

## Family Dinner

Share family dinner memories.

When Sara Miles was forty-six, she wandered into an unfamiliar church, ate a piece of bread, and took a sip of wine. Until that moment she'd had no interest in religion. Traveled, liberal, and lesbian, she was raised in a secular home and remained deeply skeptical of what she'd seen of the church, particularly its more fundamentalist iterations. She'd never been baptized, ever read much of the Bible, never prayed the Lord's Prayer. But at St. Gregory's of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco, someone invited Sara to the table.

"And then something outrageous and terrifying happened," she says. "Jesus happened to me."

### Luke 22:1-23

- ▲ The first thing the world knew of Christianity was that they ate together.
- ▲ Nora Ephron, "A family is a group of people who eat the same thing for dinner."
- ▲ On the first day of the week the church gathered to celebrate the day the whole world changed. They remembered Jesus with food, stories, laughter, tears, debate, discussion, **drink a toast to resurrection** and clean up.
- ▲ The focus of early communion services was not on Jesus' death, but in Jesus' friendship and his presence.

### Bread

Jesus taught us to pray, "Give us this day our daily bread."

Bread is the staple of life.

Food is the language of care.

Bread is universal. No matter the plainness of the food in the bush in Africa or the spiciness of the curries in India or Pakistan, the bread is delicious and salvation to everyone.

Bread is comforting. Who doesn't find comfort in a hot, fresh buttered biscuit?

Mark 7:24-30 children's bread

Something about communion triggers our memory and opens our eyes to Jesus at The Table.

Jesus is the very essence of our life. He is just what we need daily. He is our shepherd, our healer, our provider, the way, the truth and the life, the way to the Father.

### Wine

**Psalm 34:8**, "Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good."

Jesus' first miracle was turning water into wine (**John 2**)

- Even the most modest wedding feast lasted a few days time.
- Wine was not a luxury; it was a necessity. Water was scarce and often contaminated. Clean drinking water is still the world's greatest need. Wine was essential in cooking, nourishment and entertainment.
- Running out of wine was shameful.
- Grain, oil and wine indicated God's blessing. The absence of the same was considered a curse.
- Wine was a staple, the stuff of life.
- They brought Jesus six stone pots, used for Jewish purification rituals. They held 20-30 gallons each. 150 gallons was more than enough.
- Making wine of water was not just showing off. Jesus met the most practical need of the moment. God's glory resides in the stuff of everyday life.

## Sacrament

God works through life and people. The most basic elements of life, bread and wine, offered to the Lord communicate his healing presence. It becomes a sacrament.

Sacrament is a way of encountering the mystery. Jesus becomes present in the middle of his friends gathered together sharing the bread and the wine.

The mystery is also revealed in marshmallows, hot dogs and hot chocolate around a fire pit, or in the food pantry line, carry-in dinners, a box of donuts and coffee shared in a Sunday school class, or in the potato salad and fried chicken brought to a grieving family. The mystery is certainly revealed in wedding cake and the other food, drink and dancing in the celebration of the union which reveals the mystery of Christ and his church.

The grand themes of theology have their place. Yet, love takes root in specific moments when we intentionally enter one another's pain, joy, family, messes, dinners and celebrations.

Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding feast. This is sacred. His biggest miracle was multiplying a few loaves and fish turning a barren wilderness into a banquet hall. This is sacred. On the night of his betrayal while celebrating the Passover with his closest friends, He offered the first communion. This is sacred. Every time we meet and serve bread and wine in remembrance of this night it is sacred.

Jesus' presence and friendship is celebrated. The healing, forgiving, comforting presence of Jesus becomes tangible to us. The bread and wine become Jesus' flesh and blood to us.

## Open Hands

We don't have all of the answers. We come to The Table by faith releasing our questions and troubles to Christ. We come to release and to receive.

We are saying, "I am not in control. I am not the boss of what happens to me. My life is not my own. I have been bought with the blood of Christ. My life belongs to Him."

Grace is a gift; it is free, never earned nor deserved. No one is worthy of receiving Communion.

Grace cannot prevail until I am convinced that no one is keeping score. This is why we need Eucharist. We open our hands to God's grace.

Opening our hands is the practice of letting go and letting in.

## Open Table

Jesus is present in the bread and the wine. If people are hungry, let them come. If people are thirsty, let them come and drink.

We are not bouncers to the heavenly banquet, charged with keeping the wrong people away from The Table and out of the church.

The gospel needs a family of sinner saved by grace committed to opening wide the doors of the church and shouting, "Dinner is served! There is bread and wine. Come eat, sing, pray, sit, listen, serve, grow and share your life with us." **There is always room at The Table.**

## Invitation

We worship and serve the God who saved Nineveh, much to the chagrin of Jonah. This is the God who is like the vineyard manager who same wages to the worker hired for one hour as to the one who worked all day. This is our Father who welcomed his prodigal son home with a robe, a ring and a feast. This is the Shepherd who leaves the 99 good and faithful sheep to search for one rebellious black sheep of the family.

We have a choice every day to join in the revelry, to imbibe in the sweet wine of undeserved grace or to pout like Jonah. We can argue fairness like the vineyard employees and resent our own brother like the prodigal's older brother. In doing so we miss the mystery of Christ in us the hope of glory!

At its best, the church offers the sacraments by feeding, healing, forgiving, comforting and welcoming those whom God loves. At its worst, the church withholds the same, locking God behind the doors of theology, rules, doctrinal statements and a building. Our God is in the business of transforming the ordinary into the sacred, scraps of food into feasts and empty vessels into fountains of fine wine.

There is always enough. There is room at The Table. Taste and see that the Lord is good!

Jesus' greatest invitation is found in **Revelation 19:9**, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!"

The gifts of God for the people of God. Take them in remembrance that Christ died for you, and feed on Christ in your hearts by faith with thanksgiving.

Discussion Guide

## Family Dinner

Read Luke 22:1-23

- ▲ Do you have specific memories of Communion? If so, what are they?
- ▲ When you remember Christ's body and blood, what are your thoughts?
- ▲ What does it mean to focus on Jesus' friendship and presence more than his death in the Communion service?
- ▲ How would it affect our faith to share more meals together with fellow Christ followers?
- ▲ Why do you believe Jesus used bread and wine as the elements of Communion?

Read Mark 7:24-30

- ▲ What did Jesus refer to as "children's bread?"
- ▲ How does this affect your faith for healing and/or deliverance?

Read John 2:1-10

- ▲ What was the real problem of running out of wine?
- ▲ Through this miracle what problem did Jesus solve?
- ▲ What other thoughts do you take from this account?
- ▲ Why do you believe Jesus made around 150 gallons?
- ▲ What significance do you find in that this wine was the best?