit,
5 or who is lame, lame excuses, or who is hurting the body of
6 Christ, maiming the body in Christ in some way by gossip,
7 Jesus says invite them.

8 Because everyone is welcome. He tosses out social
9 status.

10 He tosses out all the ways in which we try to
11 esteem ourselves.

12 He says I don't care about that. I'm not big on
13 social graces.

14 I care about you, and I care about anyone who is
15 hurting, anyone who feels like they are not welcome at my
16 table, or in my house, or into the presence of my love,
17 mercy, and forgiveness.

18 One of the ways we can let them know that they are
19 welcome is by doing something for them.

20 One of the ways that we can show Jesus that we
21 believe in his invitation, that his invitation is not just
22 for me but it's for everyone, is by actually throwing a
23 feast for them and we can do that.

24 We actually have an opportunity to do that right
25 here in Elkhorn.

1 Drew, our high school life coordinator, came to me
2 this past week and said, "Pastor Wenda, I need your help. I
3 have been approached by Christian Outreach Program of
4 Elkhorn."

5 I said, "What is that? I'm not even sure. I think
6 I've heard of it."

7 "They want us to provide twenty meals for families
8 right here in Elkhorn who can't fix a feast for themselves."

9 I said, "Write it down and I'll share it with the
10 people."

11 So he did, and this is Drew's style.

12 "Every year around this time the talk around here
13 is that people need our help. We see the Salvation Army out
14 with their kettles, we drop our change in, and we get
15 satisfaction, and we have helped someone. I don't know
16 about you, but every time I do that I wonder where the money
17 is going and I always think that it's going to help the poor
18 and the needy, but somewhere far away from the bubble I live
19 in. I was approached by COPE, an organization in Elkhorn,
20 to help during this holiday season and again I thought we
21 were going to help people that are poor in downtown Omaha or
22 in North Omaha, but the representative explained that COPE
23 was organized to help those in need in Elkhorn. Wait a
24 minute, Elkhorn?"

25 He has like three question marks and an exclamation

1 point? Drew's style.

2 "She went on to explain for whatever reason the
3 food banks in Omaha have no food to sell at seventeen cents
4 per pound. In other words, those who don't have much may be
5 spending the holiday season hungry."

6 I didn't know that. I didn't know that the food
7 pantries were low. Did you? I wasn't aware of that at all.

8 We have an opportunity to help fix a feast for
9 twenty families that live right in our Elkhorn community and
10 if you want to later, if you want to drop a check here in
11 one of these plates and put COPE on it, Christian Outreach
12 Program of Elkhorn, to help buy turkeys to support fixing a
13 feast for someone, then you can do that.

14 Or another way you can do that is you bring a feast
15 item to Tuesday's worship and we will put them up here, just
16 like we started the items up here.

17 You want to bring things that you like, not things
18 that you don't like, you know? Okay?

19 That's how you fix a feast for others. If you like
20 that green bean casserole, I'm not a fan of it myself, but
21 didn't forget that little can of onions that goes with it,
22 right?

23 You bring those items and we will take those over
24 and we'll help fix a feast, because that's what Jesus
25 invites us to do.

1 He says you're welcome at the table, but when you
2 go to that table you're joining in fellowship with those who
3 can't fix a feast for themselves, with those who cannot run
4 for themselves.

5 I told you last week that on Wednesday night the
6 7th graders at Boyd and Charlie's were going to share our
7 knowledge of the Passover meal, the last meal that Jesus had
8 with his disciples on earth.

9 We were going to reenact it and tell the meaning
10 for Jews and for Jesus in his day and then for us today.

11 It went really well, it was awesome, we had the
12 scorched shank bone out there and the bitter herbs and the
13 matzo and it was just wonderful.

14 I learned so much from those 7th graders, and one
15 of the things that I learned was when Barb Baumert, our
16 director of youth discipleship, asked our young people to
17 write down what their favorite thing was, about half of
18 those students, twelve to fifteen of those young disciples
19 said that their favorite thing was the night at Boyd and
20 Charlie's when we put blindfolds on and then we had to trust
21 a friend to take us around the block downtown Elkhorn, back
22 up the steps to the upper room and into the upper room.

23 And of course she wanted to know why. She wanted
24 them to explain why.

25 And for those young disciples it was because they

1 learned that they needed to trust God when they couldn't
2 see.

3 I learned so much from those students. Some of
4 them said I loved it when we went to Mosaic and we saw
5 people in wheelchairs and people who are disfigured and poor
6 people who can't help themselves and they live together and
7 I received so much from them.

