

MEALS WITH JESUS: Salvation

Luke 22:7-20

October 1, 2023

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WATCH/LISTEN: www.fbcjc.org/sermon/meals-with-jesus-salvation/

In 2009, I celebrated Thanksgiving in Uganda, a country in East Africa. I had traveled to Kenya and Uganda on a personal trip, seeing partners, exploring the nations, and visiting Kristen Vogel, a former youth group member serving there. Kristen had made several new friends during her two years in Uganda. Some were Ugandans; some were expats. An expat is someone who lives outside their native country, like Kristen. She was American, but she lived in Uganda. While living there, Kristen made connections and friendships with other Americans living and working in Uganda. The non-profits and organizations they worked for varied, but their longings for the familiarity of home did not, especially on holidays.

Holidays away from families and traditions are difficult. I was only there for ten days, but I remember experiencing some sadness at missing Thanksgiving back home with my family. I pictured them gathered around my parent's dining room table. There would be turkey and dressing, corn and mashed potatoes, pumpkin, and apple pies. And perhaps my favorite, the delicious dinner rolls with hot, melted butter brushed across the top, prepared each year by my dad and stored in this metal bread container they received as a wedding gift in 1967. This is where rolls came from for my entire life. If the rolls don't come from this, I don't want them.

As I was missing those familiar sights, smells, and tastes, so were the expats from the US living in Uganda. One American family who has lived in Uganda for many decades understood the longings for holidays back home. So, each year, they hosted an American Thanksgiving in their home for those far from home. And I was invited to join them that year, along with nearly thirty others.

Some of us arrived early on Thanksgiving Day to help with preparations. Tables and chairs weaved throughout the house, making one long, continuous table with a place for everyone. Decorations were set. Pies were baked. Turkeys were cooked. Taters were mashed. Rolls were prepared, and even though they did not come from my parent's precious metal bucket, I ate one or two to be polite.

As we enjoyed the meal, we visited, laughed, and shared around the table what we were most thankful for in our lives. Afterward, we played one-handed croquet and ended the evening on the rooftop terrace under the stars with continued conversations long into the night.

In many ways, that Thanksgiving meal in Uganda was the most communion-like meal I've ever shared. We might not be home, but we had a meal of memories and meaning that helped us remember who we were, where we came from, and where we hoped to be again one day; a meal that fed and nourished us as we lived in a place that was not our home, yet where we had

been called to serve. A meal with diverse people around the table, making room for strangers like me, with laughter, celebration, and a delicious feast.

It is no wonder Jesus kept comparing the kingdom of God to feasts and banquets, much like the Thanksgiving feast I experienced in Uganda. It wasn't lavish or over the top. We simply shared food, made space for one another, and shared about and experienced together the goodness of life with others. It's a foretaste of the kingdom of God in the here and now, a little slice of heaven on earth served with pumpkin pie.

On this World Communion Sunday, we gather as God's family at the feast around the communion table. Communion is celebrated today in every language and with all types of bread and cup. It is being shared by all kinds of people — young and old, abled and disabled, those who've made few mistakes, and those who've made many. Joining us at the table are Russians and Ukrainians, Democrats and Republicans, people who put up Christmas before Thanksgiving, and those who wait until after.

Today, on World Communion Sunday, people from every corner of the globe come to the shared table to focus not on differences but on our common need for Christ. Imagine one long, continuous table weaving throughout every region of the world, overflowing with God's abundance and grace. And seated at the table are God's children, all expats of sorts, as this is not our home, yet this is where we live and serve until we are welcomed to our forever home with God.

