

Don't Give the Enemy A Seat At Your Table

When I was writing about the Camino my younger brother was writing the above titled sermon. My brother is a member of an Evangelical, formally Congregational, church. We have clashed over our beliefs many times and when I read the title: Don't Give the Enemy A Seat At Your Table, my eyeballs rolled. I had a preconceived notion of what this sermon would be about and immediately pigeon holed the narrative: exclusion of political beliefs, homophobia, religious righteousness all reared its opinionated head. Then I watched him on Zoom and was impressed. His sermon themes were stuck in my head. I want to give him total credit for the theme and because as a freshman in high school I was taught a painful lesson by Ms. Potaki on plagiarism. Anything directly from his text will be in quotes. Ms. Potaki read my report to the whole class and then the copied passage in the Encyclopedia Britannica. I got a D and later as an English major, never wanted to repeat that public exposure horror. This sermon is a paraphrase of Tim's with my additions and deletions.

From the 23rd Psalm: You prepare a table (a Banquet in the Good News version) before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over. Or you welcome me as an honored guest and fill my cup to the brim. So, who are the enemies? The enemies are not invited. They only get a seat if you give them permission. The Lord's table, His feast, is a table of peace, fellowship, love, and freedom. On my 60th birthday I was experiencing another life's crisis, getting old! (If I'd only known!) I went to Hawaii with a friend Marge, from Kentucky that I had done mission work in Mexico with. We did devotions every morning and one of hers was about only eating the crumbs off the table that God has provided. It is a bountiful banquet but we only pick at it.

But back to the enemies that spoil the feast. BAD MEMORIES: some tragic, traumatic, devastating. I have to remember that God dwells at this table and provides for his people. Don't invite bad memories to the table. Leave the pain, don't let it dictate who you are. Don't let it shape you and how you relate to others. Bad memories are in the past—they are robbers of the present; the gift God has prepared for you. We have a choice: "We either rule over our own bad memories or we let them rule us." Bad memories are like picking at a scab, making a wound bleed repeatedly. What happens to our soul, our health, when we live in the past which is something we can't change. It is done, over, can't go back, can't change it or fix it. Why keep living through the bad memories. The bad memory, the enemy, festers and robs us of today's feast. Don't give it a seat at your table.

Another unwelcome visitor at your table is ANXIETY/WORRY. Worrying about the future robs you once again of the feast set before you, steals your food right off the table and robs your joy. I could be the Queen of Worry. My husband goes to the Rock Church at 7 AM. I am usually experiencing my REM sleep then! The other morning, I got up a little past 8 and saw his truck. I was sure I would see him dead in his chair. He was in the kitchen! He says I need to start praying the Serenity Prayer: God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. These buildings of ours could be a constant hand wringer and drain. The church is not the building. It only houses us. We are the church, the people. Doom thinking the demise of Belleville is negative projection. We don't know the future. "According to the ADAA (that's Anxiety Depression Association of America) about 6.8 million adults suffer from anxiety. That's 6.8 million tables where an atmosphere of fellowship, deep peace, intimacy and freedom with the Lord have been stolen." From Paul's letter to the Philippians chapter 4, vs. 6,7: Don't worry about anything, but in all your prayers ask God for what you need, always asking him with a thankful heart. And God's peace, which is far beyond

human understanding, will keep your hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. Anxiety can be treated with medication. Don't give worry/anxiety a seat at your table.

The third and last enemy that is an unwelcome visitor is Condemnation. The lack of self-worth is an insult to the Lord. We are beautifully and perfectly made. That is not to say we don't mess up, sin and sin again, but ask for forgiveness and God accepts. The enemy condemns and wants you to feel worthless, inadequate, unloved. Don't listen to the cacophony of inner voices: I am not forgiving enough, I am not kind enough, I have petty thoughts, the Devil sits on my shoulder and whispers prejudices and judgements and I call myself a Christian. You are God's beloved no matter how many times you trip, his grace is there to catch you. In the Old Testament, Jeremiah chapter 31 vs 34: I will forgive their sins and I will no longer remember their wrongs. New Testament Hebrews chapter 8 vs 12: Same thing. Hebrews chapter 10 vs 17: I will not remember their sins and evil deeds any longer. I truly believe this table that was provided for us is overflowing. Take more than the crumbs because you are loved. This great banquet invites everyone to come. The meal signifies community, fellowships, acceptance, nourishment where one can come as they are and be welcomed and loved. God sets a table for us and joins us around it—come to the table but leave bad memories, worry, and condemnation outside.