

Ruling Elder Training: the Lord's Supper

Opening:

Getting to know each other:

- Memories of my family table
 - o When it was at it's best
 - o When it was at it's worst
- How I would describe the perfect supper
- 3 words that describe meal experiences with Jesus

Setting the stage:

- Book of Order quote
- Community, Acceptance and an Occasion for his own ministry

Group Exercise:

Let's look for these signs in some biblical meal stories:

- In Levi's home (Luke 5:27-32)
- In Simon's home (Luke 7:36-50)
- In Mary and Martha's home (Luke 10:38-42)
- In a pharisee's home (Luke 11:37-53)
- In another pharisee's home (Luke 14:1-24)
- In Zacchaeus's home (Luke 19:1-10)
- In a home in Jerusalem (Luke 22:7-38)
- In a home in Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35)

Early Christian Traditions:

Biblical witness

Agape - the Greek word for self-giving love. The story of the feeding of the 5000 served as a model: teaching/preaching/healing followed by a sacrificial meal that all shared together symbolizing their common life in Christ.

- 4th c. Church father John Chrysostom wrote this about the 2nd c. Christian church:
 - "In the churches at that time there developed a marvelous practice when all the faithful met together, after hearing the Divine Word, after the prayers

and the communion of the mysteries, after the liturgical meeting; they didn't return immediately to their homes, but the rich, who had prepared the food and drink, invited the poor and set a common table, a common feast, a common invitation in the church itself, so that the community of the table, and the piety of the place and a thousand and one other circumstances joined to make charity very close; their pleasure was great and so was their gain. This practice was the source of countless benefits – the main one being friendship – becoming daily more warm after each liturgical meeting since the benefactors and beneficiaries felt united by such great love.”

Other Themes:

Sara Miles: Take This Bread (St. Gregory of Nyssa Episcopalian Church in SF)

Did not the LORD share the table of publicans and harlots? So then—do not distinguish between worthy and unworthy. All must be equal in your eyes to love and serve.

Last Friday I was at my internship, at Saint Gregory of Nyssa Episcopal Church in San Francisco. I go on Sundays for worship and it's beautiful and creative, then on Friday's I go to be part of the worship that is the Food Pantry, because on Fridays there's a different congregation there. There's a different way that church is done.

By noon a long line of people are standing outside the doors of a steep San Francisco street. They walk in the front doors of the sanctuary, and around the communion table, where they find piles of rice, fresh celery, bread, watermelons, and strawberries. Four hundred families, who are hungry, come in and they take communion. And people are worshiping. And passing around piles of carrots. And loaves of bread. And looking each other in the eyes and seeing the face of God.

This is church. To be able to love each person who walks in the door. Many of them I can barely communicate with, because I have yet to learn Mandarin, Chinese, Russian, and only know a little Spanish. But I can greet

everyone with a smile and say, “Welcome, I’m glad you’re here” and when they walk out the door, “Have a good day, see you next week.”

There are several biblical references to an upcoming banquet in the kingdom of God:

Do not fear, for I am with you; I will bring your offspring from the east, and from the west I will gather you; I will say to the north, “Give them up,” and to the south, “Do not withhold; bring my sons from far away and my daughters from the end of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” (Isaiah 43:5–7)

I tell you, many will come from east and west and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 8:11)

Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 13:29)

The Chopsticks Story (from Japan)

Once upon a time a man died. He hadn’t been all that bad, but he hadn’t

been all that good either. He arrived at the pearly gates and asked Peter: “Where am I going?”

Peter threw up his hands and said: “Will you people never learn? I don’t de- cide, you do. Where do you want to go?”

“Uh, can I see my choices first?” the man asked. “Sure,” Peter answered. “Which one do you want to see first?” “Uh, hell.”

So off they went, down alleyways and stairways, winding around in the depths of the clouds. Finally they came to two huge brass doors. They were intricately carved with panels from scriptures, from the past, present and future. “This is it,” Peter exclaimed. “Ready?” He

opened the doors. The man couldn't believe his eyes. The place was marvelous: huge banquet tables laden down with food and drink; flowers, piped-in music; chandeliers – any- thing a person could want.

"This is hell?" the man gulped. "Yes," Peter replied. "Want to stay?"
"Uh, let me look around a bit, ok?"

"Sure," said Peter, "I'll be back in about fifteen minutes." And the man was left alone in hell.

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As he looked more closely, it wasn't as beautiful as it had appeared at first glance. All the people were skinny, nasty, and very upset. The banquet tables were twelve feet off the ground, but the people were only two feet high. Each person had a set of ten-foot-long chopsticks to get the food from the tables to his or her mouth. They kept dropping the food or other people stole it off the chopsticks before they could get to it. Still other people were hitting each other over the head with the chopsticks and poking each other with them, screaming and yelling. They were bruised and starving, dying to eat. The man gulped and said to himself: "This really is hell, I have to get out of here."

Just then, Peter returned and asked him: "Have you seen enough? Want to check out heaven now?"

"Sure," the man answered gratefully, and the doors of hell swung closed behind him. Up and up they climbed, retracing their steps, and finally they reached another set of carved bronze doors, again carved with scenes from scriptures of past, present and future.

"This is heaven," Peter said. The doors opened. Again the man could not believe his eyes. The place looked just like hell! Huge tables laden down with food and drink; piped-in music; chandeliers. The tables were twelve feet off the ground, the people were two feet tall, and everybody had ten-foot-long chopsticks. Flabbergasted, the man turned to Peter and gasped: "Are you sure this is heaven?"

“Sure,” said Peter. “Look a little more closely because it’s getting time for you to make your decision on where you’re going to stay.”

And the man did look a bit closer. Everyone was fat, rosy-cheeked, healthy, happy, and at peace. Why, he wondered to himself. Same set-up. And then it hit him. These people had realized that with ten-foot-long chopsticks there was no way to get the food to their own mouths. So they fed each other. The only difference between heaven and hell is whom you feed. And so it is to this day!

“Whatever the Lord’s Supper is, it is everything that eating is.” — contemporary Christian theologian Hoyt Hickman

L. Shannon Jung identifies five characteristics of the Lord’s Supper:

- a joy-filled encounter with the incarnate God: at the table we meet the Christ who gave of himself that we might find life. Who were the Christ-figures at the tables? What about them identifies them in this way?
- Community building: In her book *The Feast of our Lives*, United Church of Christ pastor June Goudy writes that the Lord’s Supper is “rooted in human connectedness, a power-in-relation that arises from experiencing God in and through each other.” What examples of new community and human-connectedness around the table did you see in the film clips?

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- formative and transformative: When we come to the Lord’s table, we meet Christ, we experience community together and we discover who we are. We come with a deep awareness of our own unworthiness and learn about the depth of God’s love and our incredible value and worth in God’s eyes. When we receive the love Christ offers to us, the

brokenness of our self-understanding is transformed and healed. Where did you witness personal transformations around the table in our film scenes?

- **fruit of The Vine and Work of huMan hands:** Sharing in the food made from wheat and grapes reminds us of our connection to the earth, the harvesters and all of the steps that go into providing the elements for the table. Remember the Thanksgiving meal scene that we saw Friday night from Pieces of April. Now reflect on the extent of the preparation for that meal that we saw in today's Pieces of April clip. What work of the hands and heart went into that feast?
- **Mission to the World:** How do we rise from the table and remain unchanged? Think again about the table scenes we've seen throughout our time together. How might the experiences of the people around the table

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change the way they live? How might the experience of love offered and received around the table empower their voices for justice, truth, forgiveness, freedom, love?