



## Shall We Gather at The Table?

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One of the things I love most about the United Church of Christ is the professed wideness of our table.

“No matter who you are or where you are on life’s journey, you are welcome here” is both an inspirational and aspirational profession that I’ve reflected upon often since we gathered in Milwaukee this summer.

The table is a symbol of inclusion. But too often we embrace the symbol with little attention to the complexities of an open table.

I’m invited to many tables because I hold many identities. As a clergy woman who is unapologetically black and unashamedly Christian serving in a predominantly white denomination with progressive theology, I am frequently invited to tables because of my racial identity, or my gender, or my theology, or my proximity to the lived experiences of cultural and institutional oppression. Too often the expectation of the host in such instances is that only the invited identity will show up, but neither the table nor humanity work that way.

Scripture teaches us that Jesus accepted invitations to diverse tables with diverse people. If an open table is to have any credibility within the Church, an invitation to the table cannot be synonymous with conformity or comfort.

Open tables are hard work. Open tables require a relinquishment of control. The declaration of an open table is a declaration that we are called to serve simultaneously as both host and guest at the table. It is recognition that the table is not ours to regulate.

An invitation to an open table is not merely be an invitation to be seated. It is an invitation to have a say.

An invitation to an open table is not merely an invitation to have a say. It is an invitation to be seen.

An invitation to an open table is an invitation to be recognized, fully seen and fully heard in the complexity of our beings, and to have our whole selves invited to be fully present.

This does not mean there won't be times of calling out and correction at the table. At the table we replicate most often, Jesus gathers those who love him in a room for one final meal before the crucifixion, and both John and Judas were present. Jesus did not shy away from difficult conversation at the table.

Neither can we.

The gift of the table is the opportunity to understand love outside of agreement, a love that holds fast between grace and truth. Sometimes we create a false dichotomy between love and truth, but love cannot exist apart from truth.

At the table we have the incredible opportunity to see and proclaim a God that is bigger than ourselves. A God that does not require us to be generic or muted or missing. A God that calls us out and calls us in so that we might be one.

May it be so.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Traci D. Blackmon is Associate General Minister for the United Church of Christ.

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