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# Transcendence at the Table: a Transfigurational Experience for Ecclesia while Breaking Bread Together

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GEORGE FOX UNIVERSITY

TRANSCENDENCE AT THE TABLE: A TRANSFIGURATIONAL EXPERIENCE  
FOR ECCLESIA WHILE BREAKING BREAD TOGETHER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF PORTLAND SEMINARY  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY  
JULIA RACHELLE HURLOW

PORTLAND, OREGON

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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DMin Dissertation

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

Julia Hurlow

has been approved by  
the Dissertation Committee on February 16, 2018  
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Semiotics and Future Studies.

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## DEDICATION

To those who have set the table for Thanksgiving in your Walhalla home.  
...you have exposed me to the beauty of sharing his story, our story, around the table!

To those who have come, participated, and  
communicated around the table, it has been sacred.  
...it has been quite an experience to share times of listening,  
crying, and celebrating together!

To those who have still yet to come join us at the table  
for a Calhoun & Hurlow Thanksgiving...  
may this table always have room to pull up another chair with your nametag awaiting!

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The triune God has provided a beautiful invitation to participate and communicate around breaking bread with other people. This work is an outpouring from the relationship that I have with the triune. I am so very humbled by the opportunity to steward this project. It is for the joy that is set before me that I have said, Yes! I am so very thankful for the tables that the triune God has set, and I cannot even fathom the banquet celebration of what is yet to come in heaven when we will be at one table.

This project is a collection of years of sharing meals, participating in the Eucharist, asking questions, listening, celebrating, and crying around the table. There is something so inviting when there is a chair for you at a table, but also a vulnerability that accompanies sitting down for literal and metaphoric nourishment. I could share a story about one of these times with each of you; it has been shaping, difficult at times, and an expression of love. I look forward to the transcendence that will come in days ahead as we experience transfigurational moments while breaking bread around the table together!

“Go ahead and put dinner on the table, dad will be home shortly.” This common phrase, spoken throughout my childhood around 5pm, meant that it was dinnertime on Hanley Road. This regular gathering through my formative developmental years allowed me to begin to understand the complexities of the table. Thank you, dad and mom, for making this time a priority for our family. Jodi and Joy, you two were the faces I looked at across the table and oh, what a memory. Holding hands for family prayers that are still bearing fruit today, thank you!

When I talk about my family, I joyfully name each of you as party guests around so many tables that we have shared together, thank you for teaching me so much about

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I will continue to invite each of you to the table. Your participation is kneading.  
In addition, your communication is invaluable. I echo the words of Ralph Waldo Emerson, “I awoke this morning with devout thanksgiving for my friends, the old and the new.” Cheers to what has been and to what is awaiting!

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## ABSTRACT

The Church has been slowly losing its identity. This loss of identity has a strong connection to the failure of the church to tend and till faith relationships, as well as pass the faith story on to children and others. There has been a loss of emphasis on the table as a place of significance in church, community, and home. To break bread together is to reclaim the spoken story of Jesus' transfigurational power.

The hope for growth in a stronger identity lies in believing in the Truth of a present and powerful Jesus who could transfigure lives, offer forgiveness and hope, and for those who allow him to live his life through them, the power to experience healing, joy, and peace.

The Christian faith is the gathering of those anointed by the Holy Spirit and committed to Jesus, the *ecclesia*, the Church. The early church was a community of *ecclesia*, a Holy Spirit infused, worshiping community with a strong identity and a certain mission in the world, to proclaim the power and salvation hope of Jesus.

SECTION 1:  
THE PROBLEM

**The Yearning for Meaning and Belonging**

The age-old question, “what is the meaning of life,” is as ever-present as the rising and setting of the sun. Meaning often originates from the places where people feel a sense of belonging. It is rare that a person misses a sporting event, concert, or a date. Why then is there a decline in church attendance? People spend significant time investing in the places, people, and activities where they find meaning and a sense of belonging.

People derive shades of identity and meaning from the many facets of life; the places in which there is an investment of time and energy. Relationships form with people and places that resonate with mutual interest and provide common identifiers. For example, some people identify with football, as it helps to define who people are, and football people then become important relationships. Common interests help to define relationships with people who move toward a common goal or interest.

However, is there an identity more rooted and basic than this? Jesus followers believe that there is. In Genesis 1:27, the story tells us that the creation of human beings is in God’s image: people literally derive identity as human beings from relationship with the triune God.

