



SERMON SERIES
The Table
Gospel of Luke

...eating and drinking were so important in the mission of Jesus: they were a sign of his friendship with tax collectors and sinners. His “excess” of food and “excess” of grace are linked. In the ministry of Jesus, meals were enacted grace, community, and mission.

~ Tim Chester, A Meal with Jesus

Week 1 - Day 1

Imagination

So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. ~ 1 Corinthians 10:31

It's hard to imagine a significant human event without eating and drinking. If you have a birthday party, go to a wedding, watch the Super Bowl, host a neighborhood gathering or mourn a loss, food is involved. Why? Because the sharing of food is the sharing of life. We were created for relationship, and one of the ways of relationship is eating and drinking. When we eat together, we do more than share a recipe, a calorie, a tasty treat...we share life. Joy and pain, happiness and sadness, despair and hope all of this is shared over a meal. In fact the word companion literally means "those who share bread."¹

If eating and drinking are so important to life and relationships, should our life with God not regularly engage it? Our Scriptures certainly do. The kingdom of God is centered around food. Think about it; a meal in the presence of God is the goal of salvation. The first thing God does for Adam and Eve in the garden is give them a menu, the fruit of every tree (except one). The climax of the exodus (an act of salvation commemorated in a meal) is when the elders of Israel eat with God on the mountain in Exodus 24. Isaiah promises a messianic banquet of rich foods that will never end in Isaiah 25. And Jesus anticipates this perpetual meal with God in the feeding of the 5,000, a meal with more food at the end than at the beginning. The last supper looks forward to the time when Jesus will eat with his disciples in the kingdom of God. And the Bible story ends with a meal as we celebrate the wedding supper of the Lamb in Revelation 19. Every time we eat together as Christians we are anticipating this hope.² Add to this the blessings of God in the rhythms of life from agricultural cycles to harvest and celebration, all ending in hospitality, the mutual sharing of life and food.

Why all of this emphasis on food? Because God loves us. He sends seed to the sower and bread to the eater; he causes rain and sun to fall on believer and non-believer alike. He establishes rules and invites those who have not, so that they might have...and he eats with us even to the point of Jesus himself being called a glutton and a drunkard.

¹Rachel Marie Stone, *Eat With Joy: Redeeming God's Gift of Food* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), 1-3. (Wirzba Intro)

² Justin Taylor, "A MEAL WITH JESUS: DISCOVERING GRACE, COMMUNITY, AND MISSION AROUND THE TABLE," <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2011/05/04/a-meal-with-jesus-discovering-grace-community-and-mission-around-the-table/>, (May 4, 2011).

Culminating in a Supper where his followers feast with him and continue his hospitality and presence in the world. Our faith has always been bound up with eating and drinking. This is why Paul instructs us in our eating and drinking...may we do it for the glory of God.

This devotional has two aims, first to help us eat and drink to the glory of God and second to create in us a biblical imagination, so that we may be able to apply the story of the Bible to our eating and drinking. So our eating and drinking may be a spiritual exercise, that we may eat with reflection, attention, conversation, invitation and gratitude. After all according to Norman Wirzba, "the purpose of people who gather around a table to eat is not simply to shovel nutrients into their bodies. Eating together should be an occasion in which people learn to become more attentive and present to the world, each other (& God)."³ At Crossroads, we talk regularly about a couple of things: first, we want to be a faithful presence of Jesus to each other and our world. And second, we want to know and still love...our knowledge implicating us in the way that the world is, we want to be moved by that knowledge to love God and others. Eating is a spiritual exercise whereby we are present to God, each other and our world. Let's practice attention, so that our world can be open to God's divine presence. Here again is Wirzba, "*When people learn to become prayerful in their eating by practicing the spiritual exercises of attention and reflection in the kitchen and around a table, the opportunity exists that they will begin to realize – through their touching, smelling, tasting, and seeing – how every bite leads them beyond themselves into the worlds of plants and animals, fields and forests, farmers and cooks. Eating demonstrates that we cannot live alone. Growing food reminds us that we do not create life. Food connects us to the memberships of creation and to God. Thoughtful eating reminds us that there is no human fellowship without a table, no table without a kitchen, no kitchen without a garden, no garden without viable ecosystems, no ecosystems without the forces productive of life, and no life without its source in God.*"⁴

Lord God, we thank you for the gift of food. The way you provide for us both sustenance and enjoyment in it. We ask for grace to approach the gift of food with thought...that we may eat with reflection, attention, conversation, invitation and gratitude. Help us to be present in our eating...present to you, to each other and to our world, attentive to others' needs, making room for them at our tables and in our lives. We ask all of this in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. In You we move and live and have our being. Amen.

