

Date: Feb 7, 2010

Title: What's in a Meal?

Scripture: Luke 22:14-20 (NLT)

¹⁴ Then at the proper time Jesus and the twelve apostles sat down together at the table. ¹⁵ Jesus said, "I have looked forward to this hour with deep longing, anxious to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. ¹⁶ For I tell you now that I won't eat it again until it comes to fulfillment in the Kingdom of God."

¹⁷ Then he took a cup of wine, and when he had given thanks for it, he said, "Take this and share it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come."

¹⁹ Then he took a loaf of bread; and when he had thanked God for it, he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, "This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ After supper he took another cup of wine and said, "This wine is the token of God's new covenant to save you—an agreement sealed with the blood I will pour out for you. Luke 22:14-20 (NLT)

Our sermon for this morning is one of the depictions of what we refer to as the last supper. This is the last time Jesus was with his disciples sharing the Seder meal or the passover meal with his disciples. Luke's account is

just one of three others we find in the scripture; one is in Mathew and another in Mark.

(Once a month/Weekly) we gather together at a prescribed point in our service to celebrate the sacrament of communion. Sacrament means Sacred Moment. It is one of the rituals we practice in our church as a way of remembering what Jesus did for us.

Jesus was a master at telling stories or parables as a way of communicating concepts that were difficult to explain. Jesus told us about how the kingdom of God was expansive and ever growing like a mustard seed that grew from a tiny little seed to a big bush. He used images like seeds, servants and masters, a lost coin, a lost sheep, a lost boy, just to name a few, as a way of putting into simple to understand language a complicated subject. We learn something about the Kingdom of God as we compare it to something else. Likewise, we learn something about what Jesus did for us when we eat communion bread and drink from the communion cup. We recognize something about how we are drawn together through Jesus and what he did for us with His divine sacrifice.

We do this once *(every month/every week)* and I thought it would be a good thing to revisit why we spend the time and effort. I know that for some of you there is not a more holy time in church than the time of communion. For others of you it might just be a thing you put up with because *“that’s what they do here.”* There are some churches that only celebrate communion once or twice a year. Others celebrate it every day. We do it because we believe that in the reliving of what Jesus did with his disciples, we are somehow able to connect with who Jesus is and who Jesus is calling us to be as His disciples. Simply stated, what Jesus did with his disciples was to share a meal with them. When we celebrate

communion, we too are sharing a meal not just with each other but with our savior.

There's something special about a meal shared with friends or family. I was thinking about this and I came up with seven reasons that a meal – especially a shared meal is so special.

1. Sharing a meal is an act of hospitality. Hospitality is an ancient human practice of inviting people – often times strangers – into our midst. Frequently, when people are serious about hospitality they include a meal as part of their welcome. There is just something about sharing a meal with a person that conveys good will toward that person. Some cultures take this more seriously than others, but even if you simply want to get to know someone a little better, it is not uncommon to invite them to a meal.
2. A meal is a place to share what you have with someone else. It gives you a place to share your abundance. If you happen to find a sale on strawberries and someone asks you to dinner, you might consider volunteering to bring strawberry shortcake. Potluck is sort of like that. I'll bring this and you bring that and together we will put on a feast that will be much more than if I just cooked it myself.
3. A meal gives us nourishment. We all need to take food and drink into our bodies in order to survive. If we don't eat or drink eventually we will perish.
4. A meal is something that usually happens at regular intervals. In Jesus' time people probably didn't eat as regularly as people do in this country, but my guess is that when there was enough food,

people consumed it pretty regularly. A regular meal gives us something to look forward to.

5. A meal is a blessing. Today, we take food pretty much for granted, but in Jesus' time people had no guarantee that they would be able to eat. When there was food at the table, people felt blessed. (Actually, food is still a blessing, we just forget that a lot.) A meal can draw us closer to God as we give thanks for the provision that God has given us.
6. A meal is a sacrifice. Again, we don't think about it much, but most of what we eat comes to us because something else gives up its life. It is obvious that when we eat meat an animal has to die, but less obvious is that grain or seeds cut from a living plant will never germinate when they are ground into flour and baked into bread. Even milk can come at the expense of a calf's life. I recently saw a sign that said: Bacon and eggs: a day's labor for a chicken – a life commitment for a pig. But even an egg that is eaten means a chicken will not be hatched.
7. A meal can be comforting. When we eat something that we associate with a pleasant memory, it gives us comfort. If you remember all the times your mom made fried chicken and that brings back good memories, you will bring all the joy of previous meals with you to the table when you eat fried chicken later in your life. I'm sure you've all heard the term *comfort food*.

I have listed seven things that make a meal special and there may be more that I have missed, but these are things that are tangible; my guess is that there are many more intangible aspects of a meal that are hard to describe.

Jesus used words to convey a message, but much of what we take from celebrating communion is impossible to explain as we practice together as a community of faith what Jesus demonstrated for us 2000 years ago.

Jesus said, *“This is my body which is broken for you.”* The bread becomes a symbol and a reminder of what Jesus did on our behalf. He continued, *“This is the cup of the new covenant. This is my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins.”* Jesus is telling us that when it comes to our sins, through the act of his death and resurrection, we are assured of God’s mercy. We can move forward with our lives.

The meaning we take away from Jesus’ words is important, but there is something that goes beyond the meaning in the words when we share bread from the same loaf and drink from the same cup. In this act of communion we are drawn together and each of us communes with God while we are communing with each other.

Usually, when we celebrate communion, we don’t share a full fledged meal. We share a symbolic meal. So from time to time you might hear of a child coming back from the communion rail saying, “Mom, that wasn’t very much. I’m still hungry!” But today, I would like for us to celebrate Christ’s abundance and I would like to incorporate more of the intangibles in our celebration.

Today, we have set up several communion stations and you are each going to choose which one to go to. There are an assortment of breads and juices that you can choose from and you are going to gather there with other people as you share this sacramental meal with each other. Someone will cut the bread into slices and there is butter to put on your bread if you like. Someone will also pour juice into the cups so that

everyone can share in our celebration. And when you have received your bread and juice, I encourage you to spend some time passing the peace with other members of this blessed Body of Christ. I hope you won't drink your juice and eat your bread and rush out the door. These are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Take some time to be with your brothers and sisters this morning.

We're not going to do this every communion from here on out, but what I want for us to get today is that we are a body of believers sharing a sacred meal. It is a meal that helps us grow closer and more intimate with each other and with the one who created us and loves us unconditionally. I invite you to stay at the table and share company with each other until your bread and juice are gone and then when ever you wish you may dismiss yourself from the service. Our benediction will be our words of institution which I will offer right now.

With this meal we remember and celebrate how Jesus took a loaf of bread and blessed it and gave thanks for it and then said, "This is my body which is broken for you." We will remember how Jesus took a cup of wine from the table, blessed it and gave thanks for it and said, "This is the cup of the new covenant. This is my blood which is poured out for the forgiveness of your sins." And as you share this meal with each other; while you are standing there, or sitting there talking with one of your brothers or sisters in Christ, don't forget to say a little prayer of thanksgiving for that person. Let this next few minutes be sacred time and each of the corners of our sanctuary be sacred space as we share this sacred meal together. And may you take the spiritual nourishment you receive from this sacred meal with you so that you might share it with whomever you meet. Amen.