

3 Jesus' meal-sharing with outcasts and sinners

Jesus was known as someone who ate and drank with all sorts of people. Among the religious leaders, he was notorious for sharing meals with the wrong sort of people. In the culture in which Jesus lived, to share a meal with someone meant sharing their reputation, linking yourself with them before society and God.

It was scandalous for a religious teacher like Jesus to share meals with sinners.

In the Gospels, the religious leaders' most common complaint against Jesus was this: that he ate with tax collectors and sinners.* Tax collectors were outside the boundaries of acceptability because they were in league with the Roman oppressor, and because they were assumed to collect more than the necessary tax in order to enrich themselves. Read Mark 2:13-17, the call of Levi the tax collector (parallels, Matthew 9:9-13; Luke 5:27-32). The same complaint is made when Jesus goes to eat at the house of Zacchaeus, another tax collector (Luke 19:7). In another place Jesus himself makes fun of the complainers (Luke 7:33-35; parallel, Matthew 11:18-19).

Jesus' meal-sharing was an enactment of the forgiveness of sins. Outcasts were welcome, the despised were honored. Sinners were called to sin no more, but the call came from one who sat next to them, not from one who stood over or apart from them. Those who had oppressed others were moved to change their lives and make amends (Luke 19:8-10). Salvation came to the houses where Jesus sat at the table.

* **Sinners** were those who were labeled by the religious authorities as outside the boundaries of acceptability. It could mean what we mean by the word: someone who had done something wrong or who lived in an immoral way. It could also refer to:

- someone who was too poor to pay the temple tax
- someone who was chronically ill or mentally disturbed
- someone whose job made them "impure" (morticians or prostitutes)
- non-observant Jews
- non-Jews

Hymn Search: **What can the imagery in our hymns teach us about holy communion?**

Hymn numbers refer to Evangelical Lutheran Worship.

Easter as our Exodus; Jesus as our paschal lamb, our freedom meal

- 361 The day of resurrection!, st. 1
- 362 At the Lamb's high feast we sing, sts. 1-4, 6, 7
- 363 Come, you faithful, raise the strain, sts. 1-3
- 370 Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands

The hoped-for feast

- 465 As the grains of wheat, st. 2
- 479 We come to the hungry feast
- 494 For the bread which you have broken, st. 3
(note: this is "board" meaning "a table spread with a meal," as in "room and board")
- 522 As we gather at your table, sts. 1, 3
- 523 Let us go now to the banquet, refrain and sts. 2-3
- 689 Praise and thanksgiving, sts. 3-4
- 726 Light dawns on a weary world, st. 2
- 826 Thine the amen
- 827 Arise, my soul, arise!, st. 1

Forgiveness as a gift in the meal

- 460 Now the silence
(uses the image of the prodigal son's return,
as well as the image of the wedding banquet)
- 464 Bread of life, our host and meal, st. 3
- 475 Lord, enthroned in heavenly splendor, st. 3
- 476 Thee we adore, O Savior, st. 3
- 499 O Lord, we praise you, st. 2 (written by Luther)
- 641 All Are Welcome, st. 3

