

**“Lunchroom” – Rev. Jennifer Adams**  
**August 29, 2010 – Proper 17C**

How many of you remember your high school lunchroom, or let’s say middle school or high school lunchroom? Most of us. Is it the same as your vision of the kingdom of heaven? A few differences, perhaps? Hold that thought.

Today we’re celebrating Stepping Up which is the rite of passage for the youth among us who are transitioning from middle school to high school and beginning what we refer to as “the journey to adulthood.” No longer little kids, you guys, but not yet grown-ups -- you’re on your way and today we will surround you (Connor, Katie, Daniel and Zach) and your parents with support and prayer to mark these important steps. So given the presence of this celebration and the gospel passage we just heard, I’d like to invite us into a metaphor to which most of us, regardless of generation, can relate. The middle school or high school cafeteria, we’ll call it the lunchroom.

Now for some of you out there the thought of revisiting that place might give you chills. Which isn’t meant to scare you guys. Yesterday in our retreat time together you were quite clear about lunchroom challenges, so none of this is news to you. It’s no secret that there seems to be an almost universal, clearly defined order to lunchroom life. You guys said that these days (like older days) it goes something like this: the smart kids sit in one place, the kids who get in trouble sit in another place. The preps sit all together. Music and drama kids over there. If you’re in a relatively small school the athletes are central in one large mass, except for maybe the cross country team; or if you’re in a bigger school, there is actually a secondary set of divisions based on particular sport – baseball over there, soccer over there, basketball in one place, football in another, runner with runners and swimmers with other swimmers and those who happen to play football and basketball forming sort of the central core of the whole lunchroom space. And one of you described the situation like this, “If you move, you throw off the whole system.” Period and direct quote. And you were talking about the limitations of the space but also about the categories that come with the territory. So God forbid you’re a smart, baseball playing, pianist who also happens to swim and has been in trouble a couple of times. Or what about the young person who throws around a nerf with his family but doesn’t want to get hit hard on a football field day after day? He certainly can’t just plop down next to the quarterback and just start sharing some chips? Or what about the young person who does OK in school, but doesn’t qualify as “smart” and is one of the most loving and caring of people the world has ever known but has to work after school instead of doing other activities? Is there

a place for her? Or what about the young person who feels like he or she is none of the things listed above but a very little bit of each of them all at the same time? Which if we're honest at some point in our lives is probably all of us.

Well, the good news this morning is first of all that you guys are sitting in a room full of people who survived the lunchroom experience and other experiences that come with the journey. And if you're open to it, we can give you some tips. That's part of why we're here – to be here for each other – all of us no matter what steps on the journey happen to be the steps we're taking this week or this year or throughout this phase of life. Remember too that this same room full of people have absolutely no doubt that all of you will thrive over the next four years and as adults in this world. We know you aren't perfect (your siblings and parents have talked to us too) but we also know that you are already absolutely wonderful people with tremendous gifts and the abilities to navigate the lunchrooms of your near future and beyond. The first piece of good news is that you are not alone as you go. You have a community of church that knows you, loves you and celebrates who you, even as you are becoming you.

And there's more too! Not only is there this community but there is also a gospel that addresses some of these issues too. We heard this morning that the kingdom of heaven just happens to be like a place where people come together to eat. It just looks a little different than what we're all used to. In the kingdom of heaven there *are* groups of people who receive special invitations and who are given places of honor but they're the the poor, the lame, the crippled and the blind, those who don't often have that experience, who this side of heaven don't automatically have any place in the lunchrooms of life. According to the gospel, in the kingdom, the outsiders are seated first, cared for, received, forgiven, fed and loved. It's upside down from the ways of the world and mixed up in ways that just don't happen much here.

But they can happen here and that's the point of all of this too. This way works in the kingdom because the title at each place is the same. Instead of endless types of categories over each table, in the kingdom version of lunchroom it simply says at every place, "Child of God." Come feast and rest and be loved. Athlete? Fine. Musician. Good stuff. Swimmer? Wow you got up early a lot – sit and rest and breathe. Lost soul? Take a seat. Never been in a room with all of these kinds of people before? Welcome. Now we can be that kind of place too with some work. No assigned seats here. Even the pews believe it or not. You can move around in this place and not throw the whole system off. You can be an altar guild member and a Sunday School teacher and sit with the choir and sing. You can be for social

justice and tradition here. You can be Catholic or Presbyterian or Episcopalian or not sure you are any of those things and still you can eat here. You can run and sing and be smart and still acknowledge your frailties in this place. You can have days when the last thing you want to do is anything at all and your place at the table will still say, Connor, child of God. Katie, child of God. Daniel, child of God. Zack, child of God. You are welcome.

Church as the most non-lunchroom kind of lunchroom there is. Food for all. Place for all. Children of God one and all. May we find the humility and the courage to claim our place at the table while we make room on the journey for all those who hunger and need to be fed.

Amen.