



**“The Last Supper: Conversations that Led to the Cross”**  
By Dr. Will Willimon

**Session 2: Open Invitation**  
March 1, 2026 4:00 PM

**Thank you for joining us again for this Lenten journey with Jesus. Dr. Willimon warns us that this week’s reading may have made some people uncomfortable – Jesus has a way of “trashing” our dinner parties!**

**INTRODUCTION**

- What is the most awkward dinner party or social gathering you’ve ever attended? What made it uncomfortable?
- When have you felt like an outsider at a social event? When have you felt like an insider?

**Simon the Pharisee – a pious, biblically knowledgeable religious leader – invited Jesus to dinner...In the Gospels, Pharisees like Simon are depicted as religious experts who can’t stand Jesus; yet they persist in inviting him into their homes for supper! – Willimon**

- Why do you think religious leaders kept inviting Jesus to dinner, knowing he might disrupt things?
- When has Jesus “disrupted” your comfortable assumptions about faith or church?

## **OPENING PRAYER**

*Generous God, you have set a table with room for everyone, yet we often prefer our exclusive dinner parties with people just like us. As we explore your radical hospitality today, help us see our world through your eyes – where the hungry are filled and the proud are sent away empty-handed. Give us courage to examine our own excuses and wisdom to recognize the feast you’re already preparing. Amen.*

## **SESSION 2 VIDEO – “There’s Still Room”**

Thoughts to consider as we watch the video...

- Which of Willimon’s insights about God’s “open table” most challenged you?
- How do you respond to his claim that Jesus’s dinner party instructions aren’t just suggestions but “direct instruction on how to live your way into the practical ethics of the kingdom”?

## **JESUS CRASHES THE DINNER PARTY**

### ***Scripture Focus – Luke 14:1-6 (The Sabbath Healing)***

- Why does Jesus heal the man with “abnormal body swelling” right in the middle of a dinner party?
- Willimon notes that Jesus turns the dining room into a hospital. When have you seen the church prioritize human need over social propriety?

### ***Scripture Focus – Luke 14:7-11 (Table Etiquette)***

- How is Jesus’s advice about seating different from typical social climbing strategies?
- What does “All who lift themselves up will be brought low” mean in practical terms?

***Scripture Focus – Luke 14:12-14 (Guest List Instructions)***

**“Don’t invite your buddies at the club, the few family members who still speak to you, or your fat-cat neighbors...Instead, when you give a banquet, invite the poor, crippled, lame, and blind; they’ll never repay.” - Willimon**

- How does this challenge our normal understanding of networking and reciprocal social relationships?
- What would it look like for your church to follow these instructions literally?

**THE ABSURD EXCUSES**

***Scripture Focus – Luke 14:15-24 – The Parable of the Great Banquet***

Let’s look at Willimon’s Analysis of the excuses...

- “In a region where arable land is scarce, this guy has bought a farm and hasn’t seen it!”
- “A farmer purchased costly farm animals before checking them out?”
- “A patriarchal Near Eastern male lets a wife keep him from a huge banquet?”
- What makes these excuses so absurd? What make them so familiar?
- Willimon notes that the things that keep people from the banquet aren’t evil things – they’re “concerns, riches, and pleasures or life.” How do good things become barriers to God’s kingdom?

**Is providing for the well-being of your family not a good thing? Taking care of business is what businesspeople are supposed to do. Don’t we believe that sacrificing your social life for your marriage and family is a great virtue? – Willimon**

- When have good priorities become excuses for avoiding God’s call?
- What are the most common “good excuses” people give for not engaging more deeply in church or faith?

## **“THERE’S STILL ROOM”**

***Scripture Focus – Luke 14:21-23 – The Master’s Response***

**I want you to take “there is still room” as the key to this Big Banquet riddle. - Willimon**

- How does knowing “there’s still room” change your perspective on evangelism?
- Willimon says the host “won’t rest until everybody in town is at the table.” How does this challenge our assumptions about who belongs in church?

**“Salvation for all!” cried out John Wesley in the fields and alleyways of England, obedient to Christ’s command, “Go to the highways and back alleys and urge people to come in so that my house will be filled.” - Willimon**

- The median age in many denominations is rising rapidly. How does this parable speak to that reality?

## **TODAY’S FEAST**

**In Jesus’s parables of the Great Banquet, the invitation isn’t just to some future heavenly feast, it’s also to a meal that’s in session this very moment, if we just have the eyes to see. - Willimon**

- Where do you see God’s kingdom banquet happening now?
- How is your church a “local rendition” of Jesus’s table fellowship?

**Don’t waste your time looking for kingdom outbreak on the floor of the US Senate, or at the Pentagon, much less at a state dinner at the White House. Look local: your kitchen table that you’ve opened to someone who didn’t think they belonged, potluck suppers in the church basement for people who had never set foot in a church, at the Lord’s Table next Sunday. - Willimon**

- When has FBC Elon experienced something like this “kingdom outbreak”?

## **THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH ABOUT INVITATION**

**If you've never been excluded from a party, rented a tux only to find that your invitation got lost in the mail, been turned away at the door because your name is not on the list, or on the other hand, if you've never been surprised by an invitation to the biggest bash this town's ever seen, even when you didn't expect to make the cut, then I'm unsure if I'm a good enough preacher to explain this parable to you. - Willimon**

- When have you been unexpectedly excluded? Unexpectedly included?
- How do these experiences help us understand God's grace?

**Listen to us trying to take credit for our being at the Lord's Table: "Since I've accepted Jesus as my Savior." "Now that I've taken Jesus into my heart." Or "Since I gave my life to Christ." Note the preponderance of the first-person singular. - Willimon**

- How does this parable challenge our "personal savior" language?
- What difference does it make to know we're at God's table only by invitation?

## **CLOSING**

**Any church that's not actively out on the "highways and back alleys" delivering the message, "Hey, there is still room," is not yet fully a church. - Willimon**

- What is one specific way you could extend God's invitation this week – whether to church, to your table, or simply to belonging?
- What's your earliest memory of your awareness that, for you, "There's still room"?
- What do you think ought to happen at FBC Elon for our church to more closely resemble Jesus's expansive invitation to his banquet?

**CLOSING PRAYER**

Gracious Host, you have prepared a feast with room for everyone, yet we often act like bouncers at an exclusive club. Forgive our excuses and our exclusions. Help us trust that your table is big enough for the people we find difficult, different, or disappointing – including ourselves. This week, make us bold ambassadors of your “there’s still room” invitation, and help us see our own meals and gatherings as extensions of your great banquet. Give us eyes to recognize the kingdom feast that’s already underway and hearts courageous enough to join the party. Amen.

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**Session 3: Feasting with the Found**

**Sunday, March 8 4:00 PM**

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