

**SERMON- Proper 17 (C)**  
**Charles R. Cowherd**

Jeremiah 2:4-13

Psalms 81:1, 10-16

Hebrews 13:1-8, 15-16

**Good Shepherd (Burke)**  
**September 2, 2019**

Luke 14:1, 7-14

**INTRO:**

Recently I had the opportunity to go to the Fairfax County Courthouse to watch a close lawyer friend of mine try a case.

I had never seen him in action as a trial lawyer, so I was excited to go see it all.

I put a coat and tie on, I read up a little bit about the case from the news, got there early, passed through security and took my seat in the courtroom.

I was expecting it to be like the courtroom dramas that I have watched on TV all my life, the dramatic and tense affairs where lawyers, judges and witness all play their parts in a fascinating ritual.

I was disappointed. It was all much slower, much more business-like. People stumbled over their words, microphones and equipment did not work, and there were long pauses in between various moments. There was no dramatic music to set the scene, no sudden confession or plot twist, to change the outcome. It was all rather hum-drum and, to some disagree, disappointing.

I left after about an hour or so of this, as watching taped depositions and arguments over procedures did not have the same appeal as *Matlock* or *Perry Mason* did.

I had even suffered under the delusion that I would have somehow been called as an expert witness from the faith community, instead I left crest fallen.

My friend ended up winning the case, I would later learn, but I had to report to him that the legal system operated under slightly less dramatic and desperate stakes than I had believed.

**WITNESS:**

Our faith lives, of course, might seem to operate under a similar rhythm. It seems that rarely are we put on the stand on behalf of our faith or asked to boldly proclaim what we believe.

True story, this week I was at a coffee shop thinking about this very sermon. My Bible was out, my computer typing up the manuscript. It just so happened, at the same time, that Local TV cameras were in this coffee shop and they came over to ask me if I were willing to be interviewed for a segment that they were running on *Fox5 Morning News*. I thought: “here is my chance, to talk about what I am doing, to give a little plug for the Church of the Good Shepherd.”

Alas, I was again disappointed. The TV correspondent asked me my name, but nothing about my occupation or what I was doing there. She launched into, instead, a discussion about traffic in the District of Columbia and the dangers thereof. I stumbled my way through an answer and sheepishly went back to my coffee and sermon.

### **TEXT:**

Our readings remind us, though, that we are actually often given opportunities to testify, to give our account, to witness about God’s kingdom here on earth.<sup>1</sup>

Reading Jesus’ words about sharing meals, hosting meals, where one sits at meals—my mind was drawn to that great area of social interaction, that great courtroom of adolescent drama—the school lunchroom.

When I taught in high schools, I saw all the great elements of give and take occur in that spot, where one sat, who sat with whom, what children and youth brought for lunch, how the adults monitored or did not monitor them.

It was a great proving ground for maturity, a social science laboratory for education, and a scene of great chaos and drama.

Like the courtroom, the school lunchroom has also been immortalized in film and on the TV screen.

But in real life, it’s place where people make heroic actions to be Christ’s hands and feet in the world.

And with Fairfax County Schools back in session this week, it’s a good time to remind ourselves that the lunchroom is a place where one can offer hospitality to the stranger, can provide comfort to the outcast, can share bread with someone who is need.

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 21.13-15

## **CHILDREN:**

So, although our Gospel gives the specific example of a sumptuous wedding feast for where this sort of action happens, and our Epistle talks about helping about prisoners, about those being tortured, one does not have to wait for those types of moments.

You don't have to wait until the lawyer is cross-examining you, or some sort of elevated scene. Rather, they happen early in life, at the lunch table, right under our noses.

In fact, think of all the moments where our children are tested and called upon to practice their faith:

the bully on the playground,

the wandering eyes of a fellow test-taker in the classroom,

and most especially the shunned loser in the lunchroom who has nowhere to sit.

What an opportunity to provide your testimony, to act out at one's Faith, not in theory, but in practice.

I wish that I could go back and do better than I know what I did as an adolescent and as a teenager.

To exercise Jesus' radical inclusivity, to be that blessing in this world.

I am serious about all this because Jesus was. Jesus was constantly eating and drinking, being at people's homes, talking at meals, arguing at meals. So much so that he was criticized for it all, as a glutton and a drunkard!<sup>2</sup>

## **GOOD SHEPHERD**

Of course, you don't have to be a child/ teenager in order to put this in practice.

Think about our monthly brunches here at Good Shepherd where we sit in circular tables and break bread.

Or, who has not found themselves seated next to someone in the pew who sings a little bit loud or a little bit off-key? Who has been compelled to offer the peace to someone who you know is across the aisle from you politically? Or who suddenly finds themselves kneeling at the altar next to the person whom you have fought with in some committee?

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 7.34.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The Church, capital 'C' and lower case 'c', offers itself up as a counter-cultural meal making, meal eating (and meal cleaning up) place of division, conflict and friendship.

That's the community that we are baptizing John Richard into. We are inviting him into a joyous, inviting, giving, but flawed and broken version of the heavenly banquet table that we long to sit at.

We gather around the communion table knowing that we have fallen short of our Baptismal vows to testify and provide witness to God's vision for life on earth, but we do anyway, not trusting in our own righteousness but in God's grace.

Like the attendees at Jesus' meal, first and last will be reversed, up and down will be switched.

In John Richard's baptism, life is turned upside down, literally at the font, and figuratively in joining such a topsy-turvy effort that tries to upend the social norms of the world.

Baptism also, in some way, means coming home, ending up right side up. Jesus great table reversals of what is up and what is down work to reshape how we act in this world, what God's kingdom should look like, and what we expect the next life to look like.<sup>3</sup>

The good news is that Jesus takes a seat with us at that table, and grins and laughs and chides us as we act like children, jockeying and positioning ourselves at our various places at the table.<sup>4</sup>

He calls on us to remember our baptisms and to proclaim his truth and his Kingdom, rather than our own.

Jesus calls on us, in our broken world and all too human church, that we have all these opportunities to proclaim our faith.

**AMEN**

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<sup>3</sup> John P. Burgess, "Theological Perspective." (Luke 14.7-14) *Feasting on the Gospel*, pg. 64

<sup>4</sup> Mark Ralls, "Pastoral Perspective." (Luke 14.7-14) *Feasting on the Gospel*, pg. 64