

**Rev. Maeve Hammond**  
**“Who are you inviting to the banquet?”**  
**Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19 | Luke 14:7-14**  
**April 23, 2023 (Third Sunday of Easter)**

Let us pray. Loving and holy Creator of each and every one of us, we humble ourselves before your Word. We know that you contain the expansive divine mystery of wisdom, interconnection, and love. Let us accept this mystery and allow your Spirit to move us where we need to go in your kingdom. Amen.

So, friends, here we are on this third Sunday of Easter. With each week that passes, we are nearing the middle of Eastertide, a season that follows Holy Week and stretches from Easter for eight weeks into Pentecost, which lands on May 28 this year. You’ll notice it’s still Eastertide because I have my white stole on, which I’ll continue to wear until Pentecost. What does it mean for us to be worshiping together on this third Sunday of Easter? In the historical Roman Rite of the Catholic Church, this day was named Misericordia Sunday, named after the incipit (the first few words and notes) of the introit. Misericordia in Latin means “mercy” or “compassion.” These words, translated from Latin to English, would be sung during the service: “The earth is full of the Lord’s mercies, alleluia: by the word of the Lord the heavens were established, alleluia, alleluia. Be glad, ye righteous, in the Lord: praise benefits the righteous.” Beyond the introit, Roman Catholics would traditionally read John 10:11-16 as the Gospel text. It goes like this:

11 “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. 12 The hired hand, who is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and runs away, and the wolf snatches them and scatters them. 13 The hired hand runs away because a hired hand does not care for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd....” (NRSVUE)

From these two texts—the introit on mercy, gratitude, and righteousness and John 10’s rendition on being a good shepherd in the eyes of God—we can interpret that some churchgoers within some traditions at some period of time worshiped the Third Sunday of Easter according to the

theme of fearlessly giving back to a good and generous God by protecting the wellbeing of others.

When I was preparing for this sermon, I sought the recommendations of the Southern New England Conference's lectionary. For this Sunday, the lectionary suggested we read Luke 24, also known as The Walk to Erasmus. As you heard in Maggie Keeler's Time for the Young, this passage represents how Jesus walks beside us especially in times of disbelief, confusion, and sadness. Yet, as I read and reread this passage from Scripture, I couldn't quite figure out how I was being called to bring it before the congregation today. In many ways, it's the ideal passage for where we find ourselves in Eastertide. Jesus's community is still grieving his monumental loss, and the risen Christ once again appears before them, checks in with them, and even teaches them what the prophets say in Scripture. But, as much as I tried to weave a sermon from this passage, it wasn't coming to me. So, I scrolled up on the lectionary and found the Gospel reading from Saturday: Luke 14:7-14, a passage on humility and hospitality, a well-known and well-loved parable that takes place at a wedding banquet. What better way to continue the historical Third Sunday of Easter tradition of compassion, generosity, and shepherdship than over a theologically-rich banquet feast?

Here are Jesus's own words on banquet etiquette: 1) never sit at the place of honor, in case someone else needs to take that seat, 2) humble yourself, 3) invite God's blessed children to your table: the poor, the disabled, and the blind. Jesus says that the blessing we receive from our guests should never be material, but rather spiritual: "And you will be blessed because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous." Whether Jesus is talking about his own resurrection or something else, I'd like to interpret this verse in Luke as the idea of our souls and ourselves being reborn, being resurrected, coming to life again and again, every time we invite a fellow sibling into our homes and make space for them at the table.

This concept is ancient, especially in our shared tradition, but it never loses impact to me: *our souls come to life every time we make space at the table*. Is this not what we

experience in communion, when we break bread together and share from the same cup? In that sacred moment of sense, nourishment, and transformation, where we *remember Christ* saying, “Do this in remembrance of me?” No, we won’t be participating in the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper today, but maybe this is an idea you could bring with you to coffee hour after the service, or a mindful eating practice, or serving at the Dwelling Place, or catching up over dinner with an old friend or new acquaintance.

Recently, I’ve been reading a lot about and by two of our siblings and saints in Christ whose lives and written work represent material and intangible soul connection, spirits springing to life, and shepherdship in humanity: Dorothy Day and John O’Donohue. If you attended my ordination, you might have noticed two Dorothy Day quotes that popped up during the service: 1) “My strength returns to me from a cup of coffee and a reading of the Psalms,” and 2) “The Sermon on the Mount is our manifesto.” During both of the Easter services and last Sunday, Rev. Will and I made a reference to or directly quoted John O’Donohue. For some reason, these two figures have been floating around the sanctuary of our church and of our minds.

