

"This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them."

Do you eat with sinners?

Every meal I eat – is with sinners. Even when I eat alone.

I am not Jesus, but I find myself in the presence of sinners. Constantly. Especially Anya and Lindsay.

Every cup of coffee I share, is with sinners.

Every slice of pie.

Every Sunshine Supper Meal.

Every Men's Breakfast.

Every Salad Luncheon,

Every Norwegian Specialty Food Sale.

Every quilting break on Tuesday morning – with sinners.

I can't avoid it. We can't avoid it.

We eat with sinners, because we are meant to eat together.
To welcome one another. To sit at the same table.

To share our lives, our stories, our sin, and our forgiveness – together.

Why the Pharisees accuse and condemn Jesus for eating with sinners, I have no idea.

Maybe they thought this supposed Messiah was destined for a greater role. He was wasting his time with the riff raff.

But the Son of God included everyone into the fellowship of grace.

The Pharisees were too righteous to care. Even as Jesus told these parables.

The privileged Pharisees see themselves as the ninety-nine righteous persons in the parable of the Lost Sheep who do not need repentance. They don't need to be found.

So, when sinners receive welcome at Jesus' table – the Pharisees complaints sound very much like the elder son angry about the celebration for the family scoundrel. It's literally un-believable.

What about us?

Are we so righteous Pharisees, that we can't imagine God bringing in anyone else into the kingdom?

Don't we constantly eat beside sinners and all receive the same grace and salvation of being in God's presence?

God will find the lost! Bring them to the party table, even when the lost don't want to be found.

The prodigal sons – both the younger and the older, didn't want to be found. The younger just wanted to live as a hired hand, and had nowhere else to turn. If he had another choice, he wouldn't have returned. The older was lost in a different way, caught in self-righteousness, unable to celebrate next to his sinner brother.

God is foolish and finds us even if we try to get away.
God acts out of grace, compassion, and mercy.
Not just Christians. Agnostic. Jews. Muslims. Buddhist.
Hindu. Indigenous. Natives. Witches. Pagans. Spiritual but
no religious, religious but not spiritual. Scientists.
Scientologists. People in a faith community, or those who
run from faith communities. God finds us.

God's people are not solely defined as Christian. We are simply defined as
God's people, marred by sin, and marked by Christ. All of us.

Murderers. ISIS. Child Abductors. Wall Street Execs.
Soldiers. Druggies. Politicians, good, bad, ugly. Homeless
wanderers. Kids who swindle parents out of inheritance.
And parents who welcome them home.

Shepherds who leave 99 sheep unprotected to save one measly one that didn't
follow directions. Widows, who waste our time celebrating over a measly coin,
spending more on the party than the worth of the coin.

The young son didn't believe he was worthy to be called son anymore – because of his mistakes, but the Father's grace, acceptance, and pure agape unconditional love, is exactly that... without condition.

God's grace has no requirement, God does not require repentance for forgiveness. Repentance is powerful, but not a requirement to be invited to the party. It's all grace.

Sinners. Come. Have a seat at God's table.

Does sin make us unworthy to be called God's children? Didn't God come to the world to save us from sin – because we are God's beloved children?

Whether we trust God faithfully for years, or constantly run away and waste God's gifts – we are God's children. Brought to the party. To eat together, with fellow sinners. To celebrate together, the life God has given us.

These parables are not about sheep, coins, and prodigal sons.

These stories are about God finding us, and God's amazing love and promise for God's creation.

Eating Together shows us what heaven will be.

Sharing a meal with fellow sinners, is a sign of inclusion and hospitality. It creates a bond, a community, that can't be separated. Eating in God's presence, constantly sharing holy bread together, we are reminded of our bond to God, that can't be altered, or destroyed.

In the end, no one deserves a party. The younger son breaks all the rules and violates his relationship with the father, while the older son lives in joyless resentment. Neither deserves a party, but both are welcomed. But with them, as with us, the problem is – can we accept eating together?

In the end, we all return home as sinner. The parable invites us to trust that God's goodness and mercy will be greater than we can comprehend.

Will we celebrate together, joy in the presence of God?

Or will we sit questioning why...does **"This fellow welcome sinners and eat with them?"**

Every meal we share is with other sinners. Let's celebrate that in that meal, Jesus has found the lost.