

**“A Resurrection Meal”**  
**St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church**  
**Prepared by Rev. Tim Moon**  
**April 19, 2015**

No tricks, no flashy entrance with pyrotechnics or fog machines, no soundtrack playing 1980s glam rock as he ran victoriously into their presence. The miracle was that he was there at all, but the disciples weren't convinced. The disciples were frightened, disoriented, and heartbroken, but Jesus comes to them on the outskirts of Jerusalem to let them be witness to his resurrection.

“Peace be with you.” Well, that sounds like Jesus, but anyone could say that. Touch and see my hands and feet. Well, he does feel real. I did feel the nail scars. But the text says, “While in their joy they were still disbelieving and still wondering.” The disciples wanted to believe it was real, but they were still unsure. And then Jesus does the most human of things, he asks for something to eat, and as he eats the broiled fish, the disciples must be ecstatic realizing that Jesus is really alive and in the flesh.

But what seems curious and often overlooked is the manner in which Jesus comes back and reveals himself...a meal. In fact, Jesus comes back to his followers in a meal twice in chapter 24. On the road to Emmaus, the 2 men recognize Jesus only after he sat down at a table and “he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them,” the same formula we see in the last supper and in our practice of the Lord's Supper. Our type of Baptist and our stripe of Christian get nervous when we hear the command “you are my witnesses.” But could it be that part of our witness is through our meals? Food, and eating together well is something that Baptist's and Christians are known for.

Just as Jesus was recognized in the breaking of bread, so the early Christians were known for their meals. In her new book *Searching for Sunday*, Rachel Held Evans says “the first thing the world knew

about Christians was that they ate together.”<sup>1</sup> As Luke’s account continues in the book of Acts, he mentions in chapter 2 that “day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people.”

We are a people of the meal, and we always have been. So why does Jesus choose a meal as one of the ways we will remember him? The symbol of eating from the same table is central in our worship as well as our day-to-day identity.

It may be because food conjures up memories. When I eat lasagna, I almost always think of my first date with Katie. When I eat gelato from La Divina, I am transported to Italy wondering and happily lost along the streets of Venice. When I eat meatloaf, I think of Granny Sue, who made the most delicious loaf of meat, and I miss her. When I eat jello, I think of being sick or injured, particularly I think about having my wisdom teeth pulled. When I eat crawfish bread, I think of Jazz Fest. Food evokes memories and relationships to people in a way that few things can.

We eat, we remember. Do this in remembrance of me. You are my witnesses. Around a table, we remember Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, and we remember to be a people who follow his way in the world.

For the early Christians, remembering Jesus through meal happened in the Lord’s Supper as well as a weekly resurrection day meal. As they ate a full meal together, Held Evans says the focus of these meals “was not on Jesus’ death, but rather on Jesus’ friendship, his presence made palpable among his followers by the tastes, sounds, and smells he loved.”<sup>2</sup> They remembered his fleshy-ness. As they tasted the spices and flavors of fish, prepared just the way Jesus liked it, they remembered Jesus eating the fish, and they remembered Jesus providing more than enough fish on multiple occasions. As they smelled bread fresh from the oven and the sweetness of the wine,

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<sup>1</sup> Held Evans, 125.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

they were transported back to the upper room. They laughed and it reminded them of the way he laughed. And as they cleaned up the dishes, they remembered doing the mundane things with him. They recalled that he had hungered just like them, and they remembered that he had fed them in the midst of their deepest needs.

In New York City, St. Lydia's Church is following this ancient practice of resurrection meal during their weekly "dinner church." Woven into this service are hymns, prayers, sermon, story-telling, and of course a meal. St. Lydia's does not separate the meal from worship, they eat right in the middle. A spilled drink, a kid running under the table, an awkward conversation, a wonderful story, a powerful silence between friends, a soup that will make your day all happens in the midst of worship. At the end of the evening, they clean the tables, wash the dishes, get the kitchen presentable again, and this is also all part of their time together.<sup>3</sup>

By stepping back into this ancient church practice, St. Lydia's invites us to regard all moments as possibilities for worship. From the Lord's Supper, to cooking a casserole, to listening to a person's story, to prayer, to taking out the trash, it's all a chance to open ourselves to worship, and it's all important. Do we ever imagine our Wednesday night's dinners in this way? Throughout the night we have the chance to cook and eat, a chance to learn stories and tell stories, a chance to pray together, a chance to be challenged together, and a chance to clean together, and all of these moments can be holy and life giving.

