

God Sets a Table

Psalm 23, Mark 1:29-39

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The First Church of Christ in Hartford, Connecticut

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My daughter, Leah's, 22nd birthday is tomorrow, and our family will gather at a great little place called Flipside Burgers in Fairfield, near her college, for a family celebration. We love to have special meals for birthdays in our family, and for other times, too! What are your favorite times to gather together for a meal to celebrate?

It's great to eat together and celebrate happy times. But we are not happy and feeling like celebrating all the time, right? Sometimes we are sad or frustrated or struggling or angry. Sometimes we are sick or lonely. Sometimes we might not even have enough good food to eat. Sometimes we aren't even very hungry when we sit down at a table. You know what I mean?

In the Psalm we read today, one of the most beautiful in the Bible, the person who wrote it talks about hard times. They talk about walking through the darkest valley, which means going through a really tough or scary place in their life. They talk about needing comfort and caring and hope. And they believe that God is there for them when those times come. One of the ways they imagine that happening is God preparing a meal for them, like my Mom used to make soup for me when I was sick or sad, when they are in the midst of enemies, of people trying to do them harm or sickness trying to hurt them.

I bet Jesus thought about this Psalm the night he had an important dinner with his disciples. Outside the room in which they gathered, many enemies were waiting to arrest and later kill Jesus. But Jesus believed and trusted that God was with him in the tough times as well as the happy ones. He wanted his disciples to know that, too. So, while they ate, knowing that trouble was coming, Jesus told them that every time they ate and drank, they should remember Jesus by

understanding that by eating together were they would still be together with him. He tried to explain that he would really be in their bodies and spirits, as they ate the bread and drank the wine, their remembering him would make him alive in them once more.

It's a bit hard to understand, but we believe that when we eat together, remembering Jesus, we, all together as a church, find new strength and hope and love so we can be more like Jesus. That's why we do this once a month. Sometimes when we come to church on Communion Sundays, we are happy and comfortable in life, and then we rejoice to come closer to Jesus. Sometimes when we come to church on Communion Sundays, life is hard or we are sad or angry or struggling in some way. Then we can also rejoice that Jesus is close to us, bringing us comfort and helping us figure out how to get through whatever it is we're going through in our lives, reminding us how much God loves us.

And not just Jesus, but the people around us. The idea is that as we eat and drink together, we become one with each other, and with all those in every church around the world who eat this meal. That's a powerful community of support and love we can feel. Just through a little piece of bread and a drink of juice!

No matter what's going on in our lives or in the world, our families, our school, our work, our town, our country when we come here, we can remember Jesus and come close to Jesus. What we remember may depend on what's going on. We might remember how Jesus healed people, like the story we read today. We might remember how Jesus wasn't afraid to tell powerful people they should act with more justice and compassion. We might remember how Jesus forgave people when they did something that hurt other people and God. We might remember how Jesus taught us to love one another in the same way we want to be loved. We might remember how Jesus told people that God loves us so much and wants what is best for us. So much to remember that can help us know how to live, and bring us comfort, hope and joy.

That's why I love this meal. It makes me feel closer to God, and to you. It helps me remember why I have faith when I think about how amazing Jesus was, when I remember that if only we all lived as he taught, this world would be such a different place, and when I remember that I can help that happen by the power of the Spirit, which is Jesus in me, and in you. I am hungry for God and glad I find God here with you.

At the end of the Psalm, after that meal given by God in hard times, the singer sings "I am sure that goodness and kindness, love and forgiveness, will chase after me every day of my life, and I will be one with God forever." I am sure of that, too, even when I'm not, and I hope that every time we eat together, you are too. Welcome to God's meal. Amen.