



PART ONE

**Taking Your Place
At the Table**

Mark 3:31-35, Mark 10:28-31





Part One – Taking Your Place at the Table

By Pastor David Fields

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I. “Home” As Our *Teleos*

In his book *Desiring the Kingdom*, the philosopher and Christian James K.A. Smith says that humans are “teleological creatures”. We make our way in the world based on some *telos*, like a specific vision of the good life, or human flourishing that captivates our imaginations and affections.

The initial creation story tells of God creating a space where he can dwell with his creation, and especially to be in connection with his human creatures. The creation, as described in Genesis 1-2, is a “temple scene.” God is creating a space then fills it in with his “image” placed in it as the highpoint.

The big idea being communicated in Genesis 1-2 is that God has created this space so he can dwell in it with us.

As the story unfolds, that union with God, between the humans, and with creation itself – it’s broken and twisted. And yet God puts in motion a plan to save and heal what human sin had distorted and destroyed. And then see that what God was aiming at on the first page, he has achieved in the final scene of the Bible.

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
“See, the **home** [*dwelling, tent, tabernacle: Gk noun: skene*] of God is among mortals.
He will **dwell** [*make his home: Gk verb: skenoo*] with them as their God;
they will be his peoples,
and God himself will be with them.”
– Revelation 21:3 (NRSV)

The story of God, of humanity, of the world God made, is the story of ‘home’ and ‘home coming.’ It’s the story of “with” and “together.”

“God’s central program for creation [is] the establishment of community.”
– Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*

“We carry inside us a vision of wholeness that we sense is our true home and it beckons us.”
– Fredrick Buechner

We are “...the household of God” - 1 Timothy 3:15

“But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house. And we are his house if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory.”
– Hebrews 3:6

II. Becoming the Jesus-Family

Mark 3:31-35

Jesus is making for himself a community, a “family”, of all who will come to him in trust and love that transcends biology and blood relation.

And this is one of the most important realities of what Jesus is doing in our world to meet our real and often unfulfilled needs for belonging. To address the loneliness that plagues so many.

The French novelist Andre Gide bitterly expressed an attitude shared by many: “Families! I hate you! Shut-in homes, closed doors, jealous possessors of happiness.”
– French novelist Andre Gide, *Les nouvelles nourritures*

What good news then, are Jesus’ words here for all who feel that ‘shut-out-ness,’ who, for any number of reasons have found themselves outsiders. Jesus is really and truly creating a community where those without the rich connection of “family” are brought in and made into a family where “...each member belongs to all the others” as Paul will say it in Romans 12:5.

This “new family in Christ” is really and truly the new reality Jesus creates through his work.

We see this dramatically demonstrated when he speaks to his own mother and the one called “the beloved disciple” from the cross.

“When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciples he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home.” – John 19:26-27

Being “God’s family” doesn’t take away from our love and responsibility for our biological families. But it does expand our walls.

“The goal of Christians in marriage is not to make a house an island of intimacy, shut off from others in the world, but to make a home for humankind. Through families, the church is to extend the kind of accepting love that transforms a runaway slave like Onesimus into one whom Paul claimed as his own child and as a brother to his former master [Philemon] (Philemon 1:10)...We are to adopt one another, accepting responsibility for and commitment to one another.”
– David Garland, *Mark*

Mark 10:28-31

III. On The Challenge of Vulnerability and Shared Love

“Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it up carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness.

But in that casket – safe, dark, motionless, airless – it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation.” – C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*



Love is always a risk. But the alternative is far worse.

It's true. Trust can be broken. Community, love, family, can be hard. Messy. Challenging.

Over this series, we're going to talk about how to do real community, as God designed us for, but we'll talk about *how* to do it in a way that is, well, the Jesus-Way. Paul defines how the Christian community is to live with these words:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. **5** It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. **6** Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. **7** It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

– 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The *telos* of life as God created it means real love. And that means openness to God and to others.

IV. Fully Known and Truly Loved

We all have a longing for a place of deep belonging. A sense of rootedness and stability. The sort of space where we are fully known, and truly loved.

“To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us.”

–Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage*

a) **Superficial: “To be loved, but not known is comforting, but superficial.”** Romans 12:10: “Love must be sincere.” Or, more woodenly translated: “Love must be without hypocrisy...without a mask.” Superficial is not the sort of love we were made for.

b) **Greatest Fear: “To be known and not loved is our greatest fear.”** Why is it so hard to be open and honest about who we really are? Because we open ourselves to being hurt, for there are elements of all of us that *are* open to critique. There are wounds we carry which are sometimes raw. There are corners of our lives where we struggle and feel ashamed of, even if we know that God forgives us. We fear that “if they knew”, love wouldn't be there.

c) **Gospel: In Christ, you and I are “fully known, and truly loved.”** The God who knows everything knows everything about us – every corner of my heart, my story – that he knows it all and still chooses to give his all to make me his own beloved child forever. “But God demonstrates his love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

– Romans 5:8.





Open Up

In your view, why do we long to belong? Do you think we have a 'nostalgia for a home we've never seen'? Why or why not?

And why does really belonging sometimes scare us – sometimes scare you?

Dig In

1. Read **Romans 12:3-5**. What does this passage say about belonging and the Christian identity?
2. There is a saying: "You don't get to pick your family." How does that apply to the Christian community? What does that say to our tendency to gravitate to people who we get along with and are like us, and to exclude others?
3. Listen to what Eugene Peterson writes in his book *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*: "We are a community. We are not ourselves by ourselves. We are born into communities, we live in communities, we die in communities. Human beings are not solitary, self-sufficient creatures."

Do you agree? Do you tend to behave like you are self-sufficient or think of yourself as self-sufficient? Why or why not?

4. In Romans 12:5 Paul writes: "Though we are many, we form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." (Rom 12:5). How does that challenge your tendency to think of yourself as self-sufficient?

5. What is one way this week that you can open yourself up a bit more to those in our church community? Perhaps by sharing a way that you struggle and asking for prayer? Or maybe by sharing something that God has been teaching you through a part of your story that you find painful to create a deeper sense of connection?

Pray

Take time to thank God for the way that he has loved us – that we are fully known and truly loved through Jesus. Take some time to bring what you discussed tonight to Jesus and ask for his help to be 'open' to what he wants for our community. Pray for those who are lonely and on the 'outside' and ask for God's wisdom and courage to be part of God's welcome.