

Share This Feast
Confirmation Sunday – 2 April 2017

Story from East Africa: “I had lunch with God...”

A little African boy wanted to meet God. He knew it was a long trip to where God lived, so packing his suitcase with small cakes and a six-pack of soda, he started his journey. When he'd gone about three blocks, he met an old woman.

She was sitting in the park just staring at some birds.

The boy sat down next to her and opened his suitcase. About to take a drink from his can of soda, he noticed that the old lady looked hungry, so he offered her a small cake. She gratefully accepted it and smiled at him.

Her smile was so pretty the boy wanted to see it again, so he offered her a soda. Again, she smiled at him. The boy was delighted!

The African boy and the old woman sat there all afternoon eating and drinking and smiling but they never said a word. As it grew dark, the boy realised how tired he was and got up to leave. Before he had gone more than a few steps he turned around, ran back to the old woman and gave her a big hug.

She gave him her biggest smile ever.

A short time later, when the boy opened the door to his house, his mother was surprised by the look of joy on his face. She asked him, “What did you today that made you so happy?”

He replied, “I had lunch with God.”

Before his mother could respond he added, “You know what? She's got the most beautiful smile I've ever seen!”

Meanwhile, the old woman, also radiant with joy, returned to her home. Her son was stunned by the look of peace on her face and asked, “Mother, what did you do today that's made you so happy?”

She replied, “I ate small cakes and drank soda in the park with God.”

Before her son could respond, however, “You know, he's much younger than I expected!”

I had lunch with God, the boy said.

So did the old woman.

Shared Joy and Shared Meals

In the tradition Jesus grew up with and lived in, shared meals had something sacred about them. In other words: having dinner together and worshiping were not two separate things but things that belonged close together.

Just remember the wedding at Cana, where Jesus worked his first miracle by turning water into wine. It was important for him that the party went on. He took it as a mission to eat with those who asked him to come and stay. He ate with all who followed him, men, women and children. So often we have stories of him celebrating and eating.

Remember...

The Story of Zacchaeus the Tax collector:

He collected far too much money from the people than he should so he had no friends. When Jesus came to Capernaum, Zacchaeus wanted to see him, so he climbed on a tree. Jesus saw him on the tree and said to

him “today I am your guest”, and they had a meal together in Zacchaeus’ home.

Or...

The feeding of the 5000:

Crowds of thousands of people followed Jesus. When it got late the disciples were worried because the people had followed them far out of the cities and villages and they needed food. Jesus told his disciples to look if someone had food. They found a boy who had two fishes and five loaves of bread in a basket. They gave it to Jesus, who blessed and broke the food and fed all those 20.000 or more people.

Or...

Martha and Mary

Two sisters. As often as Jesus was in the home of these friends, people followed him to listen to his stories. Mary who wanted to listen to his stories stayed in the room with all the others, while Martha was the one preparing food for all. She was upset that Mary had the chance to listen to his stories while she was the one in the kitchen cooking. Jesus showed them both a way that they are individual and important.

Or...

Simon the leper:

When Jesus was a guest of Simon the leper. There was plenty of wonderful food on the table, delicious wine to drink, and the unnamed woman came in.

Simon was not somebody Jesus should have eaten dinner with, because he was unclean. But Jesus did not care. Nor did he mind when the woman anointed him with precious perfume oil. Jesus was one to overcome boundaries and change the lives of people in the most surprising ways.

And...

The last supper. Even though Jesus knew they would betray him, he shared bread and wine with his disciples – without exception. He asked his disciples to remember this meal whenever they drink wine and eat bread, they should recall his way of living and loving. They should remember that God would empower them to go out into the world.

When today the story of the last supper is retold we remember that the comment to remember was giving at a time of crisis. Jesus was not only sharing the meal with friends but with friends who deserted and betrayed him. When people are asked to remember all time they are asked to stay faithful. When Jesus commands us to remember him he also asks us to act.

Sermon Life at God’s Table

Sisters and brothers, friends, dear Emily, dear Maggie, dear Kevin, dear Hanna, dear Ruth, dear Erica, dear Harold and dear David, do you realize that God needs you? Do you understand that you are God’s partners? And that in communion God offers you a pattern of how to live and act as God’s fellow workers in his beautiful and fascinating world?

