

**“You prepare a feast for me”**  
***A Harvest meditation on Psalm 23 by Kat Wagner***

Dear sisters and brothers,

Today we celebrate harvest, represented by this table laid with food and flowers. As I was preparing for this service, the harvest table reminded me of the banquet table which David described in this psalm.

Psalm 23 verse 5 says: “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” Another translation (the New Living Translation) says: “You prepare a **feast** for me in the presence of my enemies.” And the Message version puts it like this: “You serve me a six-course dinner right in front of my enemies.”

**Feasting in the presence of enemies?**

But this feast does not happen in a place of perfect harmony. Where is this feast enjoyed? In the valley of the shadow of death. A place of risk, of grief maybe, of uncertainty. Indeed, the table is laid in the presence of enemies. In the imagery of the Shepherd and the sheep, its like a wolf is prowling nearby.

Is it even possible to sit down and eat at this banquet table? What about the risk of attack? What about the looming threat?

As the author of this psalm suggests, God seems to purposefully invite us to his table in the midst of the challenges of life. In the presence of enemies.

Today, we are invited to this Harvest table to celebrate and feast together in the midst of ongoing challenges. In the midst of the ongoing threat of Corona, in the midst of rising living costs, in the midst of whatever challenges or enemies you are facing and fearing.

**A sacred place of meeting**

But this is where God meets us. God meets us while it still hurts. God meets us during our grief. As we wait for an answer. Before we sense any relief. Before any kind of resolution. Mid-journey. Between places. On the threshold. In the not-yet moments of life. When everything is a big ‘question mark’. God meets us in these challenging times.

With questioning minds, broken hearts and weary bodies we cry out to God. We cry out for God to meet us. Have you ever experienced such a time?

This valley often becomes the sacred place of meeting. In humility, an openness arises within us. And in the valley of the shadow of death, God lays a table for us and invites us to feast with him.

Yes, at this feast, we do not dine alone. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is with us. The One who provides for us, who protects us and leads us is here.

### **Real life application**

But what would a feast in the presence of our enemies look like in our lives?

Here are three examples which may prompt some of your own thoughts...

- Last year, Christian and myself were forced to quarantine at home for 14 days over the New Year. We were separated from our families and friends, unable to attend any parties to see in the New Year. So we created our own special feast at home. We cooked a 3-course dinner, lit candles, and got dressed up. Christian even wore a bow tie. We dined in style in the middle of our quarantine.
- And did you know about the Sarajavo philharmonic orchester who continued to perform music while their city was under siege? Even though members of the orchester had been killed in the fighting, their instruments had been damaged and performance places had been destroyed, they choose to continue to perform music from basements and even in a bombed out hall.
- And here in Peace Church, we celebrate being able to gather together, to sing and dance and eat together... despite the many challenges affecting our lives. Because being together is a blessing in itself.

### **Enjoying the feast**

There's a song which goes like this:

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death  
Your perfect love is casting out fear*

*And even when I'm caught in the middle of the storms of this life  
I won't turn back, I know you are near.*

*Oh no, You never let go  
Through the calm and through the storm  
In every high and every low  
Lord, You never let go of me*

So, in the middle of the storms of this life, God lays a table for us and prepares a feast. I wonder, what does this feast look like to you? I invite you now to try to picture this feast in your mind's eye. You may want to close your eyes.

Here are some prompts to help you build a picture of your perfect feast:

- What are your favourite foods? Your favourite flavours? A delicious curry with aromatic coriander? Chocolate cake with fresh berries? Homemade bread, hot and fresh out of the oven? Rice with the perfect blend of spices?
- What about the table decorations? Is there a table cloth, or a picnic blanket? Colourful flowers, beautiful plates...? Is there a place setting with your name written on it, or is your favourite chair pulled out ready for you to sit down? Is there music, a gentle breeze, warm sunshine, or a cozy fire?
- Now look around the table. Who else is sitting there? Are there any empty seats?

I invite you now to open your eyes again.

This is the feast that God lays out for us. Will you take your place? Tuck in your serviette, pick up your fork, and EAT.

And once you've eaten, maybe you'd like to go out and invite others to the table.

Sisters and brothers, this Harvest we celebrate because "God prepares a feast before me in the presence of my enemies". Amen