From the beginning of faith, this relationship with God has defined a people who all identify as “God’s holy people.”<sup>1</sup> The Jewish tradition, our foundational heritage, has

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<sup>1</sup> I Peter 1:15-17.

passed on this identity through story, scripture, song, and table. As Anita Diamant, an author of a number of books on Jewish history and tradition states, “Home is where the heart is, where tastes are shaped, where the eye first focuses, where identity is forged. In the Jewish tradition, home is a mikdash ma’at, little sanctuary. The holy of holies.”<sup>2</sup>

Out of this tradition, the sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah (the Christ), a Christian church was born, one that identified itself in the worship of the triune God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The identity of this new church lay in believing in the Truth of a present and powerful Jesus who could transfigure lives, offer forgiveness and hope, and for those who allow him to live his life through them, the power to experience healing, joy, and peace.

Early Christians called the gathering of those anointed by the Holy Spirit and committed to Jesus, the *ecclesia*, the Church. The early church was a community of *ecclesia*, a Holy Spirit infused, worshiping community with a strong identity and a certain mission in the world to proclaim the power and salvation hope of Jesus.

The power of passing on this Christian identity, as a Jesus follower, lies primarily in a table ministry practiced by sharing the Eucharist and breaking bread together around shared meals within communities of Jesus followers. The table is a sacred place for common time together.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Anita Diamant and Karen Kushner, *How to Raise a Jewish Child: A Practical Handbook for Family Life*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: Schocken, 2008), 17.

<sup>3</sup> Aquinata Böckmann, *Around the Monastic Table – RB 31-42: Growing in Mutual Service and Love*, ed. Marianne Burkhard (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 183.

In the Old Testament, YHWH is the one who provided common meals and hosted meals for all of his creation, both animals and humans.<sup>4</sup> God communicated that the identity formed around the table with his people was a response to his covenant: all receive an invitation to come and receive the provisions, to come and break bread together at the table. Dr. Constance Cherry, a faculty member at the Robert E. Webber Institute of Worship, has further expounded in her writing that, “In the first sixteen centuries of Christianity (both East and West), communing at the Table of the Lord was a normative response to the word. Spending time at the table was a symbolic way to recreate the message of Christ through our senses: dramatic action, and symbolic gesture.”<sup>5</sup> There are meals permeating through scripture, from mass feedings to the Eucharist. The shared table, as Nathan MacDonald, a Scottish Biblical scholar, would say, “Has decisive significance in the early Christ-movement. Meals are seen as loci of identity formation and transformation.”<sup>6</sup>

The power of the table was in sharing bread and wine. This practice constituted commitment and relationship with Jesus. In the breaking of bread and sharing of cup, an identity as a Jesus follower formed, and a deep and relational commitment was continually renewed. As ecclesia, the early church met together on a regular basis to break bread together as described in Act 2:46, 5:42. Although there were disagreements

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<sup>4</sup> Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat? Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), xv.

<sup>5</sup> Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 86-87.

<sup>6</sup> MacDonald, xvii.

among people, there was a significant regard for oneness which encouraged people to be together as one body of believers.<sup>7</sup>

The Eucharist is central to experiencing the transcendence of the Divine through remembering, thanksgiving, and celebration. As Henri Nouwen has shared, “The Lord is the center of all things and yet in such a quiet, unobtrusive, elusive way. He lives with us, even physically, but not in the same physical way that other elements are present to us. The transcendent physical presence is what characterizes the Eucharist.”<sup>8</sup> The bond is invisible, but if it takes place with other humans, it is also experienced.

However, the Church has been slowly losing its identity. This relationship of lost identity has as a strong connection to the failure of the church to tend and till faith relationships and to pass the faith on to children and others. There has been a loss of emphasis on the table as a place of significance in church, community, and home. To break bread together is to reclaim the spoken story of Jesus’ transfigurational power. The spoken word was what “broke the silence” of the world when God initiated the creation of the earth. There was a power present in the spoken word that has been a part of the oral tradition of learning for years. “The psychological effect of the living voice is the creation of a sense of presence and power.”<sup>9</sup> The spoken word has been a part of the tradition of our faith narrative since the beginning. It is important to recognize that the

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<sup>7</sup> George E. Ladd, *The Young Church: Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1964), 64-65.

