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Year C//Pentecost + 12, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I don't think of myself as a tattoo-ie kind of person

and I kind of feel like I *stick out* when I go into a tattoo studio...

and I REALLY don't want us to get stuck here...

but, I got another tattoo last week.

It's still fresh.

It matches one my daughter got...

Wednesday was her 18th birthday and we got our tattoos on Thursday.

It is modelled off of one that a young woman who was VERY important to our family

and who will forever be part of our family's story had.

Her name was Meghan.

She helped raise our children from the time they were born (practically)

and she was in middle school (I think)

until she died of colorectal cancer two years ago at a VERY young age.

At various times through the years, she lived with us.

The particular tattoo Lucy had adapted was of birds.

Honestly, I don't know what the significance of birds was for her –

probably freedom, life, joy...something like that.

I do know that one of the birds in *her* tattoo represented our kids.

She was the preeminent cheerleader and "you got this" person in our kids' lives...

just super steady and consistent and dependable.

We adapted her birds and made them hummingbirds,

because hummingbirds were my mom's favorite.

My daughter very intentionally placed hers just above *a scar* that carries an important story.

The birds look like they are kind of "rising above."

I have a couple of other tattoos, but the one most of you have seen,

even if you didn't notice or pay attention is this one +++++++.

I got it in Jerusalem.

It's just a cross.

Really simple.

I had it placed so that it faces me when I look at it.

Kind of as a "check."

Is the way I am behaving consistent with what I believe?

Or what I *say* I believe?

I wonder if the people who see it are like, "Cool."

Or if they are like,

"Yeah...her...right there! That's why I don't have anything to do with the church."

Because even though I put the way it is as a check for me,

I know that people watch...they pay attention.

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Jesus tells this story to folks who are paying attention...people who are “watching him closely.”

Maybe wanting to see if he’ll be consistent.

“On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely” it says.

It’s a word that means “to observe” or “to scrutinize” more than just “to see something.”

They’ve done this before, watched to see if he’ll heal on the sabbath.

That’s what they are doing here again – during those verses that just precede these.

Watching, maybe to try to get a handle on what motivates him...propriety *versus* people.

He is invited to the house of a leader of the Pharisees

(who are not, in and of themselves a bad group of folks...

but, they are very careful about purity laws and propriety and staying separate from anything that might make them unclean.

They are intentional about protocol, sometimes/oftentimes above people) – but before Jesus can get seated there is someone who needs to be healed which, of course, he does.

And for which, of course, he gets push-back, then stunned silence.

Afterwards, folks are finding their place at the table and doing so as propriety dictates...

or at least it appears that they are moving in that direction.

Wandering around.

Trying to figure out who is sitting where and by whom.

But, before everyone can get seated, Jesus does what he does and disrupts things...

He tells a story about a wedding banquet

and about people jockeying for position.

Maybe trying to navigate how to sit nearest the host

or – if not the host – how to get near the one who

is about to close the biggest business deal.

(Honestly, I don't know a lot about seating protocols...other than that they exist...

and that I, being the youngest in my family of origin,

was perpetually seated at the children's table...

which, truth be told was fine with me.).

And he says, as Jesus is wont to say, "Don't jockey for position!"

Then he goes on to say,

"When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind...people

who *can't* repay you and you will be repaid in the resurrection of the righteous."

And there are a couple of things that occur to me.

First, Jesus eats with anyone...

Even the rule followers

(Remember, this takes place in the house of a leader of the Pharisees).

I think we can forget that sometimes, as we automatically demonize the "other side."

After all, Jesus was a good Jew.

And he, most likely, kept purity codes, followed protocol,

kept to propriety right along with the Pharisees,

until propriety threatened to get in the way

the least and the lost and the last.

Then any table that was "closed" got opened until all were welcomed and all were fed.

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The other thing that occurs to me is really more of a "I'm not sure what to do with that" thing.

Or at least it *was* an "I'm not sure what to do with that" thing.

I wasn't sure what to do with

"...Don't try to be repaid and *you will be repaid* in the resurrection?"

I mean what kind of sense does that make?

By not trying aren't I "*trying to not try*?"

I spent a good deal of time on that this past week...wrestling with it.

To the point that I was like "I'm not going to get this right!"

And "Good grief...I'm supposed to be the one who gets things right...

at least with regard to scripture and Jesus-ie stuff!"

Then, in the midst of it all, I had a flashback to my first preaching class

about 25 or 26 years ago when *everyone* in that class lived in fear

of our preaching professor stopping them mid-sermon and hollering out

(and I mean *hollering* out)

“Preacher...is there any GOOD news from the Lord?”

Or “Wow Preacher...you sure are weighing me down with an awful lot of law”

(by which he meant things that I have to do in order to make God happy...

like “try not to try.”).

And I was like “AHHHHHH!”

And somewhere the good news seemed to hit me...

There is something wonderfully good newsy about just being kind...

Just caring for one another – being cared for and caring...

Just feeding one another – being fed and feeding

without constantly taking stock – not necessarily of the other...

but of myself.

I mean, to be freed from constant comparison

or constant assessment of where I am in the lineup...in the pecking order.

It’s wonderfully freeing!

It is wonderful, good news.

Because I *confess* that my value,

my worth,

my “where I belong”

is determined *not* by my skin color or gender or age or income

or where my name card is placed at the fancy dinner

or wedding banquet,

but by the fact that I am.../ am...

and you are and you are and you are...

and they are and they are and they are

every single one created in

the very image of God.

And so, that puts *all* of us sitting in the place of honor...

or better, all of us at the children's table...

constantly adding more and more and more chairs in a giant circle

of no beginning and no end, as it were. Right?

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One comment and one question about tattoos...then I'll be done.

First the question – this will be good for your lunch conversation:

If you had to choose a tattoo...

or some type of permanent something that you could look at

or touch every moment to remind you that you are freed

from spending your time or energy trying to determine

where you fall in the great line-up of worthiness,

what would it be?

And how would you spend your newfound energy supply?

And the comment:

The tattoo that I just got (just like my daughters) doesn't have just one bird on it.

It has several...For me that is significant.

Because we all rise together...

I don't know the aerodynamics involved

and don't really want anyone to try to explain it to me...

I just know that it's true...if not according to the laws of physics,

then according to life.

It takes a lot of us working together to move things...

bringing everyone up...beyond their scars – as it were – to a place of

equality, joy and freedom.

And that means you.