God offers us coming together for communion, not only as the centre of our worshipping lives, but as the centre of our lives all together. Sharing bread and wine is given to us as a feast. At this feast we are offered to meet Jesus, feel his presence and enjoy the community with him and with other people who want to follow him. In sharing communion God offers us one of the most important opportunities of learning what it means to be a Christian. And we learn through being nourished and fed.

The reading we have just heard tells how Jesus shared an intimate last supper with his friends before his arrest and crucifixion. He took bread and wine, blessed them, and gave them out saying, “this is my body” and “this is my blood”, adding “Do this in remembrance of me”. Ever since, communion services remind us of Jesus explaining the meaning of his life and death through a meal. A simple, normal, daily meal...

In communion God offers us the chance to discover how we can live together in unity, what blessing it may be for our lives if we learn to be thankful, how inspiring it can be to remember Jesus, and how we may want to pass on to others what we were offered and given in Jesus’ name. God offers us Jesus as a role model as to how we should work with him and try to make his dream of peace and justice in this world come true.

God invites us to gather with other Christians, to come into community in the name of God who loves us and wants to fill us with love for ourselves and others. God shows us that we cannot celebrate communion alone, and that it is not a feast that we can create, but a feast to which God invites us. God wants our whole lives to be a feast.

The unity we share in coming to communion is our **unity** in Christ. And this means: It is not a kind of unity which we have when we meet our best friends, “people like us”, those we find it easy to be with, because we are so similar, because we share the same background, skin colour, gender, or political opinions. It is not our own meal, it is the meal of God, and we may find ourselves eating and drinking with a strange bunch of people whom God has called together, and whom we maybe would not have chosen.

Only when we understand that, may we be able to discover the richness which lies in our diversity and the blessing we receive in making the strangers our friends, no matter who they are and where they come from.

This service today, the community in this church today is God’s offering to us to see each other as friends and understand our lives as a big feast that can only take place because we all are here and God is here. God is binding us together and filling us with love for each other.

God also invites us to **be thankful**. To see and understand in what ways our lives are blessed, full and rich...

Usually before we retell the story of the Last Supper and share bread and wine, we give thanks. We praise God for being the kind of God who we glimpse when we look at the life and love of Jesus... We admit to our faults and failures and

rejoice in God's amazing forgiveness. We give our dreams, thanks, fears and struggles to God, so that they may be transformed and used to God's glory. It is not always easy to be thankful... especially when life is not treating us gently. But if we recognize that we are not alone but stand with believers before and after us, with God's people of all times, our lives may get a much wider perspective... God calls us to see not just ourselves but the whole of creation and how we are all somehow connected and belong to each other.

In communion God invites us **to remember**. My child, he says, you are loved and saved. You are not forgotten. You are called by your name every moment of your precious life.

To "remember" in the biblical sense is an active way to see all we have inherited from those who went before us, and who prepared the ground on which we stand. People we know, and people we don't know...

It is the long and fascinating story of love and liberation which we find in our Bibles, and which has the power to shape our actions in the present world.

You are not alone, God says, you are part of an eternal community of giving justice to the poor, the vulnerable and enslaved, of loving because you are so wonderfully loved.

God invites us to communion because she knows that at this feast we will be changed. We cannot remain the same...

The nourishment you receive, says God, is not for you alone, I **empower you to go out** into the world, find me there, see what I am doing there, and join me. I want you at my side, I need you, I enjoy you, and I want you to enjoy me, my child.

And remember that your earthly worship can never be whole, while the world is "in tears". If you understand what my love really means, then you will long, with me, for the healing of the world. Then you will want to do everything you can to mend the universe and make it resemble the shape it had immediately after I created it and called it "good", "just so very, very good!"

The end of each communion service, the end of each feast celebrated in the name of God, is only the beginning of what we are asked to do next: to feed the hungry, to give sight to the blind, to strengthen the weary, to set the prisoners free...

At my table, God promises, not only your bodies get fed, but also your souls are nourished. At my table, I want you to meet and speak and touch each other. At my table I long for you to be working for peace. My agenda for you 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.

Emily, Maggie, Kevin, Hanna, Ruth, Erica, Harold and David, I love the image of God's table as an image of our lives, and of course as the image of your young lives. I hope you love it too.

May you live your life at God's beautiful and rich table, be fed, feel loved, and enjoy meeting the most interesting and exciting people in Jesus' name.

Amen.