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All Saint's, Russellville '  
28 August 2016

I can't hear that Gospel from Luke without thinking of my late wife, Peggy Bosmyer's mother, Markie, and her story about when she and her daughters first started attending St. John's Episcopal Church in Helena, Arkansas. She was a little anxious because at the time they were Methodist and she didn't want people to perceive them as social climbers edging their way into Helena society via the Episcopal Church.

St. John's is a huge church building with plenty of places to sit, but each Sunday when they arrived, there was an elderly lady who always invited them to sit with her. One Sunday they arrived and the lady wasn't there, so they took their seats where they normally sat leaving room for the lady to sit when she arrived. Just a few minutes before the service started the lady arrived and she was accompanied by a young couple. She leaned into the pew and said, "Excuse me, my children are here today." And with that summarily excused them, so Markie then got up and moved herself and her daughters to another pew. And we wonder why the Episcopal church doesn't grow.

The Gospel this morning struggles with the question as to whether we should jump for the best seat in the house. Here at All Saints you have ample seating, but I remember your other building where it was probably more of a challenge on some Sundays to find a good seat. Of course, what constitutes a good seat? It's subjective. When I visit other parishes and I'm not presiding I tend to sit pretty close to the front, not because I feel drawn close to the holy but because I know I won't be taking anyone else's seat and also because I'm easily distracted and it

helps me to focus.

That is certainly one way we could preach the Gospel for today, where we get to sit in church, or maybe, where we sit at the table of accomplishment in this world, or,.... who we admit to sit at our respective tables of influence, those would all be valid approaches I suppose, but the parable that Jesus tells goes much deeper than even any of that. Jesus is challenging us to go deeper, to see the world with different eyes, to imagine,, to see the world as this Kingdom of God, not some time off in the future, but right now. If we respond to that call, it wouldn't be the first time that it has happened. There are certainly times in the past that people, some of them prophets, but others were just folks like you and me, have dared to look at the world as the Kingdom of God.

One of those times happened fifty-nine years ago today when Martin Luther King gathered people in Washington DC for the March on Washington for Freedom and Jobs. They gathered to protest, but also to dream, to imagine the reality of God's Kingdom where people would not be judged by "the color of their skin but by the content of their character."<sup>1</sup> Dr. King dared to imagine the Kingdom of God and drawing directly from the Hebrew scriptures of the Old Testament as he described his dream. He said "I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low. The rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be made straight. and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together." Dr. King dared to imagine the Kingdom of God as a reality where all persons, black and white,

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<sup>1</sup> King, Dr. Martin Luther, "I have a dream" speech. p. 5, 1963.

Gentiles and Jews, Protestants and Catholics would join hands.

And today we are called to do no less. It's in that joining of hands where I see the Gospel come alive and transform lives on all sides. I've witnessed it happening many times over the years. Folks being invited to the table, offered a hand up to a place of honor and dignity. Moments of Grace in which if I'm honest I really had very little to do with it. Over the years I've slowly learned that when I see the Holy Spirit at work, that the best thing for me to do is to simply encourage it and stay out of the way as God works through the hearts of God's people.

The Gospel of Luke invites us to continue that dream where all persons will have a place at the table, even those considered outcast from society, even the poor, even the crippled, even the lame and the blind regardless of whether they are Greek or Jew, male or female, liberal or conservative, gay or straight, simply because we are made one in Christ.

This coming week I'm going to give you a homework assignment. I'm asking you to think of someone who may not feel welcome at this altar, not because of anything we've done, but because of what the world has told them. Someone, for whatever reason, who may not have access to the dream of this Kingdom of God that we celebrate at this banquet table. When you identify them, start by praying for them. Then I hope you will assure them that regardless of what the world says, you know a place where they will experience the love of God in flesh and blood people. And then, invite and bring them with you next Sunday. Do that and today's Gospel says that your life will be blessed and you will be rewarded in the resurrection of

the righteous. AMEN.