Who Comes to the Table?

Homily October 1, 2023

UUCY

Who comes to the table? What brings you here? Did you get an invitation? Or maybe you made a reservation? I can see why you may be nervous if it is your first time.

It is possible for someone to be inviting and welcoming and yet still not be accepting. I got one of my earliest tastes of this as a middle schooler eager to make friends and feel like I fit in. I was excited one day when a new friend said, “Hey Kathy, why don’t you come and join me for lunch in my cafeteria.” We had the same lunch schedule but ate in different cafeterias. I was thrilled that she asked me. I came to the table and sat down next to my friend. Before I knew it, there was a commotion behind me in the aisle. Another girl yelling in my direction. “Hey. You are in my seat. What are you doing in my seat?” As a result, a teacher came over and asked me if this was the cafeteria that I usually ate in. And I said no. As a result, she told me I wasn’t allowed to eat in my undesignated cafeteria.

I felt so much joy in the anticipation of someone actually welcoming me as a friend and inviting me to spend time with them and it turned out to be one of the most embarrassing, rejection moments of my middle school years. Being invited or even welcomed does not always guarantee equal acceptance.

It is also very difficult to sit at a table of tolerance. I know this well in my ministry experience as an ordained female in Baptist life, being tolerated by other staff members and church members because of my gender. The double standards as a female pastor became something I had to tolerate in a patriarchal system. It is not true welcoming when one is invited to the table but is not acknowledged for their worth, or for their dedicated achievements to only go unacknowledged and uncelebrated. I know how that feels.

Don’t mistake welcoming and being invitational to mean acceptance. Cross cultural experiences can be powerful tools for understanding but also serve to remind us of how much further we have to go. It starts with opening an invitation to participate but are you truly welcome to be there? I ask again, when working with different culture such as the LGBTQIA+ community, what brings you to the table? And when LGBTQIA+ folks come to our UUC table, what brings them here? It’s not being invited; it’s not being welcomed. And tolerance has no place at the table.

So I propose the idea that we all come, have a seat and be ready to be served and serve one another the delicious entrée of affirmation. If we say we are just a welcoming congregation, we drop the ball on how we truly can be transformational as human beings and as a community. It requires of us a passing of the plate to who sits with us and beside us so all can partake.

When the question is asked who comes to the table through the lens of affirmation, we can answer authentically and with confidence to our LGBTQIA+ friends, neighbors, co-workers and family members, we understand that you have experienced rejections often, many times, not only by others but of yourself, we acknowledge you are weary, tired and many times afraid, disheartened and hungry-hearted. Come those who are poor in Spirit. Let these be the reasons that you come into community at UUCY to be fed a healing embrace. And when that moment happens, the healing transformational moment in congregational living heals us all as a society. Those around the table are here because we belong to one another, we acknowledge and celebrate each other. To the LGBTQIA+ community we extend an embrace that solidifies that we see you. You do belong.

It is not enough to be tolerant or welcoming or even invitational. What is required? The warm relational embrace that says you are allowed to be yourself here.

So why come to the table? In doing so we embrace love of ourselves and others, we come to be available, to recognize the needs, to take an interest, to engage in curious learning about others who may not be like us and to learn from them. We come to be a holy presence on Earth to celebrate ours passion, to show compassion and to encourage each other on the journey. When it comes down to it, we are all human in our glorious diversity. Come to the table, sit for a while, embrace those who sit with you and be changed!