

COMMUNITAS

Jesus (part 8)

Table fellowship

“the son of man has come eating and drinking...” (Luke 7:34)

The function of meals in biblical times:

- To support kinship – to create solidarity. One ate with the clan and by doing so established the boundaries of who was “in” and who was “out.” Meals reminded the household where their loyalties lay. The concentric rings of table fellowship were: extended family, household servants or hired workers, and members of your social class (those who could reciprocate), who were invited to special banquets.
- To enforce boundaries – hierarchy, status, and gender – especially through seating arrangements. During these meals the social group was reminded who sat at the head of the table and who was at the foot (or in their case who washed the feet). Women’s roles and paternal hegemony were reinforced.
- To perpetuate social values. During meals certain rituals were maintained such as washings, prayers, and symbols. In addition special feasts, fasts, and Sabbath observances were celebrated. In some ways meals were quite liturgical, sometimes even mirroring the events of the temple (cf. Neufeld 16; Lev 23:2-44)
- To gain honour through hosting banquets or through clever discourse as a guest. The wealthy were able to show off as well as demonstrate benevolence to guests. The guests were able to show deference as well as entertain their host and other guests with wit or wisdom. In fact Luke, who describes Jesus’ table fellowship in more detail than the other gospel writers, portrays them somewhat like the Greek “symposia” where wit and conversation are central.

1. The calling of Levi (Luke 5:27-32)

2. The sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50)

3. The Pharisees (Luke 11:37-42)

4. Parables:

- The wedding feast (Luke 14:7-11)

- The great banquet (Luke 14:12-24)

5. The last supper (Luke 22:14-23)

6. The Emmaus Road (Luke 24:28-31)

So Jesus carefully subverted table fellowship:

- Jesus used meals to reconfigure who he considered his true kin. Rather than capitulating to his family's request to see him, he created a fictive family around the table based on one's devotion to hearing and obeying God's word. This was never clearer than at the Last Supper.
- "Jesus' open table fellowship was a strategy used to challenge social and religious exclusivism wherever it was accepted as normal or officially sanctioned" (Koenig, 20). Because he ate with all class of "sinners" he offended the sensibilities of the religious elite.
- He refused to perpetuate religious traditions about washing, fasting, and Sabbath regulations. This was more than a faux pas. This was an assault on a religious system that prioritized rules above people.
- When invited by prominent teachers, Jesus often offended both the host and the guests by pointing out their misguided priorities. Moreover, he often honoured some sinner who happened on the scene. He turned the tables of social rank upside down at these banquets.

7. The book of Acts post-script

- Acts 1:4 (staying/eating)
- Acts 2:42
- Acts 10:41
- Acts 20:7