8 These 7th grade disciples are teaching us.

9 Jesus said when you give a dinner, don't remember,
10 let's see, did Patty and John have us over? Was that last
11 month? Don't think like that.

12 You are supposed to invite the poor and the
13 crippled and the maimed and the lame and you will be
14 blessed.

15 When Jesus said you will be blessed, that's how we
16 know he's not talking about table manners; he's talking
17 about spiritual matters.

18 Maybe one of the reasons that we don't invite
19 others into our fellowship is because maybe it's a matter of
20 security.

21 Marketing knows this. They know that we want a new
22 cell phone look.

23 They know that we want a flashier car. They've got
24 our number, because if we get something like that we feel
25 better about ourselves. It's just a psychological

1 phenomenon.

2 So maybe it's a matter of not being secure in God's
3 love. I invite you to think about that today.

4 Do you know that you are valued?

5 Do you not know that you are loved and honored and
6 valued in God's sight?

7 Then you don't need to get another car, or a
8 different cell phone, or you don't have to sit in the front
9 seat.

10 You can sit in the back, because you know where you
11 get your worth.

12 You know where you get your value. It doesn't come
13 in something else.

14 I'm always astounded, I have been a pastor for
15 seventeen years, and I marvel at the unwillingness of God's
16 people to make a change in their life, to make a difference
17 in their life.

18 They come week-after-week, Sunday-after-Sunday,
19 year-after-year, and they sing about God's Holy Spirit and
20 his love and his mercy and his forgiveness.

21 And they hear the word and then when it comes time
22 for test results, and I'm not saying you are supposed to
23 sail through those things easily, but if we are not secure
24 in God's love, we are not secure that we are valued, then we
25 are not going to make a change in our life for the better.

1 participants come back and they get at each other.

2 I thought it's probably going to be a little nasty,
3 but anyway I sat down and I am kind of glad I did, because
4 right about in the first third of the show, Krista, if any
5 of you watch it, Krista is not a really nice gal, and she
6 got up there on the hot seat and clear as a bell a couple of
7 the women took a couple of shots at her.

8 And one said, just as clear as everything, "Krista,
9 why is it that you have to put other people down all the
10 time? Is it because you need to puff yourself up?"

11 And the audience erupted in applause and of course
12 it's a good thought.

13 She nailed it, didn't she?

14 Because humility is recognizing that we don't have
15 to put other people down in order to find value or worth.

16 We are worth everything to Christ. So we don't
17 need a new cell phone cover.

18 We don't have to scramble for the front seat,
19 because we are valued.

20 We are worthy, and it would be well with each and
21 every one of us if we would fall back into that grace and
22 that love and receive it today.

23 So that when we leave here our marriage is
24 different; our friendships are different; our family life is
25 different; our table fellowship looks different.

1 So we remember that Jesus invites all of us and
2 he's not big on social graces.

3 He puts them aside and he serves the mercy and the
4 love and the forgiveness.

5 He serves it up on a silver platter. There is
6 enough for all of us and then some.

7 In the night in which Jesus was betrayed he took
8 bread, he gave thanks, he gave it to his disciples, broke it
9 and he said, "This is my body."

10 He serves it up on a platter. I know it was an
11 ugly cross. I know it was a horrible death.

12 But on the third day, remember what we just said a
13 few minutes ago, he rose again, in royalty, and in beauty,
14 so that you and I would never have to think again about our
15 own death, because it's taken care of.

16 So is our sin. So is the way that we hurt and maim
17 the body of Christ. That's taken care of.

18 So is the way that when we gossip, that's a way of
19 putting others down to puff ourselves up, he has taken care
20 of that in his body on the tree of life.

21 And he serves it up today, and that same night he
22 took the glass of wine and gave thanks and gave it for all
23 to drink, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood,
24 given and shed for you and for all people for the
25 forgiveness of sin."

1 Sin is that which keeps us from loving God,
2 anything; anything that keeps us from loving God and our
3 neighbor.

4 And he said, "Take and drink, this is the blood of
5 the New Covenant given and shed for all people."

6 Come to the banquet table today, recognizing our
7 poverty without God.

8 Recognizing that we often make lame excuses for not
9 loving God or serving our neighbor.

10 Recognizing that we have hurt or maimed the body of
11 Christ through gossip or slander.

12 Recognizing that sometimes, yes, maybe a lot of
13 times, we are blind to the needs of others.

14 You're welcome to come today and as we stand
15 together today, we stand in the presence of the lord.

16 And it's from this banquet table that we can go out
17 with Jesus's love and mercy and forgiveness and make a
18 difference in this world that Jesus came to love and to
19 save. You're all welcome at the table.

20

21

22

23

24

25