

Pr. Sarah Mayer-Flatt is our "Synod Storyteller."

In this role, Pr. Sarah will share stories of her own, as well as stories that are part of our shared life in Southeast Michigan.

You can look for these stories online & on social media throughout the year.

You are welcome to quote from her stories, share them friends, or put them in your church newsletter. Please remember to give Pr. Sarah credit if you do so.

Take a Seat: "A Place at the Table"

Beloved,

This past weekend was our Synod's 3rd annual Justice Summit, held at Hope Lutheran Church in Farmington Hills. It was an inspiring day: we gathered around the theme "*A Place at the Table*," and focused on our roles as advocates for the least of these because we are disciples of Jesus. We called our legislature, learned about new resources, connected with the justice ministries of our Synod, and worshiped together.

I was asked to preach at the event, and at the encouragement of others, I am sharing my sermon as this month's story. Our texts for the day were: Isaiah 25: 6-9, Psalm 23, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, and Mark 14: 3-9. If you'd like to listen to the sermon, you can find it at: [Justice Summit 2025 Sermon](#).

May all we do center around God's Table of justice and grace.

Peace,
Pastor Sarah

Church! What a day it has been!

And now it's time to dig in.

Our day has centered around what "A Place at the Table" means, not only for us, but for all people. What does centering our worship and day of Advocacy around God's table of grace really mean? What do we do with our voice, our hands, our whole selves, when we are AT the table? Simply put: where is our seat at the Table?

There are dozens of tables in our lives: operating tables, dining room tables, coffee tables, the Periodic table, card tables, tables of contents, round tables, negotiating tables, pool tables, registration tables, picnic tables.

We can bring it to the table, table a motion, turn the tables, work under the table, and lay it all on the table.

We eat at tables, play at tables, work at tables. We use tables to hold things next to our bed and -- at least before "Core Math" became a thing -- learned multiplication tables. Tables, in their many forms and uses, surround us day in and out. We

use them, check them, and touch them. Tables make life easier for us,

Our texts for today are full of tables. You might say that Jesus loved tables -- from sharing meals with his friends and loved ones, to flipping them - physically and metaphorically. Jesus, like us, spent a lot of time with tables.

He's at one in our gospel lesson, having aromatic and costly nard oil poured over him, anointing him before his burial. We can hear the snide remarks of those at Jesus' table: "Why didn't she sell that stuff and give her money to the poor?"

Jesus pushed back against the snarky comments at his own table -- instead of agreeing with the disgruntled disciple, Jesus calls him out of his complacency with the poor. "Leave her alone!" he says! The disgruntled disciple surely thought he was asking the RIGHT question, but found himself being corrected for his lack of compassion and complacency to the poor.

Church, how often are we the disgruntled disciple, sure that Jesus is on our side, when we too are filled with complacency and a lack of compassion for others around us?

We can hear snide remarks being said at the tables we sit at:

"Why should we pay for free breakfast and lunches for school children?"

"She abuses the system, and we should make her pay for the choices she makes!"

"Being queer is a sin!"

"The disabled don't work hard enough to be productive members of society!"

"Stay on the other side of the street from him!"

These remarks drip with racism, ableism, queerphobia, and a lack of compassion for our neighbors. And in today's political system, we hear them as often as we use a table! And, Church, we haven't done a very good job at calling out the remarks when we hear them.

Sure, we think gay people can get married and even be our pastor. We pat ourselves on the back with our Reconciling In Christ status. But what about our trans siblings? Can THEY be your pastor, too, Church?

Jesus calls EVEN US out when we draw lines in the sand that we hope He won't notice.

Jesus must laugh at us as we draw our lines, thinking that WE are on the right side, WE are doing the better job, WE are caring the most, WE are sharing the Gospel the best. But the reality is we make up who is "in" and who is "out" all the time. We're no better than the church in Corinth that Paul so expertly called out as well.

