

Title: Dinner Woes  
Text: Luke 11.45-54  
Theme: Demanding from others what you do not do  
Series: Luke  
Prop Stmt: Jesus condemns hypocrites because they are condemned and they condemn others.

Read text: Luke 11.37-54

Would you be friends with someone who was able to read your every thought? Maybe not. I would think that if you ever invited someone like that to your home for dinner that you would be rather stressed out. It's hard to imagine that someone like that would be invited to many dinner events. However, in Luke's gospel Jesus eats at the home of a Pharisee 3 different times; chapters 7, 11 and 14. It never goes well for the host and it makes you wonder why they invite Jesus into their homes?

In this text, Jesus is speaking about the dangers of hypocrisy when, according to v.37, *"while he was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him, so he went in and reclined at table."* Why did the Pharisee do that? Dave pointed out last Sunday that what Jesus is in public is the same thing he is in private. Jesus does not have a public personality and a private one. We know that in chapter 14, he was invited to dinner at the home of a Pharisee because it was a set-up. The Pharisees were trying to trap Jesus and he flips it on them. Here, we do not know what the motivation was, but I do not think that it was a good one. V.38 says that *"The Pharisee was astonished to see that he (Jesus) did not first wash before dinner."* Jesus knows what the Pharisee is thinking and he address it by pointing out that the Pharisee was upset about the wrong thing and once again, Jesus tells this man and the other Pharisees what they need to hear, but certainly not what they want to hear.

The Pharisees were not used to this. They were not what they appeared to be. But what they appeared to be was what kept them in power. Jesus was a threat to their power. I suspect that by inviting Jesus over for dinner, that they were attempting to either find a flaw in him that they could expose, or try to get him to be part of their club. But Jesus does not play their game. He doesn't play ours either. He is the truth. You and I need the truth more than we need politeness. The message that Jesus preached in public is the one he applies in private. Now, instead of being astonished at the fact that Jesus did not wash his hands before dinner, they were stunned that he exposed their hypocrisy and lostness.

Last week Dave pointed out that we are not hypocrites because we stumble and sin. Are you a hypocrite if you got angry and cursed this week and here you are in church? Not if you own it. We're hypocrites only when we refuse to admit the truth about ourselves and use our position or claims to cover up the truth. If you know the story behind President Nixon's downfall that led to his resignation as president, you know that the burglary at the Watergate apartments was not the problem, but the cover-up. Jesus exposes the cover-up.

When the words of Jesus (Bible) expose the truth about what you are, how do you respond? The best response is for us to humble ourselves and take it to heart. That would have made this dinner a wonderful event. That is not how this went. Instead of taking this to heart, one of the lawyers attacked Jesus and tried to make it sound as if he was the problem.

1. **Jesus is honest, not “polite.”** (45)

The lawyers were men who were experts in the law. They are often called scribes because they spend a lot of time writing the OT law and making copies of it. This particular lawyer (scribe) realized that what Jesus said about the Pharisees would have applied to the scribes and lawyers, since they were in the same union. By accusing Jesus of insulting them, this lawyer was trying to make it sound as if Jesus had the problem.

But Jesus does not play by our rules of social etiquette. Truth is way more important than being liked socially. How about you? Do you value truth over perception? David said in Psalm 51.6, *“Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being, and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.”* God delights in truth, not in saving face. The lawyer could hardly believe that Jesus would insult him and the others. But Jesus is not owned by the crowd. Jesus is not intimidated by the powers that be. Jesus is free from any fear of man. Jesus is not offensive in the sense that he doesn’t care about people. Not at all. No one loves you deeper than Christ. It is his love for others and his love of truth that motivates him to say what people need to hear.

I talk with a number of young pastors. There are times when I give counsel on how to lead a church when members of the church do not really want to hear God’s Word. It can feel like a stalemate. The preacher is afraid to speak the truth because he doesn’t want to offend people and lose his job, so over time the congregation does not hear the whole truth and they develop an appetite and expectation for the preacher to give them inspirational or motivational talks. Beloved, what kind of a Jesus do you want? What kind of a “savior” do you want? What kind of a church do you want? Do you want someone who will tell you the truth, peel back the layers of respect and image so you can be honest with what is on the inside or someone who refuses to touch the hard stuff and refuses to apply it so that you are affirmed and for one more week you don’t feel uncomfortable. Beloved, there are some things worse than being uncomfortable and offended. Invite the Word of God to go all the way inside your heart. It is no game. But this lawyer can’t fathom that. He is so tied to his image and his title that he accuses Jesus, of being insulting.