³ Norman Wirzba, *Food and Faith: A Theology of Eating* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011) 28.

⁴ Ibid, 33.

Week 1 - Day 2

Marrow

*You make known to me the path of life;
in your presence there is fullness of joy;
at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.
~ Psalm 16:11*

Why did God create a world in which all creatures must eat? Have you thought about that? Asked that question? I know that on my worst days when I can't eat "right," when the scale says I didn't eat "right," when I eat without much thought, when I feel bloated or hurried or sick or when I eat to deal with my pain or stress or loss...I am asking this question, "God, why do we have to eat?" What's the point?

On my best days, however, when I eat and I am thoughtful and grateful, when I eat "right," when I don't overeat, when I eat the right amounts or portions, or when I eat something delicious, or when I cook for my friends or family something delectable and tasty and elegant, or when a meal lingers into conversation and connection with friends and family, telling stories, remembering together, laughing. On those days, I see quite clearly why God made us to eat. Food is for us...for us to connect...for us to enjoy...for us to be moved to worship...and for us to recognize our dependence and need on God for these things...for the sustenance of life...for actual living. In the film *Dead Poet's Society*, Mr. Keating led a group of young men in the pursuit of sucking the marrow out of life. We were made to eat, so that we can suck the essence of living out of our lives.

Sometimes on my worst days, I try to think of food as fuel. This usually gets me to "right" eating. You know that equation that says "calories in should equal calories out." I just need to achieve the proper hunter-gatherer state of being. Food broken down into the "right" nutrients, the "right" quantities, "right" proportions, "right" varieties. Food keeping my machine-like body running at its peak level. I can obsess about food, its content and its affects. And when I do, it often gets me to "right" eating. But what if this isn't "right" eating. What if this view of food is impoverished? Sure, our food is composed of elements, but it is so much more than that. Food is more than fuel.

At one of the men's conferences I led, we did an activity called *The Table*. In this activity, you go back to your family table at the age of 8-10. Can you picture your table at that point in your life? In the activity, we remember and reflect about a meal with our family, who is there, who isn't, what the mood is, what roles does everyone plays, who's happy, who's sad, who's angry. One of the men talked about a view of food as fuel. His father led the family in this liturgy. It was one with purpose and meaning...and the end

game was that food was fuel, we are at this table to eat...to get this done...to get to the end and be able to say, "I ate...I did what I came to do." This man then shared how when he sits down with his wife and girls, his table looks the same. Food is fuel and we are here to eat. There isn't time to linger, less time for laughing, connecting happens elsewhere. Then the man had his epiphany — Food and the table are for far more than just eating. The point isn't just fuel and getting it done. He realized the liturgy that he was leading his family into was an impoverished liturgy. God made him to eat for greater reasons than this. God made food, because He wants us to connect to Him, each other, our world...He made us dependent creatures, who live at His table receiving pleasure and joy from Him. We eat, because in our eating and needing, we bring Him pleasure.

Lord God, we get so caught up in the aspects of calories, fat, grams, nutrients...fueling these wonderful machine-like bodies you have given us, and often times in our food games we lose sight of why you made us creatures...creatures are needy, dependent for both sustenance that comes from food and the sustenance that comes from the relationships built upon a table. Help us, Lord God, to have better liturgies at our table, liturgies that help us suck the marrow out of the life you've given us, grateful for the pleasures found at your right hand both now and forever. In Christ, Amen.

Week 1 - Day 3

Shyness

...the Father is in me and I am in the Father. ~ John 10:38

A theological account names and narrates the world as "creation." Though not necessarily opposed to scientific narrations as nature, a narration of the world as creation means that our descriptions of the world's members and our telling of the meaning of the world's movements must always be articulated with reference to God as the world's source, sustenance, and end. Understood as creation, the world is not a random accident nor is it valueless matter waiting for us to give it significance. It is, rather, the concrete expression of God's hospitable love making room for what is not God to be and to flourish. Theologically understood, food is not reducible to material stuff. It is the provision and nurture of God made pleasing and delectable. It is the daily reminder that life and death come to us as gifts. ~ Norman Wirzba, Food and Faith

