

Eat “Together”

August 26, 2018

Our Savior’s Way
Worshipping Sundays 8:00, 9:30, & 11:00 AM
Pastor Mann

“Dinner’s ready! Come and eat!” How many times have you heard that in your life? When I was a kid my mother would come to the door. “Dinner’s ready!” she called. It was the signal for me and my brother and my two sisters to stop whatever we were doing and come home. It was the signal for my father to put down his newspaper--for all of us to drop whatever we were doing and gather ‘round the table to eat. Dr. Louis Fresco wrote: “The call to table represents the most important moment of the day, when everything else must give way. It is a coming together and a celebration of community and family life.”

“Dinner’s ready!” Some of you know, in the Bible food is packed with imagery and meaning. We celebrate Communion, this meal we eat as Christians. Jesus shared this meal as a last supper with his disciples. We share this meal because it reminds us of who we are as His disciples and who he is as our Savior. That’s how Jesus set it up. “On the night when he was betrayed he took bread, broke it and gave it to them saying, ‘This is my body given for you. Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, do it to remember me.’”

The table is a place of memory—also in our homes. As we sit down together around the table, all our previous meals come together and form an endless succession of memories. What foods do you remember? I love liver and onions. I hate canned peas. I remember my grandmother—whenever we went over to her house she always served fruit salad. The recipe--canned fruit cocktail

(does anybody eat that any more) with some fresh apples and bananas mixed in. Last Tuesday we had the family over for dinner. Fruit salad was on the menu—canned pineapple and mandarin oranges with some fresh apples, bananas and grapes mixed in. Food, family recipes reconnect us with who we are. Holy Communion is like that. “Dinner’s ready!” Jesus says. “Come and remember who you are.”

Do you realize that nobody modeled the joy of eating together better than Jesus? When you study the life of Jesus you soon realize that he is always eating. In fact, Jesus was eating and drinking so much with so many different kinds of people, he was sharply criticized for it. Jesus acknowledges his critics in Matthew 11:19, Jesus says, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, ‘Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!’ Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds.” How is it wise to eat a lot and drink a lot with a bunch of sinners? For Jesus this was a strategy to grow the Kingdom of God. Sharing a meal with people who are far from God is one way that Jesus could bring them closer to God.

Let’s look at Matthew the tax collector. We read about him in the Gospel of Matthew chapter 9. The thing is, Matthew was a dishonest guy. He was a scoundrel. He overcharged his neighbors. People hated Matthew. He had his hand in their pocket. But Jesus did not hate Matthew. When Jesus sees Matthew sitting at his tax-collector’s booth collecting money he issues an invitation. Jesus says, “Come, follow me.” What we don’t read and what must have happened, is that Jesus said, “We’re going to your house for dinner.” Because in the very next verse, Jesus is having dinner at Matthew’s house with all of Matthew’s disreputable friends. Kingdom strategy—eat together. Jesus will use the same strategy in Jericho when he invites himself over to dinner at the house of another tax-collector named Zacchaeus. Here’s what the Bible says, “And Matthew made a great feast in his house and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at a table with them.”

“Dinner’s ready!” Jesus intentionally arranged meals with people who were far away from God. Why? Why would he do that? The religious leaders in Jesus’ day asked that same question. The Bible says, “The Pharisees and their scribes grumbled at his disciples saying, ‘Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?’” And here’s how Jesus answered that question in Luke 5:31-32—“Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.”

I love this story for so many reasons. First of all, it calls me to identify with Matthew. Like Matthew, I am a sinner. But this morning Jesus invites me—he invites you—to a meal. “Dinner’s ready! Come and eat!” In this Communion Meal, where Jesus is truly present, he reminds us of who we are—sinners who have been forgiven. Paul puts it this way in Romans 5:8—“While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus comes looking for you the same way he came looking for Matthew. “Come and eat!” Jesus says, “And remember who you are as my disciples!”

So, first, this story invites me to identify with Matthew—a sinner who has been forgiven. Second, the Holy Spirit is telling me that we need to identify with Jesus and become more like Him. Jesus is the “friend of sinners.” That’s what they called Him. Why? Because He sits down and eats with people who are far from God. What do you think? Do you think that you and I are being called to do the same thing? Think about it—Jesus eats with Matthew, with Zacchaeus, with Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus and with so many others. Over the course of the meal they come to know Jesus and they experience a profound change in their lives. And notice something else. By inviting himself over to Matthew’s house, Jesus gets a chance to have dinner, not just with Matthew. Jesus also gets a chance to have dinner with all of Matthew’s friends—his very disreputable friends. Its brilliant--a brilliant strategy! Eating together gives us a chance to share the story of God’s love with others.

There is something remarkably powerful, isn't there, about sharing a meal with another person, inviting them into your home, sitting around a table, talking and eating together. When we were in Germany we spent three days in the home of Peter and Gisela Wurner. We ate our meals together. We talked together. We prayed together. And when we left we exchanged addresses. It was the beginning of a relationship. When we invite people into our homes, we are saying, "We want to know you better and we want you to know us better."

If Jesus used meals to express love, care and inclusion towards other people, what do you think he wants us to do?—That's right! Just like Jesus did with Matthew and Zacchaeus, He wants you to invite yourself over to your neighbor's house for dinner. Or, maybe it would work better if you invited them over to your house for dinner. Try it both ways and let me know which way works best for you. But there is something about inviting someone into your home and eating together. It develops a sense of intimacy and acceptance that you find no other way. Now, I know we live in Northern Virginia and all of us need to have "House Beautiful." But don't prioritize the house or the furniture or whether the dust bunnies have been eradicated. If you're going to stress about the mess then just go out to a restaurant or plan a picnic or go for coffee. The important thing is to eat together and begin a relationship.

Have you ever felt uncomfortable about sharing your faith? Jesus gives us a model for how to do it—eat together. One pastor, I know, laid it out this way using the word "BLESS." B-Begin with prayer. L-Listen to them. E-Eat Together. S-Serve with love. S-Share your story. I want you to notice that sharing your story—sharing your faith—comes after a long time spent building a relationship. Once you have built the relationship, you have the opportunity (and the responsibility) to share with your neighbor the love of God and the hope you have in Jesus Christ. "Dinner's ready! Let's eat together!"