In this dinner, Jesus managed to astonish the Pharisee by not washing his hands before dinner and now he shocks this lawyer who feels insulted. Could Jesus offend you? Could Jesus say something to you that you would find insulting? One of my younger pastor friends got fired from his church because some of the established members of the church took offense at the fact that the lifestyle of their children was incompatible with the teachings of Christ. My friend was faithfully preaching the Bible and the clear conclusion was that their children, who had no use for God, affection for Christ, the gospel or the church were not genuine believers. Instead of being grieved over the lostness of their children, they were offended at the preaching, so they

got him fired. Could Jesus offend you? If Jesus warned you about your duplicity, hypocrisy, unfaithfulness, or about the lack of genuine belief in your child's life, would you be angry at him, or let his words humble you so that you cry for mercy? Our God is truthful and merciful. He is honest and gracious. You and I will not experience the mercy and grace of God unless we embrace the truth and honesty of God. What gets you upset? Instead of taking the words of Christ to heart, this lawyer blurted out that he and others were insulted, as if Jesus had done something wrong. Jesus did not apologize. He never apologized because he never said anything wrong. Instead, he presses the point home even further.

In his challenge to the Pharisees, Jesus uttered 3 woes. Now he gives 3 more to the lawyers. What is a woe? Woe is an onomatopoeia. It sounds like what it means. Sizzle or hush are examples. Woe is word from the gut. It means sorrow, misery, distress, intense sadness. Isaiah used this word when he came face to face with the holiness of God. He cried out "Woe is me." because he was bracing himself for what he assumed would be a devastating response from God. Here Jesus is declaring that these scribes and lawyers of the Pharisees, like the Pharisees are the recipients of God's judgment. Jesus is telling them that they are condemned. They are not righteous. They are not holy. They are not spiritual. They are not godly leaders. They are evil and are under the condemnation of the very God they pretend to represent.

Jesus is shocking here because these men are so blinded by their arrogance that they cannot even see God when he is having a meal with them. Jesus does not mince words.

## 2. **Jesus condemns hypocrisy because hypocrisy is condemning.** (37-54)

Jesus knows that hell is real and that eternity is forever. And while many of these Pharisees and their ilk are so entrenched in their little fiefdoms and ensconced in their power, that they will refuse to ever admit that they are wrong, Jesus is warning the crowds not to be bullied or intimidated by these frauds. In these next 3 woes, Jesus is condemning these hypocrites not only because they are condemned, but their hypocrisy is being exploited to condemn others and keep them from the truth.

There are a number of accounts of people leaving the Mormon Church. Some of them have come to realize that what they were taught about Joseph Smith, the book of Mormon, its doctrines and practices are not what they claim to be. As long as you can exert total control over what people hear, see and experience then you get to determine reality for them. But when you lose that leverage over others, then they have to find out for themselves if what you said can really stand on its own. North Korea tries to totally control every influence. If you, as a citizen of North Korea, question the Supreme Leader and General Secretary of North Korea you can expect to be thrown into a concentration camp or executed. A couple of decades ago, you could not build a business in Utah very well, unless you were in the Mormon Church. If you left the church, you would lose your livelihood. People were not free to examine the truth claims and believe them or not. This is the setting in Israel. If you questioned the Pharisees, you could expect to be thrown out of the synagogue and others would have to shun you. These guys operated with a stranglehold on power. Don't question the leader and don't challenge the

leader or they will deal with you. Kings, dictators, coaches, pastors, priests, music stars, athletes, bosses and even parents have been known to abuse their authority and terrify those who are under their influence.

Some of the strongest words that Jesus ever uttered are delivered right here. Jesus is not just going off and venting. His words are measured, deliberate and focused. His argument is devastating because what he is warning about has the sense of “hell is not hot enough” for those who abuse others in the name of God. Jesus condemns hypocrisy because the unrepentant hypocrite is condemned and their hypocrisy so often results in others being distanced from the gospel.

Again, there are a total of 6 warnings (woes) in this account. I want us to briefly review the first three and then give more attention to 4, 5 and 6. When we look at the woe, let’s obviously ask ourselves if this is true of us. But since Jesus is addressing the religious leaders, let’s ask if this is true of our church and particularly of our leadership. The third question to raise, that I will address at the end, is: is this true of Jesus?

*Woe 1 (42) – You emphasize scrupulous details but neglect justice and the love of God.*

Question: Do I care so much about little things that don’t really matter that I am actually missing the big and important things? Is my life marked by fairness and the love of God? Is my church fair and loving? Do the leaders apply God’s Word consistently to themselves? Do they stand under and live under the Word they teach and preach to others?

*Woe 2 (43) – You love the best seat in the synagogue and crave titles and reverent accolades and responses of others.*

Question: Do I care more about being seen, affirmed, respected and known? Am I threatened when others are praised and appreciated? Do I get depressed when someone not as “worthy, talented, or smart” as me gets an opportunity that I thought I should get? Does the culture of my church have an “insider’s feel”? Are there titles that intimidate others, positions or people that no one is allowed to question?