Churches like ours are honored to host Christ's meal so we might gather and remember. Jesus didn't leave his disciples and us with just words and stories to remember him by, but rather a meal full of rich meaning, symbolism, and power. A meal that resonates with the very nature of God and the gospel itself — a banquet of intimacy, inclusion, festive joy, and community participation. One scholar notes that many "theologians ask too much of the table in terms of theology and too little of the table in terms of community."ⁱ

We need to recognize that our Lord's Supper meal today differs from those early days in the church. It wasn't a chicklet and a shot of grape juice. It was an abundant, nourishing meal. It wasn't six minutes long in a brief, organized worship gathering. It was a whole event, a full meal, and a full evening with others. It wasn't shared once a quarter to keep it special, which is often the reason Baptists give for not partaking in the Lord's Supper every Sunday, like other faith traditions. It was shared multiple times a week. It was not somber but rather festive, a celebration, a joyous dinner party among friends and guests in the name of the resurrected Christ. It wasn't a monologue by a religious leader. It was a rich conversation among all lounging at the tables as people shared food, space, and their lives together, remembering Jesus and what he taught them, much like that Thanksgiving meal in Uganda.

Think of all the meals Jesus has shared in Luke. Some we've talked about already in this sermon series, some yet to come: a dinner interrupted by a woman at Simon's house, a meal shared with five thousand on the hillside, eating with Mary and Martha, dinner with a leader of the

Pharisees prompting parables about inviting poor, disabled and blind persons, and eating with Zacchaeus shortly before entering Jerusalem. When we repeat Jesus' words, "Do this in remembrance of me," maybe we might hear Jesus saying, "Remember me in how you eat — and with whom."

In Luke 22, we read Jesus' request to Peter and John to prepare the Passover meal, a custom deeply rooted in Jewish tradition. This meal remembered the deliverance of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. However, Jesus was about to introduce new meaning into this age-old tradition, transforming a Jewish ritual meal into one that associates participants with his death and victory. Luke describes the detailed instructions Jesus gave Peter and John about how and where to prepare the Passover meal for Jesus and his disciples. They were to look for a man carrying a water jar. That will be easy to spot since men don't usually carry water; that was a job for women. They were to follow him to a home and ask the homeowner to show them the upstairs guest room to share the meal. Jesus said the large room would be upstairs and already furnished. There, they would make preparations. And v. 13 tells us they went and found everything as Jesus had told them, and they prepared the Passover meal. Jesus was very intentional about this meal; it was not thrown together at the last minute.

When Jesus and the rest of the disciples gather to enjoy what Jesus has planned for them, he tells them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." (vv.15-16) He has longed to share this meal with them before he suffers. He tells them this will be the last time he will eat this meal until it's fulfilled in the kingdom. It will be the last time he will drink this cup until the kingdom comes. The implication is that the taste of bread and the taste of the cup we receive at the Lord's Supper is the first course of a spectacular eternal feast they will celebrate one day. It will be "fulfilled" later, but it starts now, and Jesus earnestly desired to share this meal with them and us. He longs for us to join him at his Table and experience a sample of the kingdom in the here and now, a little slice of heaven on earth where we can hear Jesus saying, "Remember me in how you eat – and with whom."

Are there any foods or drinks that remind you of something cherished and special? With one bite, you're transported back to a time and place or someone dear to you. When I was a kid, we spent a couple of weeks each summer at Windermere, a Baptist retreat center about an hour from here at the Lake of the Ozarks. It was my absolute favorite place growing up. I loved the campus, outdoors, people, adventures, and freedom to run around the campground. I loved the familiar smells and sounds of the lake and the constant hum of chatter, ice machines, and the conveyor belt of dirty dishes in the dining hall. I can still hear them today.

In middle school, my dream was to work at Windermere and one day own it and live there. I was all in. I often long for those summer days, which are near perfection in my idolized memory. Today, two items transport me back to that place – an Oatmeal Crème Pie and a Shasta Black Cherry soda. These were always in our room, lovingly packed by my mom. I don't know if they even make Shasta sodas any longer, but on the rare occasion I enjoy an Oatmeal Crème pie, that

first bite floods all of my senses with Windermere, and the association is so strong; it almost brings a tear to my eye.

