

The creators of this Worship Series, the Worship Design Studio, point out, “**The Twenty-third Psalm is a great comfort to us as we imagine the green pastures and still waters. It also recalls the dark valleys and calls us into the not-so-easy practice of sitting down at the table with our enemies. An unhurried God is present with us in the good times AND in the difficult times and invites us to be radically present to each other in the same way. Have we been too busy to be really present to one another?**”

In this Sermon, I am going to focus on the first half of verse 5, “*Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies*”. What does that mean? **What is the importance of the “table” being prepared for us? What does it say about our “enemies” or anyone else for that matter? What does that portion of verse 5 from Psalm 23 tell us about our Unhurried God, Jesus Christ, and our purpose and calling?**

This message is going to take us on a tour of a significant number of Scriptures to aid us in our answering those questions. Since we will celebrate the “Table” of Jesus Christ in the Sacrament of Holy Communion, this sermon needs to be shorter than noncommunion Sundays, so buckle in. Our first question is, “**What is the importance of the ‘table’ being prepared for us?**” First, we need to remember Psalm 23 is part of the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures. Over time, the Hebrews, who were often called Jews after Judea fell to the Babylonians in 587 B.C., came to understand God promised them **God’s Messiah would bring about the full revelation of the Kingdom of God – Reign of God, when all evil and death would be destroyed and all the People of God would be welcomed into Life Eternal.** Since God and Heaven or the Kingdom of God are outside of Time, every Child of God would be received into the Kingdom of God when they died. Of course, the Legalists claimed only persons, who were radically obedient to all the laws supported by the Pharisees, Scribes, Teachers of the Law, and Priests, would receive the heavenly reward. **Whereas, the Prophetic Traditions and their adherents focused more on God’s Relationship with all of the Children of God.** As part of the anticipated great celebration at the Fulfillment of the Kingdom of God was the Great Feast of the Day of the Lord. We find references to this Great Feast in many Scriptures. **The Feast would be when all God’s Beloved Children would sit at the Lord’s Table in Heaven.**

One of those references about the Great Feast is found when Jesus taught his disciples in **Luke 12:36-38 (RSV)**, “*be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the marriage feast, so that they may open to him at once when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes; truly, I say to you, he will gird himself and have them sit at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them so, blessed are those servants!*” Please note, if the master finds his servants “awake” – attentive to him, he will prepare the “table” for them and will “serve them”! Jesus was connecting the Great Feast to how he will prepare the Table and will serve his people – God’s Children. **Indeed, according to John 13, Jesus did just that during his last meal with his disciples, as he washed their feet!**

Luke did not want his more Gentile audience to miss the connection between the Feast Jesus referenced and the Great Feast in God’s Fulfilled Kingdom. So, he included a teaching of Jesus in the next chapter, in which he warned those, who want the benefits of the future Kingdom but don’t want to be devoted to God, saying in **Luke 13:27-30**, “*But he will say, ‘I tell you, I do not know where you come from; depart from me, all you workers of iniquity!’ There you will weep and gnash your teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God and you yourselves thrust out. And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the Kingdom of God. And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.*” It is important to recognize, people from everywhere will be welcomed at the Table, especially those, who the Legalists degraded as being the last – the outcasts!

Just in case Luke’s audience had difficulty recognizing that the Divine Parent sent Jesus with the message of God’s Forgiveness and Invitation to all people, especially those rejected by the Legalists, over and against the exclusivism of the Pharisees, Teachers of the Law, Scribes, and Priests, Luke included a parable of Jesus about the Great Feast. **In it the people, who were the invitees to the feast rejected the invitation and Jesus said in Luke 14:21b-24 (RSV)**, “*Then the householder in anger said to his servant, ‘Go out quickly to the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame.’ And the servant said, ‘Sir, what you commanded has been done, and still there is room.’ And the master said to the servant, ‘Go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled. For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall*

taste my banquet.” Instead of excluding people from God’s Table, as the Legalists wanted, **our Divine Parent and Jesus Invite and Welcome All People, so God’s House “may be filled”!**

The second important question about our focus verse, Psalm 23:5a, is **“What does it say about our ‘enemies’ or anyone else for that matter?”** I suspect most people reading Psalm 23 would believe the person singing it was gloating against his enemy. However, **Jesus’ approach to enemies is instructive for us as we consider who is invited to the Table of our Unhurried God.** We are helped in this endeavor as we see what Jesus taught during the Sermon on the Mount in **Matthew 5:43-44 (RSV), “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Agape Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you”.** In times like ours, when there are a number of prominent persons, who relish attacking their enemies and encourage everyone else to reject many different groups of persons, it is a bit jarring to have the Son of God tell us to do otherwise!

Could it be Jesus just had a slip of tongue? The answer is clearly, “No!” For example, when a Teacher of the Law asked Jesus about what is required “to receive eternal life” and Jesus asked back of the questioner his own reading of the Scriptures, the Teacher quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and answered in **Luke 10:27, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind’; and ‘Love your neighbor as you love yourself.’”** The Teacher of the Law did not stop there but sought affirmation for his exclusivistic approach and asked for a definition of “neighbor”. Jesus answered with his well-known **Parable of the Good Samaritan** in which one of the main enemies and outcasts for Jews, a Samaritan, was the hero – was the agape loving neighbor of the beaten and robbed man, while all the prominent religious leaders, like the Teacher of the Law refused to provide the victim with any help! After the Teacher acknowledged the man, who helped the victim, was the good neighbor, Jesus went on to say in **verse 37b, “You go, then, and do the same.”** Instead of excluding and rejecting someone, Jesus calls us to welcome “All” people to his Table – God’s Table!

So, we have answers for the questions about the meaning of the table being prepared for us and about how we are to treat others – even those, who act like our enemies, or those, who society or cultural – religious leaders encourage us to reject. **To sum up the answers, God wants us and All People to receive and accept the Divine Parent’s Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome into a New Relationship with God, a New Life in Christ, and into the Gathered Children of God, who are forgiven, invited and welcomed into the Fulfilled Kingdom of God!** God wants others at the Table and calls us to be bearers of the Good News of God’s Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome to All People, especially to those, who feel rejected and looked down upon by the self-righteous – yes, even by some, who claim to be Christians.

Our final question to answer is **“What does that portion of verse 5 from Psalm 23 tell us about our Unhurried God, Jesus Christ, and our purpose and calling?”** We can call the Creator Unhurried because our Divine Parent understands and takes the time for human beings and Creation to come to terms with the reality that God Agape Loves All People and the Creation – God Forgives, Invites, and Welcomes us and the Universe! **Relationship building takes time and God is taking all the time needed for humanity and Creation to welcome, accept, and live out the New Relationship with God, which is revealed to us through God’s Son, Jesus Christ.** Likewise, Jesus demonstrated this unhurried – patient approach to humanity, even to the point of living a human life, suffering betrayal, experiencing torture and death, being resurrected, and delaying his eventual return. **Jesus took the time to allow his life, death, resurrection, and coming return to proclaim and show God’s Agape Love, Forgiveness, Invitation, and Welcome!** Our calling is to be co-creators with God – to take the unhurried time to develop and strengthen our Relationship with God and Jesus, as well as, with one another, and with All who might accept God’s Agape Love, Invitation, and Welcome! Yes, we are to be unhurried and even to reach out to our enemies. **Finally, we are to follow the example of our Unhurried God and Jesus Christ, as we prepare God’s and Jesus’ Table and the Invitation for All People to come to it! Amen.**