Many years ago I made a pilgrimage for a conference to one of the biggest churches in America, Willow Creek Church outside Chicago, Illinois. At the conference I heard one of those sermons that just stuck. It was delivered by John Ortberg, and it was called The Shyness of God. In it, Ortberg talked about the Trinity. He said God in Trinity is shy. It is not a shyness of timidity, but of deference. A concentrated attention on Another. Not self-centeredness, but other-centeredness. It is a shyness of love. For example, the Spirit reminds us of what Jesus says. The Spirit doesn't clamor for attention on Himself. His constant ministry is to focus our attention on Jesus. You might call the Holy Spirit the Cinderella of the Trinity. The Spirit wants us to be thrilled by the wonder, majesty, and relevance of Jesus. This is also true of Jesus. Jesus didn't walk around saying, like Mohammed Ali, "I am the greatest." He wanted to glorify the Father. He came to serve, to speak the Father's words, to do the Father's works. And what about the Father? Twice, at Jesus's baptism and at the transfiguration, he says, "This is my priceless son. I'm so pleased with Him. Listen to Him. Pay attention to Him. Love Him. Follow Him." Even the Father doesn't draw attention to Himself. The Father is shy in love, too. Each points faithfully and selflessly in a gracious, eternal circle of love. At the center of reality are not atoms or quarks, but a circle of humble, mutual love and interdependence. This is the most real thing in existence. God exists as Father, Son and Spirit in community of greater humility and love than we can imagine. God is Three yet One.⁵

⁵ Alan Fadling, "JOHN ORTBERG: EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE TRINITY FOR PASTORS AND MINISTRY LEADERS," <http://anunhurriedlife.org/2013/03/19/john-ortberg-experiential-knowledge-of-the-trinity-for-pastors-and-ministry-leaders-part-1/> , March 19, 2013.

There is a fancy theological word for this shyness...it's Perichoresis. This word means that the Godhead makes room for another to be. The beauty of the fellowship of the Trinity, is that the Triune God then makes room for us. He is our host, and He makes room for His creation in the mutual love and interdependence of the Godhead. We are relational beings, because God is relationship. He makes room for us.

God creates a world and communicates His own Trinitarian love as the basis and goal of created life. This is accomplished in communion. The mutual love of God making room for us, us making room for them...mutually abiding together. If the Trinity is true, if Perichoresis is true, this means that we do not exist first as individuals and then at some point enter into relationship with each other. No our lives are marked from the first to the last by interdependence...this is our constitution...we are meant to mutually indwell, the other in me, myself in another. So life is then lived through the gifts of others. Life is a gift, a movement of self-offering and receiving love.⁶

CS Lewis touched upon this interdependence when he describes the love he had for his fellow Inklings in *The Four Loves*. As he reflects on the death of his friend Charles Williams, one of the Inklings, he says, *"In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's [Tolkien's] reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald...In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious "nearness by resemblance" to heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each of us has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying "Holy, Holy, Holy" to one another (Isaiah 6:3). The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we shall have."* Tim Keller sums this up: *"Lewis is saying that it took a community to know an individual. How much more would this be true of Jesus Christ?"*⁷ This is perichoresis being lived out in relationship.

Our world exists to make room for others to be and to flourish, and this should transform our view of food. Food is a gift of love. It is born out of the joy of God. We don't eat just to live, but to share and nurture life, so eating is not reduced to consumption or self-sustainment.⁸ To eat is to enter into communion. To enter into

⁶ Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 9-11

⁷ Tim Keller, *The Prodigal God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009)

⁸ Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 11

communion is to enter into the very Trinity and His purposes...to enter into consummation.

Lord, three-in-one, we are so grateful for your love. The way you have existed in love and mutual self-giving for all eternity. And that you have invited us into that! Hallelujah! Oh, Lord, help us to see when we settle for so much less than this kind of interdependent living. Where we try to make it on our own, where we try to retreat from communion, sharing, making room. And may our tables be places where sharing and flourishing are regularly thought about, prayed for and entered in. In the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit, Amen.

