

All Around the Table

Hebrews 1:1-4, 2:5-12, Ephesians 2:19-22

If after listening to this morning's Gospel reading, you are expecting a sermon about miraculously feeding the multitude – that's not exactly where we are headed. Instead, I bring you all around the table – together, joined as a family, a growing family, a nurturing family, a joyous family, an ever-changing family.

Before I speak about the table, I first want to give you an assignment. I'd like you to do 3 things.

#1 should be easy – Pray for the children, young and old, that you want to see enter our doors and join our family.

#2 ... Write down one thing you want to see us do to welcome the little children into our church, enlarging our family and reaching our new community.

#3 ... Write down one thing we can do to welcome the innocents of this world, those beyond childhood, but searching for God, how we can share the love of Jesus Christ with them.

It's that feeling of God's presence in our lives, His leading in our steps that brings us to the table this morning.

Throughout the Christian church, World Communion Day is being observed today. No matter the denomination we join, we can know that we are all members of God's family.

We all are offered the free gift of salvation because of Christ's sacrifice upon the cross. And we are all invited to the table, after first acknowledging Jesus Christ as our own Savior, and then being right with God – having asked for forgiveness of our sins.

So what does eating together do for us? I think just about every denomination has some joke about it not being a proper joining together if there isn't eating involved!

Whenever my family gets together, whether it's just my kids, my brother and sister-in-law, my sister and brother-in-law, right on down the line – getting together means some sort of eating together! We eat when we celebrate and we eat when we need comfort – I've been joining around the table together a lot this past year, both in celebration and in sorrow. Joining together for a meal is probably the same for most of you.

I read an article about the benefits of eating together as a family – and all of those benefits stand for church families, too.

Benefit #1: Communication and well-being. Conversations during the meal provide opportunities to bond, to plan, to connect and to learn from one another. Sharing a meal together nurtures warmth, security, love and the feeling of belonging.

As we find ourselves all around this table, we know that we share these things with each other and we receive them from Jesus Christ – a bond, a connection, warmth, security, love, the knowledge that we belong to God's family.

Benefit #2: The Ability to Model Manners. At first thought, this seems like something we would teach a child around the table, but consider how we learn from each other. We learn by example. Jesus taught His disciples around meals. Think about how Jesus fed the multitude from just a few fish and loaves of bread.

He let them know that nothing is beyond God's ability, that when we work together, we can provide for each other. As we share what we have with others, we learn manners, etiquette and social skills that Jesus exemplifies.

One of things I miss about how our church once celebrated Communion is that, pre-Covid, the Deacons came to you and served you individually. Just as Christ washed the feet of His disciples and served them, so we served each other. So, today, our deacons will be serving.

Benefit #3: Expanding our World, One Food at a Time. As we learn from each other, as we share a meal together, we see the benefits of a growing table, with new family members, who bring us new ideas, new knowledge, new experiences and new skills.

As we try the food that is brought to the table, both literally and figuratively, we grow as a family – within these walls and throughout God’s church, we grow into the people that Christ would have us be.

Benefit #4: Nourishment. How obvious can we get? It’s said that as families share meals prepared and eaten at home, they are usually eating more nutritiously and healthy. They eat more fruits, vegetables and dairy products, getting the nutrients they need. They tend to eat less fried food, less salt and less sugar.

As we join around Christ’s table, we receive the true nourishment we need. We receive the Word of God, we receive the knowledge needed to live well. We aren’t subjected to the filth of the world, and we grow stronger so we can continue the work of God.

Benefit #5: Becoming Self-Sufficient. As children help their parents plan and prepare their meals, they learn the basics of planning, shopping, peeling, chopping, pouring, mixing, cooking, baking. They learn to work as a team to provide a well-balanced meal, learning responsibility along the way.

As we join together around God’s table, we serve each other, we learn to be both self-sufficient and caring at the same time, learning the basics of Christianity, while also learning the deeper messages Christ would have for us. We also accept responsibility for the care and needs of our brothers and sisters.

Benefit #6: Preventing Destructive Behaviors. Research shows that frequent family dinners are associated with lower rates of smoking, drinking and illegal drug use in pre-teens and teenagers.

This one is a no-brainer when relating it to sitting around the table of Christ. When we make sharing a meal together with our Christian brothers and sisters a priority, we find less reason to stray from Christ’s teachings, keeping ourselves pure and safe.

Benefit #7: Improving Grades. Children do better in school when they eat more meals with their families. Just like Benefit #6, our “grade,” our performance, is enhanced when we spend time in Christian fellowship.

And lastly, **Benefit #8: Saving Money.** When we eat at home, it costs less money. So, how can I relate that one to gathering all around this table before us?

There are so many worldly things ready to grab the money out of our hands, but if we consider first how our church family would have us spend our money, we will be more careful, not allowing money to become our idol, nor allowing the things we can buy with that money to control our lives. All things within reason.

How do you feel when you receive Communion? Do you feel fresh? Clean? Renewed? Part of Christ’s family?

Communion is an opportunity to join with all God’s family – past, present and future – in an act of fellowship that spans time and space.

Ephesians 2:19-22 says: *“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.”*

As we share in the remembrance of Jesus’ last supper, we are no longer strangers because we are joined as family. We open ourselves for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit – we become the church, which isn’t four walls, but is instead a group of people serving God and His creation.

Jesus lives within us and shows Himself to the world through us. Jesus – the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of His being – became fully human, while remaining fully divine, came down from Heaven to live amongst us, to teach us directly, to save us from ourselves, to free us from our sins.

As we observe World Communion Day we join with the Christian community, moving beyond historical and theological differences – remembering that our similarities are of much more importance.

We celebrate our communion, our unity with each other as we worship Jesus Christ and hopefully introduce Christ to those who haven’t yet welcomed Him into their lives.

So today, as we join with many of the rest of the world's Christians, we celebrate what Jesus did and what, by the power of the Holy Spirit, He still does.

We celebrate Jesus, who considered family unity to be important. We celebrate Jesus, who welcomed little children into His arms. We celebrate Jesus, who took time to bless everyone, no matter who they were and no matter what others thought of them.

We celebrate Jesus, who became like us; who experienced our pain, our confusion, our suffering, our joys, our celebrations, our friendships. We celebrate Jesus and what He did for us – remembering that He died for all of us, for every person in every corner of the world. We see the signs before us today – the bread and the cup. They remind us of what His love and His faithfulness cost Him.

As we come all around the table, remember that God believes in us, even those who don't believe in Him. God believes that we are not beyond help. God loves us and wishes to forgive us, to mold us into something even better than we were before.

Continuing to remember the importance of gathering all around the table gives us a sense of identity – as children of God, members of the family of Jesus, a family that stretches beyond our doors and around the world, a family that is called to love as we have been loved, to forgive as we have been forgiven, to give as we have been given to.

As we gather all around the table, we make our day-to-day conflicts lighter, and we have the opportunity to create new traditions and share memories that will last beyond our lifetimes.

Let's join all around the table!