

# The Family Table

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Matthew 26:17-30

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Special occasions are often connected to food. Usually a day or two before my birthday Jamie always asks me, "Do you want me to fix you dinner or would you rather go out?" This year it was so hot when my birthday rolled around and our air conditioning is out so she just told me, "It is too hot and I am not using the oven, so where to want to go eat for your birthday?" Thanksgiving, Christmas and Easter are the holidays we associate with big meals, but there are also graduations, funerals and of course anniversaries that are occasions for celebratory meals.

A man wanted to do something special for his wife for their anniversary. He made reservations at her favorite restaurant, left work early and went to a friend's house and showered, shaved, put on some choice cologne, bought her a bouquet of flowers. He went to the front door and knocked. His wife answered the door and exclaimed, "Oh no! This has been a terrible day! First I had to take Billy to the emergency room and get stitches in his leg, then your mother called and said she's coming for 2 weeks, then the washing machine broke, and now this! You come home drunk! Usually making plans for a special anniversary dinner is a good thing.

As a child I remember waking up on Thanksgiving or Christmas morning to the wonderful smells of the food my mom was fixing and just by the smells I knew that it was a significant day. But by far the smell that I loved the most was my Grandma Reed's homemade yeast rolls. Like Pavlov's dog when I smelled those rolls my mouth began to water and my stomach began to growl. I could not wait to hear those 4 important words, "Come and get it!" Even today I associate the smell of fresh baked bread to many fond memories with my family.

I served a church in Kentucky where the bread for communion was actually baked in the church and when we came to church we were welcomed by the glorious smell of fresh baked bread. When people walked in the doors and they smelled the bread they knew that it was a significant day because we would be gathering around the Lord's Table as a family.

While we do not bake the bread that we use for communion here at Hampton Baptist a number of people gather before hand to prepare the Lord's Table for us. Before we come into the time of communion we should be preparing ourselves, our hearts and minds to "come to the table." How can we do this? I think we can begin by looking at the example offered by the Psalmist.

In Psalm 26 the Psalmist asks for vindication for he has "led a blameless life" and has "trusted in the Lord without wavering." But from reading previous scripture passages we know that the Psalmist, whether it was David or someone else, was not blameless so what does he mean by this? I believe that the Psalmist was saying, "God, I am trying the very best I know how to live a life that is pleasing and acceptable to you. I really do want to serve you with all that I am." The verse that is at the top of our worship bulletin also comes from the Psalmist, "I wash my hands in innocence, and go about your altar, O Lord." Of course we know that what has come to be known as the Lord's Supper was not practiced in the Old Testament, but the

Psalmist recognized that for true worship to take place he needed to approach the throne or altar of God clean and without sin. The Psalmist was asking for forgiveness so that he would be found acceptable in the presence of God as he worshipped.

I bet when you were a kid and you came to the supper table, before you got a chance to sit down you were reminded to wash your hands. We don't work in the garden or change the oil in the car and then sit down to eat dinner with our family without washing our hands. I remember coming back to the table and having my hands inspected or examined. Many times I was sent back with the admonition, "Go back and use soap this time."

In I Corinthians 11:28 Paul says that, "Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup." We need to wash up, which means as individuals we need to humbly approach God and confess our sins and ask for forgiveness.

At Hampton Baptist we offer an open invitation to all those that profess and proclaim Christ as Savior to join us as we celebrate communion. A part of the professing and proclaiming is our agreement with God that we are sinners and in need of grace and forgiveness that only Jesus can offer and provide. In our preparation to receive communion as believers we are to confess sin and acknowledge our brokenness, and seek reconciliation with God and our neighbor.

In our personal preparations we must approach communion with awe and respect. We at Hampton Baptist celebrate communion on the first Sunday of the month. Growing up and in some of the churches that I served in Kentucky we celebrated communion once every quarter or once every three months. There are many churches that serve communion each week. Calvary United Methodist in Frederick, Jamie and Natalie's home church and the one I served before I came here recently decided to offer communion each week to those that would like to receive it. For those that receive the bread and cup weekly or even for us who do it once a month, it is something that we can begin to take it for granted. Possibly in receiving it so frequently individuals don't consider the implications of this act or the impact it has on their lives. It could easily become just another part of the service.