They weren't sharing the meal faithfully: the rich would show up early, and hungry, and get drunk, leaving nothing for the working poor when they were finally able to sit. God's meal wasn't being shared as a gift for all -- no. Instead, it was a feast for some, and a matter of crumbs and drips for others.

Oh, that Paul should write a letter to us!

Even on our best days, we are often just like the early church. We spend our time deciding who deserves the best: the best seat, the best food, who is the guest and who are the servants, or the elder, or whatever it is that gives someone privilege. We even make up trying to decide who we sit by at our tables, and who deserves a voice at our tables.

But that's not the way God's Table works.

Because -- and all of us who are disabled, or black, or indigenous, or queer, or female, or any other kind of minority know this -- *there are tables at which we still do NOT have a place, Church.*

We take our "ins" and "outs" very seriously. And we call it being faithful!

Church, we cannot draw lines ANYWHERE -- not between us and the Missouri Synod, or the white Christian Nationalists, or the perpetrators of gun violence. Not between us and the republicans, or the democrats, or the immigrants, or the President. Not between us and the welfare moms, or the disabled, or the queer folk! Not between us and our enemy!

Now hear me: not all IDEAS belong at the Table, but we are ALL IN at God's Table, and every PERSON has A Place at the Table. This means we eat with the woman with the alabaster jar, the people in exile in Isaiah, and even the trans kids down the street.

The **problem** is we've become so accustomed to seeing each other as rivals, and being ready to be offended, that we don't know how to live with the discomfort of disagreement anymore.

Someone offends you? Block them on social media.

You don't agree with someone? Demand an apology or make their lives a living hell.

Not on the same side of that line we drew between us and them? Forget them; they're wrong and have nothing helpful or of value to offer ever again.

Church, how do we fix the problem?

It sounds so simple, but our hardened hearts tell us it's not: **We love.**

We love our enemies, and even ourselves, out of bigotry, out of racism, and out all other 'isms that don't belong at God's Table. We love our enemies, and even ourselves, so that lines may be erased through conversation, Through worshipping together and by the grace and mercy of Jesus.

We love and live in hope that the restoration of God's creation is coming, through us, by way of the meal of redemption we openly invite all to.

Earlier I made quite a list of tables, and we noted how Jesus used (and flipped!) tables. But long before God chose to live among us, so we could see and hear and bear witness to how God behaves when confronted with our lived experiences, God was speaking through the prophets, and inspiring the poetry of the Psalms.

And today, we got to hear about our favorite picnic.

The 23rd psalm is a prayer that speaks FOR us, because it's flooded with truth.

Preparing a table before our enemies doesn't mean we get to feast and get drunk while our enemies get nothing. Preparing a table before our enemies doesn't mean the wealthy and MOST righteous get to eat first, while the working poor have their backs trampled on.

Jesus, our Shepherd, offers us a meal on the side of a quiet stream and Church, everyone is there.

Preparing a table before our enemies means WE sit across from our enemies and Jesus says to us, "I'm here. You're here. Even THEY are here. Look one another in the eye and above all else, see the Belovedness in each other. I am in all of you, and I am here with you to do this hard thing."

It is God's Table that CENTERS us as we work for justice and peace and equity in a world torn apart by greed and selfishness.

It is God's Table that STRENGTHENS us to advocate for all people to make a living wage, be brought out of the systems that create horrific -isms, and see one another as human and divine.

It is God's Table that FORGIVES us of our sin of complacency, of drawing lines in our sandboxes, of not honoring our neighbors and enemies as children of God.

And it is God's Table that SENDS us back out. Into our homes and congregations, our places of work and places of leisure and play, our communities, state, country, and world, to continue inviting ALL people back to God's Table, again and again, where everyone has A Place at the Table.

Come Lord Jesus, quickly come.
Amen and Amen.

P.S.: Have a story you'd like me to share about your own congregation? Send me an email (sarah.flatt@gmail.com) and I'll be sure to tell your story!