

# McCabe United Methodist Church

June 3, 2018

*The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss: Life Is Messy!* series

“Sam I Am” at the Communion Table

Sermon on Luke 14:15-24 & Galatians 3:26-28

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Worship this weekend at McCabe is all about feasting...worship this weekend is about being invited to join in particular *kinds* of feasts. And, continuing in our *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss: Life Is Messy!* sermon series, when thinking about *feasts*, what better book could we utilize than *Green Eggs and Ham*?

*Green Eggs and Ham* was actually written as the result of a dare. Dr. Seuss' editor challenged the children's book author to write a new book using no more than 50 different words...and the result was the 1960 release of *Green Eggs and Ham*.

(For reference, *The Cat in the Hat* contains 263 different words. And, no, I didn't count the words of these two books myself...I learned this from a reliable internet source.)

Anyway, in *Green Eggs and Ham*, Dr. Seuss uses very few words to tell a classic tale of stubbornness, persistence, prejudice, trying new things, and discovering that you might actually enjoy something you had previously misjudged.

There are two primary characters in *Green Eggs and Ham*: the first is “Sam”, or, “Sam I Am”, and the other is Sam's unnamed friend – though I hesitate to call him Sam's *friend*...but, since Dr. Seuss doesn't give him an actual name, we're stuck with something generic like that.

Sam-I-am spends most of the book trying in vain to get his friend to try eating green eggs and ham.

Now, to be clear, Dr. Seuss never helps either us readers – or the characters in the book – understand why the ham and the egg yolks are green. That is a mystery we'll never know. But, of course, green eggs and ham do not likely strike anyone as being particularly appetizing – at least not at first.

The first few pages of the book go like this...a back-and-forth exchange between Sam I Am and his friend: “I am Sam. Sam I am.” Then his friend says, “That Sam-I-Am! That Sam-I-Am! I do not like that Sam-I-Am!”

Then Sam says, “Do you like green eggs and ham?” To which his friend replies, “I do not like them, Sam-I-am. I do not like green eggs and ham.”

Sam-I-Am tries another tactic: “Would you like them here or there?” But his friend's mind is set: “I would not like them here or there. I would not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham.

"I do not like them, Sam-I-am." Sam tries again: "Would you like them in a house? Would you like them with a mouse?" Still no budging on his friend's part: "I do not like them in a house. I do not like them with a mouse. I do not like them here or there. I do not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam-I-am."

And so forth and so on. Sam-I-am's friend does not like green eggs and ham in a box...with a fox...in a car...in a tree...on a train...in the dark...in the rain...on a boat or with a goat.

Toward the end, we learn a little secret about Sam's friend: he says he does not like green eggs and ham...yet, he has never actually tried them! For shame. Such prejudice!

Sam says, "You do not like them. So you say. Try them! Try them! And you may. Try them and you may, I say." For some reason, this change of track somehow shifts Sam's friend's thinking and he says, "Sam! If you will let me be, I will try them. You will see." And so he tries the green eggs and ham.

"Say!," Sam's friend says. "I like green eggs and ham! I do! I like them, Sam-I-am! And I would eat them in a boat. And I would eat them with a goat...and I will eat them in the rain. And in the dark. And on a train. And in a car. And in a tree. They are so good, so good, you see!

"So I will eat them in a box. And I will eat them with a fox. And I will eat them in a house. And I will eat them with a mouse. And I will eat them here and there. Say! I will eat them ANYWHERE! I do so like green eggs and ham! Thank you! Thank you, Sam-I-am!" All of a sudden, the prejudice turned into a welcome embrace.

We're now in the fifth week of our sermon series, *The Gospel According to Dr. Seuss: Life Is Messy!* Each week, we've used a Dr. Seuss story to help illustrate the message of the week's Scripture readings.

And, in some way, shape, or form, each of the Scripture readings we've explored during this series reflects the fact that life in this world is *messy*. Life doesn't always go the way we hope it would go – for us individually, for our families, in our communities, nation, and world.

There is poverty, sickness, death, violence...we get lost and in need of guidance...our hearts get broken, we get hurt by the sins of others and we hurt others with our own sin. There's social and political strife...et cetera, et cetera. Life. Is. *Messy*.

The Dr. Seuss stories we've explored have illustrated, in typical Seuss fashion, the *mess* of life...and the Scripture readings we've explored, have demonstrated, time and

time again, the ways in which God *enters into the mess with us*, bringing redemption and hope.

As I mentioned a bit ago, today's worship is about *feasts*. It's about who's invited to the feast, who accepts the invitation to the feast, how we behave at the feast, and, most importantly, it's about the *host* of the feast.

