



31st August 2025 | 12th Sunday in Pentecost Growth

Who's missing at your dinner table?

Main Point:

Jesus calls us to set an extra place at our tables — in our homes, our churches, and our lives — so that the stranger, the outsider, and the overlooked may experience the hospitality and welcome of God's kingdom.

Intro |

I love it when I find some interesting tidbit or fact that I didn't know before – especially when it relates to the passages we are going to delve into today.

Did you know, that in Polish tradition, during the Christmas Eve meal known as *Wigilia*, an extra place is set at the table for an unseen guest. Apparently, it's a way of saying, 'A guest in the home is God in the home.' It's really about showing hospitality and keeping your home open to anyone who might turn up.

It reminds me that on Christmas morning, my mother would often set an extra place at the table, and bake an extra serving of roast, in case someone happened to mention at the Christmas morning service, that they had nowhere to go at lunch.

So, I'd like to make a radical suggestion at the opening of my message - what if, we created a new habit that every time you set your table, you laid out one extra place? Not for the family member running late or the friend who might drop by — but for the person the Lord might unexpectedly send.

An extra plate, an extra chair is a quiet reminder that you're always making room for one more. That's what we'll discover today the kingdom of God is like: a table with space prepared for those who weren't originally on the guest list, those who turned up late, or those who never believed they'd be welcome.

That's the picture Jesus gives us in today's gospel. A table where the missing are expected, and the unexpected are welcomed.

Our passage opens with Jesus at a dinner party hosted by a Pharisee. He's watching how everyone scrambles for the best seats — the places of honour. And He tells a parable: "*When you're invited to a banquet, don't rush for the best seat. Sit in the lowest place instead. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.*" (Luke 14:8, 11)

Then He turns to the host and makes it even more challenging.

"When you give a luncheon or a dinner, don't invite your friends, your brothers, your relatives, or your rich neighbours. They'll just invite you back and you'll be repaid. Instead, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. You will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." (Luke 14:12-14)

In one short conversation, Jesus overturns the whole cultural system of status, honour, and belonging. He points to a kingdom where tables are open to those who could never have earned their place — because that's exactly what God has done for us.

Point 1 | Hospitality is God the Father's way of life, and this is reflected in the way Jesus lived his life on earth.

Hospitality in the Bible is not just about being polite or setting a nice table, with your best crockery, your freshly laundered napkins, or your carefully starched linen tablecloth. It's about making space for the other — especially the one who doesn't naturally fit in, the one who is usually left out.

In Jesus' world, meals were about much more than food. They defined social boundaries. Who you ate with showed who you considered worthy of friendship, fellowship, and respect.

That's why Jesus got in so much trouble for eating with tax collectors and sinners — people respectable society wanted nothing to do with.

But Jesus at every shared meal, was saying: *In my kingdom, everyone has a place. The outsider is brought in. The forgotten are remembered. The excluded are welcomed.*

Point 2 | There's a danger of remaining in closed circles, only spending time with people who are like us.

We might not think of ourselves as Pharisees fighting for seats of honour, but it's easy for our tables — and our lives — to shrink into closed circles.

We naturally gravitate to people we like, people like us, those we're comfortable with. That's not wrong — but when that becomes the whole picture, there's no space left for those who are missing. And so Jesus' question comes to us, taps us on the shoulder and whispers:

Who is not at your table? Who is missing from your circle of friendship, your community, your coffee mornings, your dinner table?

That's where the extra chair comes in. Not because we always know in advance who will fill it, but because we are living expectantly — ready for the stranger, the newcomer, the one God might send.

Point 3 | Hospitality as Worship

Hebrews helps us see just how holy God considers hospitality. *"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it."* (Hebrews 13:1)

Isn't that astonishing? To welcome someone to our table may be to welcome a messenger of God. It may be to meet Christ Himself in disguise. Hospitality, then, is not just kindness. It's an act of faith. An act of worship.

This is why Dinner Church is as much a worship service as our Sunday service. It's a gift to our community. In a world where fewer people feel comfortable walking into a Sunday service, a shared meal is one of the most natural, human ways to experience the love of Christ.

At Dinner Church, there's no head table or seat of honour. There's no dress code, no ticket price, no requirement to "fit in." Just a table — with extra chairs ready for whoever might wander in.

I've seen people come who hadn't eaten with others in weeks. I've seen neighbours who only knew each other to wave across the street become friends over a bowl of soup. I've seen the Spirit move in conversations as bread was broken and stories were shared.

That's what the kingdom looks like — not grand or polished, but ordinary people at a table, discovering they belong in Christ's family. Jesus reminds us when we welcome those who can't invite us to their home, *"You will be blessed, because they cannot repay you."*

The blessing isn't in being thanked or recognised. The blessing is in reflecting the love of God, who invited us to His table when we could never repay Him. Isn't that the heart of grace? We are guests of mercy, recipients of a hospitality we didn't deserve.

When we open our tables to others, we are simply passing on what we have already received.

Application | Who's missing at our table?

So, let's bring the question close to home. Who's missing at our table?

- At home — is there a neighbour or fellow club member who might never get an invitation otherwise?
- In church — is there someone who feels like an outsider, who could be drawn in by a meal?
- In our community — are there groups we often overlook, who Jesus is longing for us to notice and welcome?

What if we made it our habit — in our homes and in our churches — to set that extra place? To expect the unexpected guest? To live as though Christ Himself might just turn up?

I recognise that this can feel daunting. But listen again to Hebrews:

"God has said, 'I will never leave you or forsake you.' So we can say with confidence, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid.'" (Hebrews 13:5)

And then: *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever."* (Hebrews 13:8)

We don't open our tables on our own strength. Christ Himself is with us. He is the true host, the One who feeds us with living bread. We are simply passing the plates.

Friends, Jesus is not only inviting us to His table — He's sending us to invite others. To resist the temptation of closed circles, and to live out hospitality that reflects the wide embrace of God's love.

So, let's be the kind of people who not only say "all are welcome," but who set the extra chair, pull it up when someone walks in, and mean it.

Let's be the church where the lonely find a family, where the outsider becomes a guest, and where every meal reminds us of the great banquet of God's kingdom.

Because in the end, that's what the gospel is: an invitation to the table of Jesus. And there is always room for one more. Amen.

Closing prayer:

Lord Jesus, thank you that your table is always open and that there is room for everyone. Help us to notice those who are missing from our tables — the lonely, the overlooked, the stranger — and give us courage to invite them in, even when it feels uncomfortable. Teach us to offer hospitality without expecting anything in return, and to trust that in doing so we are welcoming you. Open our hearts to see every meal, every gathering, every shared moment as an opportunity to live out Your kingdom. May we set the extra place this week with generosity, humility, and love. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

1. When you picture your own table (home, church, or social circle), who might be missing from it?
2. How does Hebrews 13 challenge your understanding of hospitality — especially the idea of “entertaining angels without knowing it”?
3. What fears or barriers hold you back from inviting those who are different, or who cannot repay you, to share life with you?
4. In what ways can we make our Dinner Church (or any shared meal in our community) more of a living sign of the kingdom of God?
5. How might you begin to “set the extra place” this week — practically or metaphorically — in response to Jesus’ call?