

# “Enough To Share”

Rev. Dr. David Holyan

First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

Sunday, October 7, 2018

## **Ephesians 3:14-21**

*For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.*

*Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.*

## **Philippians 2:1-3**

*If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.*

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God, I pray that you would take whatever is on our hearts this day. I pray that you would take the words that we've heard read from Scripture, the words we've offered in song and in prayer, and the words that you've laid on my heart to share. Bless them. Break them, and distribute them as your Word. And by the power of your Spirit, speak to us, feed us, encourage us, challenge us to love and serve you and to love and serve our neighbors as ourselves. I ask this in the name of the one who was the embodiment of love, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today we celebrate World Communion Sunday, a day in the life of the Church where we stop our regular traditions or change them to acknowledge that we are one with sisters and brothers around the globe, people that we will never meet, people who live in circumstances so different from our own yet who gather together around a table, break bread, share a cup, and proclaim in community God's goodness to them and to their neighbors. And I realize in preparation for this sermon how important meals are and how easy it is to let the importance of a meal slip through our fingers. I realize for myself and for many of us, some of the best part of who we are and what we share happens around a table.

In fact, this afternoon after church, Jani and I are going to meet with our daughter Anna and our son-in-law Buster, also known as Anthony-- we're going to sit around a table so that we can plan a meal that's going to happen next Saturday when we have a party for our son Sam's engagement to girl Sam. So we're going to have a meal to plan a meal. Why? Because this is where we can actually sit down and talk to each other. Not a text message, not an email, not a phone call, but actually sit face to face and have a conversation while eating. And the conversation will be about eating and feeding others so that we have a good time just like we hope to have a good time today. And the pot just keeps getting stirred around the idea of meals and the goodness that can come from them. So in preparation for today, I thought, "I wonder what other people have done with communion, with that sacred meal." And thanks to the internet, which I so often criticize, I was able to watch a segment of Russian news where the newscaster and her producer and cameraman were having communion in the desert in Tanzania in Africa. They were in a Church that was built with sticks that had fabric as the walls. I'm not sure what the roof was because I never quite saw it in the

video. But inside this hut in the middle of nowhere, people were gathered together singing songs that sounded a lot like the choirs sang. Not quite as many people. There were maybe 12 or 13 folks in the hut. But they were singing and dancing. And the minister in a suit had a big jug of grape juice and 15 or 16 glasses lined up. And he's singing and dancing. And he unscrews the grape juice. And he's pouring it into all the glasses. And then he has two packages of what look like Fig Newtons to me, but I wasn't sure. But some kind of bread thing. And he opened those up and poured them into a big bowl. And all of the people in there came forward and grabbed some bread and drank some juice and kept singing and dancing. And then they show the little kids walking up and getting a cookie and drinking some juice. And everyone's singing and dancing. And I thought, "This is amazing, that in the desert in Africa, they are coming together in joy to share a sacred meal, singing and dancing while they drink the juice and eat the bread." And you can hear them talking about Jesu Kristu in their song. They're singing and talking about Jesus.

And then I remembered as an exchange student to Italy on a field trip, I had the privilege, although at that time it wasn't quite as special as I would think it is now, to go to Santa Maria delle Grazie in Milan and see Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper, this amazing fresco that's painted on a wall in their cafeteria. And what a lot of people don't know about the painting is that it was an experiment of da Vinci's technique that he had never used before. They asked him to come and paint a painting. And he decided on the Last Supper. And there's lots of conversation and correspondence about what it was going to look like and everything. And he got it all set up and went in and painted it on a drywall with regular paint. Fifty years later, it started to flake off the wall so much so that not very long after that, other artists came and began repairing it. One of the greatest masterpieces of all time just sat on a wall in a cafeteria of a church. The people didn't think much of it because, at one time, they cut a hole in the wall and cut off Christ's feet. At another time, so unaware, whatever they decided, that rather than a cafeteria, they were going to make the refractory, place a stable where they had their horses. And because of the weather in Milan and the horses and the age and the technique, the painting just kept getting worse and worse and worse. In fact, during the war, the dining hall was bombed and the only wall that survived was the wall with the painting. And there had been over a dozen major restorations of this masterpiece. But what I learned this week, that I was unaware of, was that the perspective that's created in this masterpiece, the center point, the focal point that Leonardo used in creating it, it all comes right back inside Jesus's right eye. Everything begins there in the eye of Christ and flows out. And again, it's a painting of Jesus having a meal with his friends. Think about all the amazing things that Christ did. And one of the masterpieces is about him having a meal with his friends.