*Woe 3 (44) – You have no idea what you really are. You are a rotting corpse and neither you nor others know it. But God does.*

Question: Am I really honest with God? Am I really honest with myself? Are the things that I want others to think about me, really true of me? Do I fear exposure? Is my church more concerned about everyone keeping to the code or do we really want biblical authenticity? Is there a confusing gap between the love and truth of God and the love and truth of the church and her leaders?

Now directed to the scribes/lawyers at the dinner, and the others in the Pharisee cult, Jesus gives woes, 4, 5 and 6.

Woe 4 (46) – *You crush people with burdens and refuse to help them.*

Jesus is condemning those who crush people with their words and demands. They load them down with impossible expectations and when they crumble under the weight, no help is offered. A few months ago, Cathi and I went to the DIA in order to see a film that was being previewed by a local artist. The film was about a talented man who struggled to make sense of the role of his father in his life. When this man was a kid, he worked with this dad, scrapping stuff and cutting grass. One day when he jumped out of the truck, he stepped on a rusty nail that went all the way through his foot. But if the boy didn't cut the grass, then the dad didn't get paid and if the dad didn't get paid, then the dad couldn't support his crack addiction.

Question: Do I use others to get what I want or do I use my influence to put fresh wind in their wings. Do people fear my presence or enjoy it? Does my church relieve burdens or add to them?

Woe 5 (47-51) – *You pretend to be aligned with the godly while being ungodly.*

There were many prophets that God sent to ancient Israel. Many of their tombs were still identifiable. The Pharisees and their lawyers would rebuild some of them to show their solidarity with the prophets to give the impression that they were in the line of the prophets. They wanted people to think that they were the voice of God to the nation today. Their word was the new law. However, the entire OT, including all of the prophets, pointed to Jesus. Jesus was the fulfillment of the OT prophecies and these Pharisees are trying to kill Christ. By rejecting the very word of God in the flesh, they were making it clear that they were not in line with the prophets. They were in line with all of those who rejected, persecuted and even executed the prophets. In reality, the only good prophet to them was a dead one.

Abel was killed by his brother Cain because Abel's life pointed to the holiness and righteousness of God and Cain hated him for it. Abel was the first of thousands, like Joseph and Daniel whose lives became lightning rods because of their consistency. All of them pointed to Christ. By rejecting the ultimate prophet, Christ, these men were rejecting all of these prophets they claimed to revere.

Woe 6 (52) – *You are blind to your own demise and use your position to damn others.*

By rejecting Christ, these religious leaders threw away the key to knowledge. By threatening and intimidating any of those who wanted to follow Christ, they tried to stop anyone else from being set free as well. If someone were handcuffed to the steering wheel of a car and the assailant threw away the key and then pushed the car into a lake we would be enraged. If that assailant handcuffed kids inside the car and threw away the key and pushed the car into the lake, I'm not sure we could contain our rage. But that is what hypocrisy does. It rejects the gospel and muddies it up for others.

Hypocrisy is as old as the human race. We are not surprised by it, but we are scandalized by it, when it is discovered in the lives of those who are supposed to be caring for our souls and supposed to be pointing us to God. God has designed us to love him and trust in him. There is a sense in which most, if not all humans really want to believe in something or someone that is right and true and will always be right and true. This is why superhero movies will always be popular. God has kindly given the world little monuments to his righteousness and love by establishing faithful local churches. In a world of toxic hatred, we get to be an oasis of grace, humility and holiness. Our superpower is not being large, impressive, talented, efficient, trendy, and showy. Our superpower is simply being a people who are, like God, transparent about our lives. We admit our needs. We trust in Christ. We help one another follow Jesus and make much of him. Many are unaware of their true needs. Many therefore, live lives of pretending because they fear facing what they really are. When you come to grips with that, there is a level of vulnerability that you have. When you are vulnerable to a spouse who betrays you, it messes you up. When you are vulnerable to a sibling who betrays you, it messes you up.

You hear me say it often. Every church has a choice. We can be a bag of marbles or a bag of grapes. The marbles in the bag do not really affect the others, but over time, the grapes all become part of the whole. This is the beauty and the risk of being a faithful and healthy church. We are a people who are vulnerable before God and have meaningful relationships with one another. There is a trust that we are called to have with God and in one another. It is a sacred trust that calls us to be honest with God and honest with one another. Beloved, we are not destined to lives of hypocrisy because Jesus is the exact opposite.

Jesus is the opposite. He is embodiment of the justice and love of God. He gave up the best seat in heaven and the worship of angels in order to become one of us. Instead of crushing others with burdens, he was crushed with the burden of our sin. Instead of demanding that others die for him, he died for us. Instead of blocking the way to eternal life, he is the way of eternal life.