In *Green Eggs and Ham*, Sam-I-am tried, in vain, through much of the story, to get his grouchy friend to feast on something a little bit different. Sam-I-am was a very persistent host, doing everything he could to share something he loved with another person.

That in mind, the theme is similar in our reading from the Gospel of Luke...

Our reading from chapter 14 of Luke's Gospel starts well into the chapter, in verse 15, but, at the very *beginning* of chapter 14, we learn the setting:

Jesus was at the home a religious leader because he and many others had been invited there for dinner. (Certainly *not* green eggs and ham!) It happened to be the Sabbath and the writer, Luke, tells us that "many were watching Jesus closely" ...so we know he was being put to the test.

The *first* test involved the religious law about not working on the Sabbath. As the scene goes, someone who had chronically swollen arms and legs came to the house.

Jesus knew there were many at the party who were looking to catch him doing something wrong, so he asked them if it was lawful to heal someone on the Sabbath.

No one answered him, so Jesus healed the man and then reminded all the fancy religious people at the party that, in their own ways, each of them works on the Sabbath.

A bit later, as the guests were getting seated for the meal, Jesus noticed that many guests were sort of fighting over the "places of honor" near the head of the table...so he offered them a little lesson in humility, suggesting that it's better to take a "lower" seat and then be invited to a seat of honor, rather than taking a "higher" seat and then being asked to move down.

The basic lesson there is that none of us should make any assumptions about how great we are. For people of faith, sincere humility is *always* favored over prideful arrogance.

Of course, that doesn't mean we should think of ourselves as being unworthy of love and respect...it just means we shouldn't think that we are any *more* worthy of love and respect than anyone else is.

I'm reminded of a quote by Christian writer C. S. Lewis in which he states "Humility is not thinking less of yourself; it is thinking of yourself *less*."

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In Luke chapter 14, Jesus makes this point through his teachings at the Sabbath day dinner party: don't be so worried about following rules that you miss the opportunity to help someone in need...don't think more highly of yourself than you think of anyone else...and, then, the third lesson comes through the story Jesus tells from the verses we heard read a bit ago – verses 15 through 24.

"A man prepared a great feast and sent out many invitations. When the banquet was ready, he sent his servant to tell the guests, "'Come, the banquet is ready.' But they all began making excuses. One said, 'I have just bought a field and must inspect it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five pairs of oxen, and I want to try them out. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

"The servant returned and told his master what they had said. His master was furious and said, 'Go quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and invite the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' After the servant had done this, he reported, 'There is still room for more.' So, his master said, 'Go out into the country lanes and behind the hedges and urge anyone you find to come, so that the house will be full. "'For none of those I first invited will get even the smallest taste of my banquet.'"

Listening to that story, you *might* have heard echoes of Sam's friend and all his excuses regarding his dislike for green eggs and ham. Sam wanted to share something wonderful – even if it seemed a little strange at first – but his friend wouldn't have it.

"I do not like them in a house. I do not like them with a mouse. I do not like them here or there. I do not like them anywhere. I do not like green eggs and ham. I do not like them, Sam-I-am."

Can you hear in those excuses something like the excuses of those banquet guests? "I have to inspect my new field." "I need to check-out my new cattle." "I just got married."

The man simply wanted to share something wonderful with them...and they refused his invitation. But, something like Sam-I-am, the man in Jesus' story was persistent. He had a banquet prepared and he was going to do whatever it took to have guests to feast with!

Now, it would be easy to focus on the fact that folks who were perhaps more quote-unquote "elite" were first on the invitation list for the man's banquet...and it would be

easy to focus on the fact that the street folks, the poor, the sick, those with disabilities, and the country folks were only invited after the more “elite” folks RSVPed “no”.

It would be easy to focus on the fact that the more *lowly* people weren't invited to the feast until those on the initial invite list made their excuses...but, I prefer to look at this story as the story of a persistent host who wants nothing more than to share his feast with others.

Friends, we are about to celebrate the feast of Holy Communion – and the feast of Communion always has as its host our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ...who is wholly persistent when it comes to each of us and when it comes to our world.

In the midst of life's mess, here, today, we are welcomed to the Communion table – to the Communion feast – by the never-ending grace of Jesus.

When we celebrate Communion, Jesus is the persistent host, inviting *all of us* to the banquet table...no matter who we are and no matter who we might tend to prefer to be with at the table.

Jesus invites *all of us* to the table: the rich and the poor...the white, the black, and the brown...the republicans and the democrats...the professionals and the working-class...the arrogant and the humble...the city folks and the rural folks...the healthy and the sick.

We are all here for the Communion feast, and we are all welcomed to it by our gracious Lord Jesus. *That* is the good news. *That* is the invitation. May we graciously accept the invitation...and may we, with our gracious Lord Jesus, welcome others to the feast.