

“Jesus’ Thanksgiving Table”

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A Series on Practicing God’s Presence in the Lord’s Supper

1st Corinthians 11:17-34

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See the Scripture by clicking [here](#).

Eating at Grandma and Grandpa’s Thanksgiving table taught me some things.

- Don’t eat until everyone is seated. It shows respect.
- Always leave some of the dressing for Uncle Jim. Share.
- Even if cousin Freddy kicked me under the table first, I don’t get to kick him back. I can’t control what others do to me, but I am responsible for what I do to them.
- I don’t have to like pumpkin pie, but shouldn’t say “yuck” when I see it. Respect that people’s tastes are different.
- When we are eating, don’t ask Grandma to take out her teeth, no matter how funny it is.

Jesus’ people gather at a thanksgiving table too. One of the first things we called the Lord’s Supper was *Eucharist*. That means “thanksgiving.”

We’re not celebrating Communion today, but we did last Sunday. I talked about how, when we eat and drink at Jesus’ Table together, we learn to recognize how he is with us here. So then we can go and recognize how he is present everywhere.

Jesus’ Thanksgiving Table changes things. It changes how we are with each other. Then we go and change how we are with others at other tables.

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Those Corinthian Christians however, the ones we just heard about, had made their Thanksgiving Table a disaster.

In those early days, they celebrated the Lord’s Supper as part of a whole meal. They shared the bread and wine in the midst of an ordinary dinner.

In those early days, they didn’t have special church buildings. Jesus’ people met in regular homes. Wealthier members had bigger houses, so it made sense for the church to gather there where there was space. In their society, it was normal for the wealthy to host big dinners, with lots of guests.

Here's how those meals would work.¹ The homeowner and other high-status guests would dine in the dining room.² It typically held 8 to 10 people. They were served the best food and best wine. Everyone else — working folks, the poor, slaves — sat or stood in the much-larger entrance hall.³ Their food and drink were not so good.⁴

That's how things were done. It underlined divisions of status, even made them stronger. A few were on top. The rest were not. Charity was used to enhance the power, honour, and reputation of the givers. It reminded the receivers that they were less important, shamed them, and kept them in their place. That's how it worked then, and too often now.

When those early Christians in Corinth had their worship-dinners, they did it the same way. The ugly line dividing rich from poor cut right across the Lord's Table.

Which showed they weren't seeing Jesus.

III

They were not seeing what Jesus had done.

Paul reminded them in his letter of stuff they already knew. (Sometimes we need that.) *Remember what Jesus did on the night he was handed over for execution.* (You can imagine them nodding.) Well, *“every time you eat the bread and drink the cup, you are making an announcement of the Lord's death until he comes.”*

Eating break broken and drinking wine poured, we're announcing something. Jesus died. More to the point, he was crucified.

Why is that worth announcing? The Roman Empire crucified thousands of Jews. It was a means of imperial terror designed to control a colonized people. Crucifixion brutally announced that the empire was in charge, and nothing would change, end of story. What's there to be thankful for?

Yet that's what we remember at Jesus' Thanksgiving Table. Because Jesus, giving himself to crucifixion, did something no one expected.

IV

It looked like his defeat, but at his Table we announce Jesus' victory. It looked like his damnation, but here we announce Jesus' glory. It looked like Evil's chains could never be broken, but here we announce that, dying on a cross, Jesus destroyed its power to enslave.

¹ See the description in Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 196.

² The *triclinium*.

³ The *atrium*.

⁴ One author from that time, Pliny the Younger, spoke of regular people getting “cheap scraps of food” from the host. Quoted in Hays, 196.

Picture us as a people occupied by invading Powers. Sin-Power has occupied us, estranging us from God. Death-Power has occupied us, imprisoning us in fear. Shame-Power has occupied us, telling many they are worth less, and others they are worth more. Injustice-Power has occupied us, dehumanizing both those oppressed and those oppressing. Violence-Power has occupied us, convincing us that brute force and murder rule the world.

This has gone on for as long as can be remembered. We just accept it. We are collaborators with it, the sin-death-shame-injustice-violence occupation of the whole world. We live under occupation, and die under it too.

But here is the announcement: Dying on a cross, Jesus defeated the Powers. They're done for. They don't know it yet. The world doesn't know it yet. It acts like nothing has changed. (That's why we continue to see the Occupation's ugly effects.)

We're free. Jesus' Table proclaims this.

But those folks in Corinth were acting like Jesus had changed nothing. They were acting like the Powers of Status and Shame were still in charge, deciding how things should be done. Some dine here, the rest there. Some eat well, others starve. They kept on dividing people, rich and poor. "*That's the way it's done!*" they said.

But this is Jesus' Table, and he says different.

V

As I said, we are not celebrating the *Eucharist* today. Let's think of our other meals. How does how Jesus hosts us at his Thanksgiving Table make a difference in how we host folks at our many tables?

In Philadelphia there were people living in a park called "Love Park."⁵ The municipal government, instead of asking the hard questions about why people were living in the park, decided to force people out of it. The problem it saw wasn't homelessness, but the homeless. So it made it illegal to sleep, lie down on the sidewalks, or ask for money in the park. Also, people had "to cease and desist from distributing food" in Love Park.

Some Jesus-followers knew the park-people well. They were being formed at Jesus' Thanksgiving Table, and they knew Jesus is also in Love Park. He'd had already been taking them there.

So they took Jesus' Table there. They set up, sang songs, prayed. They remembered Jesus' breaking and pouring. They passed around the bread (illegal). They passed around the cup (also illegal). Remembering how the first Christians celebrated

⁵ Shane Claibourne, *The Irresistible Revolution: Living as an Ordinary Radical* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 233.

Communion within a full meal, they continued their worship by passing around boxes of pizza. Church went on for hours, into the night and the next day. Folks lay down and fell asleep (also illegal).

After a few weeks, the authorities arrested the church in Love Park. They said, "Stop it!" But the Powers had no chance.

This is Jesus' Table, and it says different.

That's just one story. It reminds that what we do "in here" is going to make a difference in how we are "out there." Jesus's People are nourished and changed at his Thanksgiving Table. Yes, we are not eating and drinking here today, but everything we do, everything we are together feeds from what this Table announces, from what Jesus has done.

So when we leave from here, and go to other tables, let's keep our eyes open. What difference is Jesus wanting to make at those tables? What Powers is he defeating? Pray that we will recognize what he is doing, so we can be part of his work.

This is the good news of Jesus. Amen.