Now I'm hoping I'm going to start to make you hungry. Many of you know the story about Babette's feast. It's the story of a refugee from the French war who ends up in Denmark. She's not recognized. She needs a place to stay. She goes to the home of these two sisters whose father started a very strict religious group. He's passed away but these two sisters who never married because he wouldn't let them take her in and tell her that they can't really pay her to be their cook and cleaner but she says she'll work for free. So she works with them and you see the very strict life that they live and they get flashbacks into the lives of these two sisters in their earlier existence when suitors came to try to marry them and their father said no. And at one point, Babette wins the French lottery and gets 10,000 Francs. And rather than using that money to go back to France, she decides instead, she's going to cook a special meal for the people that are there. She orders all kinds of exotic items and they come in from France in crates, wines, and food, poultry, a turtle and one of the guests is a suitor of one of the sisters who's not a member of the community.

As they get closer to the time of the meal, and everyone's getting ready, the sisters start to realize that eating this food will be a sin because it's going to be so delicious. So they decide, along with the members of the community, "We're not going to talk about the food or the cooking or Babette during the meal because this is serious business. We're going to eat and that's it." But the suitor doesn't know that. He's now a general in the army married to a woman who's in the court of the queen of Denmark. He comes in and as every course comes out, he is just oohing and awing. He puts the turtle soup in his mouth and makes a noise that I'm not sure you can make in a church. He loves this stuff. And then out comes what's called quail in their nest. Roasted quail that's been marinated in Madeira wine and cognac vodka all night wrapped in bacon seared in duck fat and then roasted in the oven sits inside a bed, a nest of puff pastry with fig sauce, with the wine poured over. And they lay it on the table and everyone's eating and the people of the community are trying so hard not to make a noise and the general is just gushing about how delicious everything is. And then he says, "I've had a meal like this before in Paris at Cafe Anglais. It was amazing." And Babette comes out and at some point in the evening and identifies herself as the head chef of that cafe. She tells them that a meal like this at the cafe for 12 people, 12 people like the disciples, would've cost 10,000 French Francs.

Exactly what she spent. She blessed the sisters and their community for their generosity by feeding them one meal and that was enough. Again, people gathered around the table doing what is most important, being together, being blessed, being loved and sharing.

So recently, a friend of mine, a dear friend who I don't think is here today, got reservations at the French Laundry in Napa Valley. The French Laundry is known as one of the greatest restaurants in America. He got lunch reservations. I found out that he had made reservations for three, for he and his wife and his daughter but his daughter couldn't make it so I volunteered to fly out and join him only to have him say, "Once I heard she couldn't join us, I changed the reservation to two." And I'm like, "Seriously? It's Friday. It's my day off. I could've been there." The French Laundry. So it started me thinking if I were to put a restaurant on my bucket list, what place would it be? And since he's been to the French Laundry, I thought it can't be that. So I googled, "What's the best restaurant in the world?" And up came Osteria Francescana in Modena, Italy. The best restaurant in the world where for only \$118, you can have a 12-course meal with wine pairings. And then you know on the computer, there's that thing up on the top of Google where it says ALL or IMAGE, VIDEO, and other things like that? I went to images and just clicked. It made my knees weak to look at this food--it is like looking at a Leonardo da Vinci painting. It is unbelievable how things are laid out on the plate. One of the dishes is called An Eel Swimming Up the Po, which is a river in Italy, and it's four little pieces of fish that it seemed to be wrapped in something floating on this green broth with little tiny flowers on foam pillows, floating around. And it's just like, "Oh my goodness, it looks so good." And then I was curious. How long does it take to eat a 12-course meal? Four hours. And I thought, "Well, they probably could never get a reservation." And so I went to the reservation page and just started clicking, like, "I want reservations for two for dinner." And on December 14th at 8:00, Jani and I could be in Italy having dinner there. We're not going, unfortunately [laughter]. At least, I think we're not.

But again, it's about the power of food bringing people together and having an experience that changes their lives. I don't really like fussy food like that, but the pictures were amazing. And then I decided, I'm going to figure out one of the best restaurants in Saint Louis, so I searched that. And thank God, on the list is Stacked STL. A place in South County by the river where they hand-make your hamburgers. Been there, done it, \$8. It's delicious. You can go. Tell them David sent you. Good food feeds more than just our stomachs or our lives. Good food feeds our souls, allows us to be in conversation with each other, allows us to slow down in today's world. So thinking about that, I wonder what people really hunger for as they sit down and share food together. I know that I hunger for is love, acceptance, forgiveness, a place at the table. And probably what I hunger for most is the ability to make a positive and empowering difference in the life of someone else.

Believe it or not, I think this is one of the best restaurants in the world. Whether it's a table in Africa or a table here in Kirkwood, when we come to this table, we are fed with love and acceptance and welcomed and reminded that the spirit lives within each of us so that we can serve our neighbors with energy, intelligence, imagination, and love. It may only seem like a piece of bread and a cup of juice. But somehow, I think this meal is more than that, and I'm glad we get to share it together. Amen.