

This is sermon #6 in a series about what it means for us to have had God become embodied in the Nazorean man called Jesus. One of the “human” things about Jesus is that he ate and drank and enjoyed what I will call “table hospitality” with others. But like anything else with Jesus, meals weren’t just straight-forward. There HAD to be some sort of meaning attached - at least in the eating stories documented by the gospel writers.

We’ve just read aloud two stories that briefly mention eating and drinking.

What stories can y’all think of?

Congregation shares

Table hospitality was such an important aspect of Jewish life. An article I found on [Hospitality in Judaism](#), says,

showing hospitality (*hakhnasat orchim*) to guests is considered a *mitzvah* (act of obedience to God’s will). When one knows of strangers who are hungry or need a place to relax, it becomes a legal obligation. Some rabbis consider *hakhnasat orchim* (literally the “bringing in of strangers”) to be a part of *gemilut hasadim* (giving of loving kindness).

The first time hospitality is displayed in the Torah happens when Abraham invites the three wanderers from Mamre to relax while he brings them water and food (Gen. 18:1-5). Later, when Abraham sends his servant to find a wife for his son Isaac, Rebecca graciously watered the traveler’s thirsty horses (Gen. 24:28-32). The Bible contains many

examples of the importance of being hospitable toward strangers and the rewards that one receives for the act of kindness.

...

Also the Talmud teaches that one's house should always be welcoming and open to strangers. In the Torah it affirms that Abraham always kept all four sides of his tent open, for guests to easily enter. The opening of one's doors is why at the Seder on Passover an invitation is delivered to the hungry and needy. It is read in the Hagadah, "Whosoever is in need let him come and eat" (Ta'anit 20b). During the Middle Ages the custom arose of providing a guest house (*bet hakhnasat orehim*) for the poor; this would later be called *hekdesh* ("sanctuary").

Conversely, an inconsiderate guest in a hospitable house is condemned. While hosts may not make guests feel awkward, guests are obligated to be grateful for the labors of the host. At meals, guests are also expected to recite an additional blessing in the course of *Birkat ha-Mazon* (Grace After Meals) for the host. Also a guest is obliged to leave some food on their plate (Er. 53b) and mind the desires of the host.

The meaning is that a guest should not impose on their host or extend their visit longer than three days. In Midrash Tehillim it states, "On the day a guest arrives, a calf is slaughtered in his honor; the next day, a sheep, the third day, a fowl, and on the fourth day, he is served just beans" (23:3). (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/hospitality-in-judaism>)

In our reading from Luke 10, Jesus clearly understands the rules of hospitality in Judaism. When he sends his growing ranks of disciples (72?) out in pairs into the community (sound familiar Session and Deacons?), he gives them specific rules about how they are to encounter the strangers they meet - he knows that his disciples will most likely be treated as guests:

5 Whenever you enter a house, first say, 'May peace be on this house.' 6 If anyone there shares God's peace, then your peace will rest on that person. If not, your blessing will return to you. 7 Remain in this house, eating and drinking whatever they set before you....

This sounds simple enough - maybe even some advice our mothers or fathers would give: "When you sleep over at your friend's house, don't turn your nose up at what they serve you for dinner. You eat what they give you!" Gracious advice, to be sure.

But, Jesus' disciples would have been Jewish and would have kept kosher in their eating habits. In his declaration to the disciples, Jesus is opening the door for them to break one of the fundamental holiness codes in Judaism. And yet he seems to be saying, that to be a gracious guest is even more important than ensuring that the food they eat is lawful. We would see the budding Jesus movement clearly define hospitality over keeping kosher when in Acts, Peter is told by the Spirit to eat at the home of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Not only does Peter eat with the Gentiles, he also baptizes them, thereby integrating the family of Christ (Acts 10).

This is where Jesus' table hospitality begins to ruffle a few feathers. We can hear it in just those two short verses in Luke 15:

All the tax collectors and sinners were gathering around Jesus to listen to him. 2 The Pharisees and legal experts were grumbling, saying, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them."

With each of the themes I've treated during this sermon series, we're seeing a trend. Following Jesus can be a dangerous business, it can put us in unpopular situations. It is no mistake that two of the most important symbols in our places of worship are the table and the cross. There is a connection. Retired pastor Dick Watts, who was once the interim executive of our presbytery, writes,

The way Jesus called "all sorts and conditions" of people to become a new community around the table was deeply offensive to religious leaders committed to "separate tables." Remember once again the revulsion and violence that marked modern, democratic America (during the Civil Rights era) when table rules were violated by black and white young people. How much stronger was the revulsion in the first-century Jewish homeland. Jesus himself referred to the antagonism he aroused: John was an acetic, he said, and you thought he was crazy; I am among you eating and drinking and you say, "Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!" (Matt. 11:16-19). Jesus' insistence upon an open table, where strangers and enemies became a new community, was a major factor in inciting the bitter anger that led to his denunciation, arrest, and execution. His table led to his cross.

In light of its centrality to his mission, surely we are called to reflect on what Jesus' open table suggests about our mission as the church today.

Eating and Drinking with Jesus: Table Manners for Peacemakers, pp12-13

There's a wonderful thing that happens at the conclusion of the story of Jesus and the woman at the well. We covered this story a couple of weeks ago. This Jewish man and this Samaritan woman should not have been talking in public - let alone sharing water! And yet they are - Jesus doesn't seem to care in the least who might see them (in fact, it's kind of funny that he sent his disciples on a grocery errand just to get them out of the way--they would have tried desperately to dissuade him from having that public conversation with *her*). So, the two of them talk, and she can see that he is a prophet, and maybe even the messiah, and so she goes home to tell her people about him. John sets the story up nicely (this is John chapter 4, by the way). As John tells it, as Jesus' disciples are arriving back to report their food findings with Jesus, the woman shows up with "all of her people," who want to know more about Jesus. As they are arriving, John writes,

the disciples spoke to Jesus, saying, "Rabbi, eat."