<sup>8</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Eternal Seasons: A Spiritual Journey through the Church's Year*, ed. Michael Ford (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 2007), 187.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Wipf & Stock Pub, 1992), 50.

table is a gathering place where people can join together to audibly speak and share the truth-filled messages of our historical-biblical narrative.<sup>10</sup>

Changing cultural patterns such as more athletic practices and events, the distance people travel for work, along with schedules that are packed throughout the week, have challenged the church to re-define the table for a 21<sup>st</sup> century world. Humanity has failed to do so in a way that resonates with culture and has failed to take seriously the passing on of faith to future generations.

I grew up in the church and I can remember engaging in the fifteen minutes a month devoted to the Eucharist. During this first Sunday of the month's sacramental ritual, the Pastor would use words about remembering, thanksgiving, and celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus. This ritual included passing the gold platters of stale wafers (to represent the breaking of bread) and drinking grape juice from plastic cups (to represent the wine).

My childhood church created a rhythm for this practice of sharing the sacrament of the Eucharist around the table. Breaking bread together and drinking wine was a once-a-month sacramental ritual tacked onto the end of the Sunday morning service.

When something takes place on a regular basis, there is an opportunity to develop a consistent experience. This is an opportunity to utilize the table daily, integrating the practice of breaking bread and drinking wine together as a way to remember, offer thanksgiving, and celebrate God's relationship to us as well as our relationship with others. Pastor Daniel Rife of College Wesleyan Church shares his wisdom on the

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<sup>10</sup> Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, rev. ed. (Nashville, TN: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2001), 50-53.

sacramental worship of the Eucharist, “The sacrament of the Eucharist is the experience of Christ being present around the table. It is Emmanuel, God with you, in a tangible way. He is here and he is aware of you. To participate in the Eucharist is to recognize there are implications upon building an identity in reflection of God’s power.”<sup>11</sup>

My beginning memories of identity, meaning, and belonging are around a table. I remember times spent around the table with people from multiple generations. It was late fall, with the transitioning of clothed trees to naked ones covering the ravine in our middle-America town. The robust decorations of pumpkins, dry cornhusks, and straw bales awaited their Thanksgiving Day table debut before the accents of Advent and all its Fraser fir pine-scented décor would take center stage. I hold sacred this memory of gathering together with others around a table. Because there was always a place set for each person who was coming, each person had a place of belonging at the table. There was space for each person to join in and partake in the breaking of bread.

The space around the table had dried apple decorations and hand painted ceramic figurines spaced out along the beautifully ironed white tablecloths. Along with the distinct memorabilia of childhood art class, the table was embedded with a variety of family members’ and friend’s narratives. Names tags were set with intention as each had responded to the invitation of the hosts, my gracious aunt and uncle. The tradition of circling up around the large table to share in a blessing, hymn, and prayer was as natural as taking one’s place in a rousing song of ‘ring-around-the-rosey.’ Reaching for the hand of the one next to you, held with care, symbolizes a time of gathering relationships together to offer reflective thankfulness. Breaking bread together, as well as listening to

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<sup>11</sup> Daniel Rife, interviewed by author, Marion, Indiana, March 3, 2017.

each other's stories – their experiences of sorrows and celebrations – offers space to remember the provisions of the previous year as well as the triune God who offers these provisions. People graciously offered one another stories of thankfulness and redemption. It is because of the Trinitarian relationship that humanity can have relationships with one another.

Thanksgiving Day celebrations are held once a year as a way of remembering the first Thanksgiving. In that gathering, in 1621, two of the most unlikely groups of people came together over three days, in a meal to celebrate the harvest. The Plymouth colonists and Wampanoag Indians shared space together to tell a story.<sup>12</sup> A gathering of many people sharing the story of bountiful provisions of food from the harvest. As Rachel Held Evans has said, "It's easier to remember things together than alone."<sup>13</sup> Stories are shared as each takes time to remember how they have come to this space together, along with words of thanksgiving for the abundance of the provision.

The Thanksgiving Day table will be set each year, inviting each person to participate in remembering, thanks-giving, and celebrating together as an ecclesia, able to worship the triune God through relationship around the breaking of bread.

I remember the meals when we have come around the Thanksgiving table and shared tearful conversations about losses throughout the past year. I remember when life choices led to painful consequences that were less than ideal.

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<sup>12</sup> History.com staff, "History of Thanksgiving," History.com, 2009, accessed July 5, 2017, <http://www.history.com/topics/thanksgiving/history-of-thanksgiving>.