I think that is Jesus's hope for his meal. When we gather at the table, all our senses are overwhelmed by our remembrances of who Jesus was, how Jesus lived, what Jesus has done for us, who Jesus ate with, and what is promised to us, not just in the future but the here and now. Taste and see that the Lord is good! Happy are those who take refuge in him. (Psalm 34:8)

In his book *Meals with Jesus*, author Tim Chester writes, "In a busy culture with people desperate to succeed, we practice in the Meal resting on the finished work of Christ. In a fragmented culture that is radically individualistic, we practice in the Meal belonging to one another. In a dissatisfied culture of constant striving, we practice in the Meal receiving this world with joy as a gift from God. In a narcissistic culture of self-fulfilment, we practice in the Meal joyous self-denial and service. In a proud culture of self-promotion, we practice in the Meal humility and generosity. All these practices are habit-forming, and so seep into the rest of our lives."ⁱⁱ

Just one block from here, the Missouri Governor's Mansion hosts an annual event called "The Manners." Hundreds of children, ages 8-12, have undergone the one-day program during the past two decades. The yearly effort teaches young girls and boys proper etiquette for written and verbal communication, table manners, and how to set a formal dining table. A guest (such as a parent or guardian) joins each of the children for lunch (following a few hours of lessons), allowing the young students to show off their newly acquired knowledge.

Perhaps the church is teaching the Manners of the Kingdom each time we gather at the table so the practices of the Meal might seep into the rest of our lives. When we gather, we remember we do not need to hustle for our worth. It is Christ who gives us worth. Christ is our Sabbath and our rest. When we pass the bread to our neighbor, we practice belonging to one another. We need one another; we are priests to one another, serving, welcoming, and offering grace. When we teach this Meal as a celebration, a foretaste of the kingdom of God, we practice being people of joy and hope, not just one day but in the here and now. When we drink the cup, we practice humbling ourselves to receive Christ's work, not our own. When we gather at the table of abundance, we practice trusting there is more than enough for all. God is our generous provider and our faithful sustainer.

And all these table manners we learn when we gather together to share Christ's meal go with us as we go into the world to live as the people of God, nourished by this meal.

In her book "Bread and Wine," Shauna Niequist writes, "I want all of the holiness of the Eucharist to spill out beyond the church walls, out of the hands of priests and into the regular streets and sidewalks, into the hands of regular, grubby people like you and me, onto our table, in our kitchens and dining rooms and backyards."ⁱⁱⁱ

May it be so. Jesus longs for us to join him at his Table and experience a sample of the kingdom in the here and now, a little slice of heaven on earth where we can hear Jesus saying, “Remember me in how you eat – and with whom.” And may we take the practices of this Meal with Jesus with us as we go into the streets and sidewalks, around our tables and in our backyards, around office break tables and school cafeterias, in corner restaurant booths and little coffee nooks, from Uganda Thanksgiving tables to our own.

Before we share in the Meal together, I want to share this poem by Jan Richardson entitled, “And the Table Will Be Wide.”

And the Table Will Be Wide – Jan Richardson

And the table will be wide.

And the welcome will be wide.

And the arms will open wide to gather us in.

And our hearts will open wide to receive.

And we will come as children who trust there is enough.

And we will come unhindered and free.

And our aching will be met with bread.

And our sorrow will be met with wine.

And we will open our hands to the feast without shame.

And we will turn toward each other without fear.

And we will give up our appetite for despair.

And we will taste and know of delight.

And we will become bread for a hungry world.

And we will become drink for those who thirst.

And the blessed will become the blessing.

And everywhere will be the feast.^{iv}

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All scripture quoted is from the NRSVUE unless otherwise noted.

ⁱ Sweet, *Tablet to Table*, 114.

ⁱⁱ T. Chester, “Meals with Jesus.”

ⁱⁱⁱ M. Graves, “Table Talk.” P.28

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