

What is the best meal you ever had? If you're like me, it's awfully hard to decide on one. I can tell you that one of my most memorable meals took place at a restaurant in Pepper Pike; it was a wedding rehearsal dinner for the daughter of one of my ministry colleagues. It's a little ironic that I can't really tell you what I was eating; it was Russian food, that's about all I know, and it was good, and the courses just kept coming and coming. But what made it so memorable was the connection I felt to this family. It was truly an occasion of celebration. It was a joy and a privilege to be at that table. Every time we drive by the restaurant, I point it out to my family and they probably know it's coming each time. I hope you've had some similar dining experiences; if we were to share what those were, we'd probably come to the same conclusion: that it's not really about the food. I mean, you want the food to be good, but there's something else going on at the table that has more to do with relationships.

It is no coincidence that when God talks about his kingdom, he consistently talks about it in terms of a feast. Think back to the reading from Isaiah 55. God could've just said, “I'm going to bless you, and here's how.” But instead he uses table language, and doesn't it grab your attention? “The Lord says, “All you who are thirsty, come and drink. Those of you who do not have money, come buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend your money on something that is not real food? Why work for something that doesn't really satisfy you? Listen closely to me, and you will eat what is good; your soul will enjoy the rich food that satisfies.” Now that is an invitation that we understand, that we can almost feel. Doesn't it make you want to pull up a chair to see what God's going to serve at His table? And what a diagnosis. “Why work for something that doesn't really satisfy you?” God knows we go after so many different things, thinking, if I just have THAT, then I'll finally feel good about myself...but then I don't. And God says, I have something for you, rich food that satisfies, but you have to get it from Me.”

There's a lot more where that came from. When Jesus appears in the world and begins sharing His message—that the kingdom of God is right now breaking into our reality—guess where He goes. A lot. If you said “the table,” you're right, and you're tracking with this concept. Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners and Pharisees. He shared meals with the insiders and outsiders of his society. It was a simple thing, yet a beautiful thing, and it got Jesus into all kinds of trouble. An accusation was leveled against Him. Religious people were scandalized. “Jesus eats with sinners!” was the charge. It was an accurate charge. By joining people at the table, Jesus was sending the message, “I want to have a relationship with you.” And there's only one kind of person that Jesus could dine with: a person who suffers from the problem of sin. This offended the religious and attracted the outsiders.

Then one day, Jesus receives word that John the Baptist has been killed. He was looking to spend some time alone in prayer to his Father, so he sets out in a boat. When he reaches the shore, rather than finding the retreat time he desired, he finds a crowd of

people waiting there for him. That might be the last straw for you or me, but Jesus just continues to serve. Then, his disciples point out the practical problem of getting all these people fed. Their idea is to send the people away. Jesus has a different idea.

Taking five loaves of bread and two fish, Jesus thanks His Father for it, blesses it and gives it to the disciples, who have just become servers. They take the food and serve it to 5,000 men, plus the women and children who were there, and Matthew makes it a point to tell us that “all the people ate and were satisfied.” That means, of course, that they ate until they were full. And not only that, but there were twelve large baskets of leftovers remaining. What in the world was going on?

This is what was going on: Jesus used his divine power to show what the kingdom of God is like. The kingdom of God is a feast, it is a banquet. At first glance, it doesn't look like much; it might even look like a joke. Five loaves and two fish and 10,000 people with growling stomachs. But here's the point: Jesus is involved. Focus on the problem—the number of people and the lack of resources—and it seems unsolvable. Focus on Jesus—who cares for the people and has complete command of the resources—and you've got dinner in a desolate place, with more than enough to go around. I've sometimes wondered, maybe you have too, what it must have been like to eat the food that Jesus multiplied. What did it taste like? What were the conversations like with the people sitting there on the grass? Who asked for seconds? How busy were the disciples as they became waiters that day? What was it like to eat at the Feast, the Feast hosted by Jesus?

Here's another simple, beautiful thing. You don't have to wonder. You can eat the Feast hosted by Jesus today, in just a few minutes. No, it's not bread and fish. At this reception, the main course is bread and wine. This food is the result of Jesus once again being at a table. On the night when he was betrayed, he was at the Passover Table when he took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying “this is my body.” He took the cup of wine after supper, the cup of redemption, saying “this is my blood.” He continued, “As often as you eat and drink this way, do it in remembrance of me.” On the evening when he rose from death, Jesus was once again at a table, where he took bread, gave thanks, and began to give it to the people He was with, and they recognized Him with overwhelming joy! Ever since, ever since, those who believe in Jesus have gathered together for the Feast hosted by Jesus; for the Banquet of His Body and Blood, hidden in bread and wine.

Please hear me when I say: this is the kingdom of God, breaking into our reality. This eating and drinking is a celebration of what Jesus has done; and what he is currently doing for you and in you. Whenever the Lord's Supper is offered, you are invited to come, with all your burdens and troubles, to the table that Jesus has prepared; to come as an honored guest, to be served by the Lord of heaven and earth himself. In the middle of trying times, this festive meal gives you sustenance for this day, and at the same time gives you a sneak preview of your future. A celebration is coming; the party of all parties; one that never stops. It's the Feast of Victory; of Jesus' victory over death; a victory He shares with you. A beautiful bash of eternal proportions. We get a preview of all that right here. So until that day, let us truly celebrate the rich food that satisfies. Welcome to the Lord's Table.