32 Jesus said to them, "I have food to eat that you don't know about."

33 The disciples asked each other, "Has someone brought him food?"

34 Jesus said to them, "I am fed by doing the will of the one who sent me and **by completing his work.**" (emphasis added)

Oh, this is so beautiful. Remember how we talked earlier about how showing hospitality (*hakhnasat orchim*) to guests is considered a *mitzvah* (act of

obedience to God's will)? THIS IS EXACTLY WHAT GOD WANTED JESUS TO FULFILL - bringing strangers together and allowing them to experience the joy of one another, and the gifts of God's love, grace, and mercy!

Here in this scene, Jews and Samaritans have unwittingly gathered around the heavenly banquet and are eating food, as Jesus said, that none of them knows about. John concludes this story by saying,

39 Many Samaritans in that city believed in Jesus because of the woman's word when she testified, "He told me everything I've ever done." 40 So when the Samaritans came to Jesus, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days.

Haha, only two days, lest he be served just beans by his hosts (see above!).

You and I still need the nourishment of healthy food and drink. But there is something to be said for being "fed by doing the will of the one who calls us and by completing God's work." In fact we accomplish Jesus' work anytime we open up our "tables" to those who need to be filled, as well as when we graciously accept the hospitality of others.

As we prepare to come to the communion table, there's one more story I want us to hear. It comes from Luke 24:13-35. The event of what we're about to read occurs on the same day as it was discovered that Jesus' body was no longer in the tomb after his crucifixion. There is great sadness and despair and a lack of direction.

Luke 24:13-35

13 On (the same day the women found empty the tomb), two disciples were traveling to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking to each other about everything that had happened. 15 While they were discussing these things, Jesus himself arrived and joined them on their journey. 16 They were prevented from recognizing him.

17 He said to them, “What are you talking about as you walk along?” They stopped, their faces downcast.

18 The one named Cleopas* replied, “Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who is unaware of the things that have taken place there over the last few days?”

(*Probably contracted from *Kleopatros* (compound of $\kappa \lambda \acute{\epsilon} \omicron \varsigma$ (G2811) and $\pi \alpha \tau \acute{\eta} \rho$ (G3962)) = glory and father = “of a glorious father”)

19 He said to them, “What things?”

They said to him, “The things about Jesus of Nazareth. Because of his powerful deeds and words, he was recognized by God and all the people as a prophet. 20 But our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him. 21 We had hoped he was the one who would redeem Israel. All these things happened three days ago. 22 But there’s more: Some women from our group have left us stunned. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 and didn’t find his body. They came to us saying that they had even seen a vision of angels

who told them he is alive. 24 Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found things just as the women said. They didn't see him."

25 Then Jesus said to them, "You foolish people! Your dull minds keep you from believing all that the prophets talked about. 26 Wasn't it necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" 27 Then he interpreted for them the things written about himself in all the scriptures, starting with Moses and going through all the Prophets.

28 When they came to Emmaus, he acted as if he was going on ahead. 29 But they urged him, saying, "Stay with us. It's nearly evening, and the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them. 30 After he took his seat at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. 31 Their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. 32 They said to each other, "Weren't our hearts on fire when he spoke to us along the road and when he explained the scriptures for us?"

33 They got up right then and returned to Jerusalem. They found the eleven and their companions gathered together. 34 They were saying to each other, "The Lord really has risen! He appeared to Simon!" 35 Then the two disciples described what had happened along the road and how Jesus was made known to them as he broke the bread.

Communion Liturgy (*Eating and Drinking with Jesus*, pp24-25)

When he was at the table with them, he took the bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him.

It was in the breaking of the bread that their eyes were opened and the risen Christ was made known to them.

Jesus was known for his gracious hospitality. His table was open to those looked down on and ordinarily left out. It was whispered that he was a friend of sinners and tax collectors. Yet when people came together with Jesus, amazing things happened. Strangers became friends. Thousands were fed. People were healed. The usual divisions did not matter so much.

We long to be part of this kind of community, but we fear the changes it will demand of us.

And yet Jesus continues to show up in our midst, even when we do not recognize it. We give thanks for the work God has begun in us and among us. Let us now celebrate this new life and community yet to be born in the sharing a communion together. Let us pray:

Gracious and loving Spirit, we give you thanks for the work that you have begun in and among us. As we eat this bread and drink this fruit, grant us the courage and grace to keep faith with the open table that Jesus began.

As we break this bread, we remember:

Sisters and brothers ground down by hunger and poverty,
Sisters and brothers oppressed by prejudice and privilege,
Sisters and brothers held back by social, mental, spiritual, or
physical infirmity,
Sisters and brothers estranged from one another,
Sisters and brothers of different faiths and traditions,
Each one of us gathered around this table
All who hunger and thirst for healing and wholeness, including
mother earth and father sky--the whole of God's creation.

Living God, creator and sustainer of all life, for nourishment of body and spirit we give thanks. For the companionship of this table we give thanks. For a foretaste of community yet to be born, we give thanks. When we leave this place, empower us to keep faith with the open table that Jesus began, that our symbolic hospitality will become real hospitality.

Hear us now as we say together the prayer Jesus taught the disciples to pray,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory

forever.

Amen.