Week 1 - Day 4

Eating Means Dying

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. ~ Romans 6:5

This is a humbling, even terrifying, question, particularly for people who are intimately involved in the finding, growing, and harvesting of food. Eating is no idle or trifling activity. It is the means of life itself – but also death. For any creature to live, countless seen and unseen others must die, often by being eaten themselves. Life as we know it depends on death, needs death, which means that death is not simply the cessation of life but its precondition. Death is eating's steadfast accomplice. It is also each creature's biological end, for no matter how much or how well we eat (for the sake of life's preservation), we cannot erase our mortal condition. 3 Why eat if eating, even vegetarian eating, implicates us in so much death? Why eat if eating is the daily reminder of our own need and mortality? ~ Norman Wirzba, Food and Faith

There is a great children's book called *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie*. It tells the story of a mouse who, when eating a cookie needs a glass of milk, then a straw, then a napkin, then he will want a mirror to make sure he doesn't have a milk mustache, and on and on it goes. It's not just a book about a consumeristic mouse, but tells an important lesson about things that are linked together in this life. Food, as good as it is, as tasty and delicious as it can be, food is founded upon death. There's a trail, that if you follow it leads you there. I taught this lesson to my kids, by asking them the question, where did this come from? Where did this hamburger come from? They were quick to play along. They named off this and then that...the farmer, the butcher, the store...the path...if you eat a hamburger then you need to know that it comes from a cow and there was someone who fed and cared for that cow and someone who prepared the meat from the cow to be bought and sold and that path has death ingrained into it. My kids then began to pray the chain as part of their gratitude, God, I thank you for this cow, for his life, for the farmer who fed the cow, for the butcher who killed the cow and made him into edible meat, for the store who packaged it and sold it to us...this list covered not only meat, but veggies as well.

You see food is a humbling mystery and every time we eat we participate in this gift dependent upon sacrifice. Plants and animals sacrificed for our needs. Wirzba says it as follows, "(we) are finite and mortal creatures dependent on God's many good gifts: sunlight, photosynthesis, decomposition, soil fertility, water, bees and butterflies, chickens, sheep, cows, gardeners, farmers, cooks, strangers, and friends (the list goes on and on). Eating reminds us that we participate in a grace-saturated world, a blessed creation worthy of attention, care, and celebration. Despite what food marketers may

say, there really is no such thing as “cheap” or “convenient” food. Real food, the food that is the source of creaturely health and delight, is precious because it is a fundamental means through which God’s nurture and love for the whole creation are expressed. And this food comes through sacrifice and death.⁹

If we have eyes to see, then we can hear the rhythms of the cost of sin and the payment for it. Sacrifice is woven into the foundations of our world. The giving of life for another is the pattern of creation, the way of the world, the way of God’s kingdom. We are dependent upon this sacrifice to live, whether we are killing animals or nurturing the soil to produce the crops in nutrient-rich soil that uses death and decay to bring forth a fertile crop. In all of it we are dependent upon these little deaths to bring us life. Do you hear the rapping on the drum of the Gospel story? Life comes through death.

Father, thank you for all those that die, so that I might live. Thank you for plants and animals through whom you nurture to us life. And thank you for your son Jesus, who came to offer His life for our life, His death for our death to bring us to God. Help us to see this sacrificial offering in every bite and may it make us thoughtful about our membership in your creation. Amen.

⁹ Wirzba, *Food and Faith*, 2

Week 1 - Day 5
Gardner

The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ~ Genesis 2:15

When we look at the New Jerusalem, we discover something strange. In the midst of the city is a crystal river, and on each side of the river is the Tree of Life, bearing fruit and leaves which heal the nations of all their wounds and the effects of the divine covenant curse. This city is the Garden of Eden, remade. The City is the fulfillment of the purposes of the Eden of God. We began in a garden but will end in a city; God's purpose for humanity is urban! Why? So the city is God's invention and design, not just a sociological phenomenon or invention of humankind. ~ Tim Keller

*You make springs gush forth in the valleys;
they flow between the hills;
they give drink to every beast of the field;
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.
Beside them the birds of the heavens dwell;
they sing among the branches.
From your lofty abode you water the mountains;
the earth is satisfied with the fruit of your work.
You cause the grass to grow for the livestock
and plants for man to cultivate,
that he may bring forth food from the earth
and wine to gladden the heart of man,
oil to make his face shine
and bread to strengthen man's heart. ~ Psalm 104:10-15*

God is a gardener. And the garden of this world is the place He expresses his provision and care. If you think about Genesis 1-3, the beauty of the story is a God who speaks everything into being, but then gets his hands dirty to form humanity. Working the ground to produce life...theres a beautiful word used there in Genesis to describe the results of God's making room and speaking things to be...it's teeming. The world swarms with life at the speaking of our gardener God. He is good and His creation is good. And life fills every nook and cranny...creepy, crawly things, swimming things, flying things, stomping things...life teeming everywhere. And God as gardener appoints his prize creation whom He forms from the dust of the ground to be his

apprentice gardener. I found the following job description for an apprentice gardener.

