

God Invites Us to His Table
Sermon on Ps 23, Mark 6:30ff & Mark 14:3ff

Come, people of God, your hunger is never better satisfied than at God's table...

Sister and brothers,
with this sentence we sometimes invite people to come to the communion table. But of course this is not only an invitation to communion. It is an invitation to live life with God, at his table, because God's table is the place where we are nourished best.

God has prepared a table for his people.

We are invited to come and meet each other and God.

Psalms 23 is a confession of faith by a people who dedicate their lives to God who is watching over them, who is protecting, guarding, guiding them, and caring for them...

You prepare a table before me...

God invites us to his table – not only on Sundays, not only at communion – and never alone! God invites to his table the whole family of his children in this world. He or she invites us to a life in all its fullness.

I must say, I love the image of God's table as an image for our lives, and of course as the image for life in community.

My life takes place at God's table - every moment of my life... with all I live and do. And there at God's table I meet you...

We come to this table and it is already set for us. Prepared... There is food and drink, delicious things which we are invited to share and enjoy.

Come, and be fed, God seems to say. Come, sit down, make yourselves comfortable. Come and stay. Come and rest. Come and celebrate. Here is all you need. Abundantly...

Our life takes place around God's beautiful table. If not today, then tomorrow...

This what Christians at all times believed.

Here is food for us. Plenty of food and drink. And more...

Around God's table our dreams and visions are nourished.

Here ideas are shared, plans made, and hands given...

Here help is offered, support and strength.

Here we can find the courage for new beginnings and exciting life journeys.

At God's table not only our bodies get fed, but also our souls are nourished.

At God's table people meet and speak and touch each other.

Here they work for peace, discuss justice, confirm human rights.

God's agenda with which we meet round his table, contains issues of freedom and happiness for all people, equality between men and women, equal chances of education for boys and girls, fair forms of economy, and an end to any exploitation.

God's agenda does not only allow but requires overthrowing rules and traditions when they harm people more than they serve them. We will see that later when we have a closer look at Jesus' life and his relationships to the most diverse of people.

Come, your hunger is never better satisfied than at God's table.

This is what the people did, when they met with Jesus for dinner in the house of Simon, the leper. They came and expected to be fed and entertained... Maybe they were expecting a story from Jesus, or some teaching or healing...

...your hunger is never better satisfied...

To their surprise people at Simon's table witnessed an extraordinary act of touch and tenderness. Not performed by Jesus, but administered to him.

And Jesus did not object at all. He actually confirmed clearly and strongly that such deeds were what the world would later remember and speak of. The embracing and loving, the comforting and sharing, the wasting abundantly by this nameless woman... these are the deeds the world would and should remember... these are the deeds that we should copy and repeat...

Jesus saw meals together as part of God's plan for our lives. He understood organising meals together as part of his divine task. He ate with those who were on the margins of society as well as with everybody else who asked him to come and stay. So often we have stories of him celebrating and eating with the poor and sick people, with prostitutes and tax collectors.

He sat at God's table with all who followed him: men, women and children.

He accepted invitations to all sorts of people's tables. Only think of Simon, the leper, of Zacchaeus, of Martha and Mary, of Peter and his mother-in-law, and many more...

Often there were discussions and disputes at the meals – like when the woman came with her alabaster jar of ointment to “waste” it on Jesus. Jesus then discussed and argued with those present.

Many times he told stories, like the one about the vision of a feast of people in God's kingdom, in which everybody would take part.

God's banquet is described as a meal with an abundance of not only food but also peace and happiness created by God.

The hungry and undernourished people in Jesus' time held fast to this vision and managed to experience together the fullness of creation, because they shared the little they had: bread, vegetables, wine, and hope... hope for a better future.

This experience of the wealth which comes from sharing at God's table, - again used as an image for our lives -, is at the core of the gospels.

Just think of the story of how Jesus fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes.

These are not to be read as historical facts, but as visions of the people who experienced happiness by being around Jesus, who knew that God would set a table for them and care for them.

5000 people and more were fed with five loaves and two fish, and there was still something left over...

Mark even tells us of a second miracle, where Jesus this time feeds 4000 people. I think these stories are not to be read as a record of reliable numbers, but as an attempt to express that the fullness of the kingdom of God could be experienced with such satisfaction when you followed Jesus and became one of his friends.

Just imagine: people who for most of the time are struggling to survive, people who are suffering from hunger day by day, people who know well the words of Psalm 23, tell each other such stories...

They are encouraging each other to build communities of sharing and to live in them.

Jesus had – as a matter of fact – initiated building communities in which people were responsible for each other, in which people prayed and hoped and dreamed together, in which people ate and drank and celebrated together. And that is how the church began: with shared meals and shared joy.

Peace Church today shall be for us God's table!

Here we meet: saints and sinners, friends and strangers, men and women. Our souls and bodies all find nourishment, and we shall experience people's touch and tenderness as well as we shall offer our touch and tenderness to those we meet here.

God wants to feed us today, to strengthen, encourage and heal us... All we need he provides... All we long for, he holds in store for us...

Come, taste and see, he seems to say, live your life at my table, it is worth living.

Amen.