Pastor Emily Scott says of St. Lydia's, "'We do church this way because people are hungry,' ... 'People in New York have hungry bellies that may be filled with home-cooked food. They have hungry souls that may be filled with holy text, holy conversation. And these hungers are sated when we come together and eat' ... when we sit down together and break bread, we glimpse him for a moment in one

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<sup>3</sup> Held Evans, 131.

another's eyes and say to each other, 'I see Christ at this table; I see him when we sit down together and eat.'<sup>4</sup>

It was when he broke bread that they recognized him. It is when we break bread that we recognize one another as God's beloved.

It is easy to get so involved in our own lives that we forget the ways that others hunger. It is easy to forget the ways that we hunger. And other times its impossible, almost overwhelming to think about the many ways we hunger. But when we come together as a body, we remember all our needs and we find that there is enough to go around.

Meals beckon us to slow down and take our time. And as fast paced as American culture is, slow food is something we know to be true in New Orleans. We don't make a jambalaya or a gumbo in 20 minutes, at least not one we would want to serve anyone. And when we eat a meal together or have friends over, it is not quick. No, we take our time. We eat, drink, talk, eat some more. Chef, author, and minister Milton Brasher-Cunningham says "we need time to be together, to eat together, to take stock of what has transpired since our last gathering. The Body of Christ is not fast food."<sup>5</sup> We also don't get to know each other so quickly. It takes time and a lifetime of work to get to know one another. We come from different backgrounds, economic brackets, and viewpoints, so many different viewpoints. Over the course of countless meals, many discussions, many triumphs, and many failures, we begin to really know each other. A person is no longer a name or a face, they are a child of God with a story that you know. A story that you are now a part of.

Meals remind us that God's table is open for everyone. For Jesus, for early Christians, and for us, this is a revolutionary concept. Yes, something as simple as a meal can be revolutionary. The English word companion is derived from the latin com "with" and panis "bread."<sup>6</sup> Your companions, those who you are affiliated with, are

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<sup>4</sup> Scott.

<sup>5</sup> Brasher-Cunningham, 49.

<sup>6</sup> Held Evans, 149.

those with which you sit around a table. Jesus sat around the table with sinners, tax collectors, fisherman, and outcasts. In the ancient near east, you only ate with those who were your people. So the early Christians were breaking boundaries between class, race, gender, and ethnicity in both the Lord's Supper and the resurrection day meals.<sup>7</sup> And at St. Charles Avenue Baptist Church, we believe that God's table is long, and wide, and open to all who want to pull up a chair. To follow the way of Jesus calls us to become companions with one another, whether we are alike or we couldn't be more different. And every time we eat together, whether at the Lord's table, the Fellowship Hall, or at High Hat Café, we are speaking out against classism, racism, sexism, homophobia, or any other outlooks that view people as less than.

Milton Brasher Cunningham says "to break our schedule as we break bread is an opening for the Spirit. A thin place...One of the ways we draw nigh is breaking bread together, thus breaking down barriers and opening our hearts."<sup>8</sup>

When we come together to eat, when we spend time together, we create these thin places where holy moments happen. In June, we will have Supper Clubs across New Orleans. We will gather around tables of different shapes and sizes, and we will eat meals as varied and unique as the people eating them. As we watch a film about how physical hunger impedes learning in school children, we will discuss how we can begin to change the conversation. And in the fall, we will begin a weekend backpack feeding program in partnership with Audubon Charter School, remembering that when we come together, there is always more than enough for those who hunger.

As we venture to the Lord's table, may we remember that we are all hungry in our own way. As we join together for Wednesday night dinner, may we take time to eat with friends new and old. And as we eat together, laugh together, cry together, and live together, may others recognize the way of Jesus when we break bread together.

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<sup>7</sup> Evans, 149-50; Ryken.

<sup>8</sup> Brasher-Cunningham, 75.

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