When Pastor Roger Rose was a child he had a younger brother that was killed in a tragic accident. A dirt road ran alongside their home, and only on rare occasions would a car be seen on it. But one day his brother was crossing the road on his bike and a car came roaring over a nearby hill, and he was run over and killed.

Roger said, "Later, when my dad picked up the mangled, twisted bike, I heard him sob out loud for the first time in my life. He carried the bike to the barn and placed in a spot we seldom used. Dad's terrible sorrow eased with the passing of time, but for many years whenever he saw the bike, tears began to stream down his face."

"Since then I have often prayed, 'Lord, keep the memory of your death, and the grace and salvation it provided that fresh for me. Every time I come to your table, may my heart be stirred as if it occurred only yesterday. Never let the communion service become a mere formality, but always a tender and touching experience.'"

The attitude of our hearts and minds as we approach the Lord's Table has a significant bearing on how we embrace and how God embraces us during communion. To understand this we need to take a closer look at the New Testament passage that was read earlier. The setting for the conversation was of course the Upper Room and took place during the supper that Jesus shared with his disciples to celebrate Passover. While reclining around the table Jesus said, "One of you will betray me." One by one the disciples asked Jesus, "Is it I, Lord?" When it came to Judas' turn to ask, he said, "Is it I, Rabbi." Did you notice the difference? All the other disciples referred to Jesus as Lord, but Judas called him Rabbi or teacher. There is a big difference between Lord and teacher. For the 11 Jesus was much more than a good teacher, he was someone they had dedicated their lives to, Jesus was their Lord.

Who is Jesus to us, just some good teacher that we have heard stories about most of our lives or someone worthy of committing our life to following? Our attitude is very important in how we relate to Christ and how he relates to us.

In many faith traditions at the beginning of communion the priest or minister offers a blessing and consecrates the bread and the cup. They believe that during the blessing and consecration the Spirit of God descends upon the bread and juice and makes them holy and life giving.

In the Baptist tradition we do not consecrate the elements but we do ask a blessing over them. We do not believe that during this blessing God's Spirit comes down to make them holy and life giving. It is the Spirit of God that lives within our hearts in conjunction with our humble, submissive and thankful attitudes that makes the bread and cup holy and life giving for us. If our attitude isn't where it should be all that has taken place when we partake of the bread and cup is we have eaten a little bread and drank a bit of juice instead of having a holy and life giving experience with God.

In August of 1900 more than 250 hobos, tramps and freeloaders came by train to a little northwest Iowa town for their first annual National Hobo Convention. They ate free food, drank free beer, stayed in free accommodations, played games, drew up a political platform and nominated a candidate for the 1900 Presidential election. We are speaking about a tradition that is repeated even to this day-the Annual Hobo Days in Britt, Iowa.

The people of Britt have been inviting the hobos, bums, & freeloaders to Britt each year, not because they deserve it, not because in some way they have earned it. They get their free food and drink, & this special treatment because they are hobos, nothing more.

All sorts of conventions happen in our country each day, but the annual Hobo Convention at Britt is different. They didn't deserve it, ask for it or encourage it. It was given freely. Freely given to hobos who haven't worked, many who are lazy, crude, dirty, dishonest, who have been arrested for vagrancy. But in Britt, for one weekend, the hobos are kings. For a brief time they are loved for who they are, fellow human beings who celebrate their humanity for one brief weekend.

Jesus says come and eat all is ready, come not because you deserve it, not because you have earned it, come because it is freely given. Yes, like it or not, we come to this supper as the hobos come to Britt. We come not deserving but accepting. We come to this grace banquet to celebrate God's victory, not ours. We come to celebrate our humanity in Christ. We are invited by God through Christ to come and eat and drink not because we are great, but because of the great love that God has for us. We come though we have been lazy in our calling to follow Jesus, are dirty with sin, and have been dishonest with God and each other. Yet, he still invites us, He still accepts us at His table, as we are.

We come as forgiven people, who are nourished, renewed and refreshed because of Christ. We come not as perfect people, but as forgiven people. Christ's love, forgiveness and grace are present here at this supper. This bread and this juice are a nonverbal sign, and reminder of God's great love for us. So Come. Come as people who are celebrating the grace of God. Come to the family table. Amen.