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday: Loving, Leaving, and Finding the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 128.



I can also remember the year my cousin shared his story of falling in love and proceeded to pass around the dazzling diamond ring that would be a part of the surprise engagement. I was awe struck as a young girl by this profound love and celebrated the joyful event that would take place. I can vividly remember the pregnancy announcements of new family members, travel opportunities, along with opportunities for jobs that further promoted skills. Stories rooted in sheer joy and celebration.

There have also been times over tears as people have shared about the waiting that they are experiencing in their lives. For a child. For adventure. For a different job. For wisdom. For a life partner. For patient endurance. For redemption. Sharing stories of desire – the not yet – has been significant to me because it has been clear that this is welcomed at the table.

I long for this experience to be more than just one day a year. There is a longing for meaningful belonging that is telling the relational story of the triune God on a daily basis. The longing for what took place around the Thanksgiving table once a year, along with the first Sunday of the month's Eucharistic ritual, were formational and sacred to my understanding of ecclesia.

Christ brings us into communion with himself and each other through sharing in the Eucharist.<sup>14</sup> I long for a rhythm where invitations are given to people who will chose to participate as well as communicate around the table on a regular basis. Experiencing the transfiguration and breaking of bread around a table on a regular basis offers a sacred rhythm to individual lives as they come together as image bears of the triune God. To

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<sup>14</sup> Leonard Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 199.

engage in soulful nourishment as well as physical nourishment among others is a transfigurational opportunity where there is embodiment of the triune God around a table while breaking bread together.

Meaning and belonging are central to the longing of humanity. In order to build one's identity as a Jesus follower there needs to be time and energy spent towards establishing oneself by engaging in the essential practice of breaking bread around the table. This offers an opportunity to experience the transfigurational nourishment of the relational triune God with other people, on a regular basis, in a physical space.

### **Lack of Faith Identification**

The longing for meaning and belonging affects the identification that individuals have with faith. "Based on Barna's most recent data, almost four in 10 (38%) Americans are active churchgoers, slightly more (43%) are unchurched, and around one-third (34%) are dechurched. But ... there are great variations among American cities."<sup>15</sup>

People are not attending church on a regular basis, even though the desire to be a part of a community is present; people are looking for authentic relationships with others. John Eldredge, a Christian author and speaker, shares,

The church is not a building. Church is not an event that takes place on Sundays. I know it is how we think of it. "I go to First Baptist." "We are members of St. Luke's." "Is it time to go to church?" Much to our surprise, that is not how the Bible uses the term. Not at all. When the Scripture talks about church, it means *community*. The little fellowships of the heart that are outposts of the kingdom. A shared life. They worship together, eat together, pray for one another, and go on quests together. They hang out together, in each other's homes. When Peter is

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<sup>15</sup> "Church Attendance Trends around the Country," Barna, May 26, 2017, accessed June 26, 2017, <https://www.barna.com/research/church-attendance-trends-around-country/>.

sprung from prison, “he went to the house of Mary the mother of John...where many people had gathered and were praying” (Acts 12:12).<sup>16</sup>

The table is a structure, a space for sharing faith stories on a regular basis. People experience a form of identity and meaning by the stories they generate. The definition of a Jesus follower comes from the story of Jesus and God’s relationship to humanity throughout history.<sup>17</sup> William Willimon shares, “People tell stories not simply to give themselves something to do while they eat, but because stories are important parts of the communion, fellowship, love, joy, and remembrance which make up the mystery of the meal.”<sup>18</sup>

The opportunity to identify with a community of faith has meaning and offers a sense of belonging. The following story offers an insightful perspective from a woman who shares from her own vivid experience of growing up in the church and its impact on the way she perceives engaging with the table as a means of bringing people together.

As a child growing up in a mainline, high church tradition, I was taught a great reverence of the Lord’s Table. While I can’t say I was never caught running or causing mischief in the sanctuary of that stately church, I’m certain such behavior never made its way near the altar. It was as if there was an invisible fence surrounding the chancel and the table of the Lord and I was the proud owner of the electric shock collar, keeping me at an arm’s distance from this holy, sacred space. I remember, on more than one occasion, being dared by the Pastor’s kids or my Sunday school buddies to run up and touch the altar cloth; but I was always too intimidated and never acted on the dare. Outside of approaching the table with my parents to receive a blessing from the Pastor while they received communion, the altar was forbidden and uncertain territory.