I’ll admit that I didn’t know much about Dorothy Day until about a year ago. As an Assistant Chaplain at Suffolk University, we had a club for Catholics and questioning Catholics and who-knows-what-I-am Catholics. During one of our meetings, our Catholic chaplain planned an entire hour to chatting about Dorothy Day’s case for canonization in the Catholic Church, a case that has been pending for over ten years with thousands of pages written about it and countless discussions about the merits of her conversion, her Catholic Worker grassroots activism, and her “miracles.” A few weeks ago, with Dorothy on my mind, I slowly read D.L. Mayfield’s biography *Unruly Saint: Dorothy Day’s Radical Vision and Its Challenge for Our Times*. Here, I learned so much more about the complex, messy, passionate, and Christ-led person who was Dorothy Day. Raised without religion, Dorothy converted to Catholicism in her twenties. Before she got up to work as a muckraking journalist, read Russian novels and write her own, and drink and smoke with socialists, she would attend early morning Mass, praying in

silence with a rosary in her hand. When she became pregnant with her child, Tamar, she immediately saw herself in Mary, Mother of God. In her diaries, Dorothy Day wrote fondly of the quiet time she had to herself, walking barefoot on the beach, pregnant, and living in a shack on Long Island. In 1932, she founded the Catholic Worker Movement with French immigrant Peter Maurin in New York City. Throughout the Great Depression and after, Dorothy took a vow of poverty, giving any additional resources she had to the poor and owning only a few, worn-out essentials. Everything she had went toward the Catholic Worker paper, protesting unfair labor laws, seeking and establishing temporary or permanent residences for unhoused and housing-insecure neighbors, and keeping her friends and activist colleagues running, never without a hearty soup and strong coffee on the stove.

In her time, Dorothy housed and lived with a variety of people in tenement apartments. Mothers who couldn't feed their children; neighbors who experienced delusions and psychosis; people who refused to bathe even after many pleas and resources made available to them; laborers exploited by their jobs and teetered on the financial edge of "okay" and "really not okay"; people who were violent; people who were thieves and stole from her; people who had nothing to their name; artists, writers, drinkers, activists, intellectuals, people of faith. Dorothy saw her duty as a servant of God to express gratitude to her Maker by serving others. She firmly maintained that all people were loved and created by God, holding within each of them an inherent dignity and divinity, regardless of financial status, social identity, behavior, or disorders. As D.L. Mayfield writes in her biography, it must have been scary at times to live with some of these folks. Dorothy's grit and her faithfulness are, to me, completely astounding. I keep returning to her dedication to Christ's mission and ministry and now often wonder where we would be if we had never had her, or if she were still with us today.

Dorothy Day shepherded a flock of God's most blessed children by inviting them to her table and saving the best seats for them at her banquet. After all, who did Jesus hang out with? Dorothy's story came alive for me most recently after the Easter sunrise service. At 7:00 or so in

the morning, I took a long walk through the Middlesex Fells. I'd never seen the Fells that early, and the quiet, the sunlight reflecting off the leaves, the chill but damp air came together to make a spiritual and mystical morning. I had just downloaded *Anam Cara*, one of John O'Donohue's most famous works, so I put in my earbuds and listened. *Anam Cara* is based on the Celtic wisdom of soul friends. In O'Donohue's words, a soul friend is someone with whom we recognize our hearts can be at home. He writes, "fashioned by the earth, we are souls of clay." When our souls recognize each other in friendship, "love allows understanding to dawn. And understanding is precious." Upon hearing these words, I thought of Dorothy Day and how she must have had hundreds, if not thousands, of soul connections with her friends and neighbors in need. I wonder if that soul connection fostered understanding upon understanding each time she reached out and invited someone in.

I hope our Scripture readings, traditional Third Sunday of Easter interpretations, and stories of wisdom today invite us even closer into our relationship with God and with God's children. I hope for myself and for the body of Christ not to just be inspired, but to *do*. May our souls be reborn, fed, and connected in the work we do. May Christ shepherd us to others and provide blessing upon blessing to us all. May we join the long table of saints and sinners, and may we invite endless guests into our heart and home. Amen.