The Apprentice Gardener is a trainee classification that performs routine and basic duties to assist Gardeners in the care of squares, parks, thoroughfares, medians and/or other landscaped areas. Under direct supervision, learns to perform care and maintenance of a variety of plants and landscaped areas, including planting, pruning and pest control; removes debris and litter; operates hand or power lawn mower; performs routine maintenance of tools and equipment; and performs related duties as required.

As I read this, I thought this sums up so much of Adam and Eve's job description...be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...make it teem with life, bring order to it, and make it fruitful. The Psalmist describes this above...God joyfully bringing forth fruit, cultivating life from the ground. God is the gardener conforming us to His image to care for and provide for His creatures. Without this picture, without this calling, without this understanding, we can reduce the gift of food and the grace of eating to desecration. We can then undermine the very garden to provide for our life together...easily landing on speed, convenience and cheapness¹⁰...food, people, animals all just more commodities to be bought and sold, like we are all just playing Pit, the card game with God's creation. All about profits and the 'Bull' market. All about speed and efficiency.

But what if we saw our calling as gardeners? Enhancing the conditions, the raw materials, so that life teems...apprentice gardeners and members of the created order, naming and narrating the world as creation, making room for all of God's creatures to flourish.

Lord God, you are so kind to provide for us through your creation. You do give us food and drink that gladden our hearts, you have made your world teem with life. Help us in our calling to cut back the debris and to plant and establish things that lead to life. That we would be known as your apprentice gardeners joining you in the work of flourishing toward the Garden City that you are creating. In Jesus name, Amen.

¹⁰ Ibid, xiii.

Week 1 - Day 6

God's Love Made Tastable

And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. ~ Genesis 2:9

At its best, eating is a sharing and welcoming movement that makes room for others. According to this theological view, we don't really understand food until we perceive, receive, and taste it in terms of its origin and end in God as the one who provides for, communes with, and ultimately reconciles creation. Created life is God's love made tastable and given for the good of another. The mundane act of eating is thus a daily invitation to move responsibly and gratefully within this given life. It is a summons to commune with the divine Life that is presupposed and made manifest in every bite. ~ Norman Wirzba, Food and Faith

The Wizard of Oz is based on a premise of disappointment. A world emblazoned with wonder, until the curtain is pulled back and the great and powerful Oz is reduced to a bite-sized megalomaniac. Wonder in that moment, awe is taken away, like a balloon losing its air. Have you ever missed wonder? Maybe due to your cynicism or stoic nature, you just walked by it. I have, countless times. Even more so now, I'm afraid, because of the grand world of the iPhone...wonder stolen away, because my nose is in a screen. We are all like George Bailey not realizing our Wonder-full Life because we are dreaming of the far-off places, reading about wonder on Facebook or Instagram and missing it in the flesh and blood, food and drink right in front of our faces.

Do we understand the wonder of food? Do we see God's love made tastable in every bite? Do we see the Trinity, the drama of God's story, our callings, our mission in every bite? Has our knowledge of food, family, tables, God, calling been capsized by the task of living and loving in those spaces? Has it been undone by our cynicism and angst, has it been starved by our hurried busyness? It is so easy to consume food and so hard to savor it. Have you tried it? Tried to get the "right number of chews" in? Soft foods require 5 - 10 chews, more dense foods require 30. Have you tried that? The point of this devotional and partly this series is to get us to slow down and be mindful of our eating...to see all our eating as a spiritual exercise. To eat with reflection, attention, conversation and gratitude. To learn to become more attentive and present to the world and each other. Our church is built upon this idea of faithful presence. Our eating together should be an occasion in which we learn to become more attentive and present to the world. Where we learn to practice attention. So that we may be able to echo this

toast offered by Robert Farrar Capon: *To a radically, perpetually unnecessary world; to the restoration of astonishment to the heart and mystery to the mind; to wine, because it is a gift we never expected; to mushroom and artichoke, for they are incredible legacies; to improbable acids and high alcohols, since we would hardly have thought of them ourselves; and to all being, because it is superfluous.... We are free: nothing is needful, everything is for joy. Let the bookkeepers struggle with their balance sheets; it is the tippler who sees the untipped Hand. God is eccentric; He has loves, not reasons. Salute!*¹¹

Father, please give us eyes to see our food. Help us to have a spiritual imagination that helps us to be present in our eating and drinking to a world teeming with life. Amen.

¹¹ Ibid., 11 from Robert Farrar Capon, *The Supper of the Lamb: A Culinary Reflection* (New York: Modern Library, 2002 [1967], 85-86.