My sense of reverence for the table was high, to say the least. To that end, I had some level of fear and trepidation upon approaching the altar for my first

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<sup>16</sup> John Eldredge, *Waking the Dead: The Secret to a Heart Fully Alive* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 192.

<sup>17</sup> Leonard Sweet, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2015), 3.

<sup>18</sup> William H. Willimon, *Sunday Dinner: The Lord's Supper and the Christian Life* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 1998), 11.

communion as a teenager. The imaginary, electric shock collar had been removed, but my sense that this space was holy and off-limits still lingered in my heart. I remember anxiously climbing the steps toward the space around the table where I would be offered the bread and the cup. While the room was anything but quiet, I heard nothing but my own breathing and my heavy and uncertain steps toward my destination. This was serious business. And now that I was allowed to come to the table, I was unsure of how it should be engaged.

The truth is, the table of God is many things. It *is* a place to be solemn and to remember the sacrifice of Christ made on our behalf. But it's also a place to give thanks, celebrating the grace and love extended to us by the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit. And it is the place where, together, we are unified, as a body, through God's gifts which are offered freely to us all.<sup>19</sup>

Coming to the table to break bread together can offer an opportunity for people to come with questions, desires, hopes, longings, and individuality to form a faith identity rooted in the narrative of the transfigured Christ. This then allows an ecclesia to form around the table breaking bread together and sharing in the Truth of the triune God.

### **The Decline in Familial Identity around a Table**

There has been a significant decline in familial identity around the table in recent years. The make-up of a family has shifted from only referring to a dad, mom, and children. It could be said that today, a family meal consists of those who most often spend time sharing a meal together. The security that takes place within a structured time among a family may be an opportunity for people to sense a place of belonging.<sup>20</sup> Sharing a meal with other people can be psychologically reassuring.<sup>21</sup> Leonard Sweet

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<sup>19</sup> Emily Vermilya, "This Is the Feast: Experiencing the Full Spectrum of God's Story at the Table," *Seedbed: New Room* (blog), November 24, 2016, accessed April 7, 2017, <http://www.seedbed.com/this-is-the-feast-experiencing-the-full-spectrum-of-gods-story-at-the-table/>.

<sup>20</sup> Paul Fieldhouse, "Eating Together: The Culture of the Family Meal." *Transition* (00494429) 37, no. 4 (Winter 2007): 3, accessed October 22, 2015, *SocINDEX with Full Text*.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

distinguishes the table by saying, “Around the table each learns who we are, where we come from, what we can be, to whom we belong and to what we are called.”<sup>22</sup> The television portrays some families who do not eat together, yet others often are sharing family prayers and stories around the table. It is as if people are craving intimacy.<sup>23</sup>

Mealtime sixty years ago averaged ninety minutes; today records say it is less than twelve minutes.<sup>24</sup> There are routine times of day that people eat, consisting of breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The standard three meals a day is not something that is routine for everyone; some people spend a lot of time grazing throughout the day rather than eating square meals. The routine, or lack of one, does not consistently include eating with other people as in previous generations, when specifically Sunday noon was time for people to gather after church for a meal. William Willimon shares this about his experience around the table as a child,

Sunday meal time was a ritual. Because of this, no one had to tell me what it meant to be a part of this family. No one had to tell me who I was or instruct me in the proper world view for fold with our name. I never got formal instruction in orthodox belief or behavior. No one had to explain to me that I belonged or that I was loved. I learned all that at the Sunday dinner table. If someone had asked me, “Who are you people and what do they stand for?” I would have responded quite honestly, “My people are those who gather at grandmother’s dinner table.” At that table we were initiated, nurtured, and claimed in the family. There we participated in common memory, fellowship, and identity. There we found our place, our name, our story – at the table.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Sweet, 8.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>24</sup> Anne Fishel, “FAQ,” *The Family Dinner Project*, accessed April 15, 2016, <http://thefamilydinnerproject.org/resources/faq/>.

<sup>25</sup> Willimon, 10.

When many people think about a shared table with others they think about a large meal served at an event like Thanksgiving. However, how often do people think back to where the shared table came from in a historical context? This did not just begin in 1621 at Plymouth Rock; it has been around since the beginning of time. People have been coming together to share a meal for generations.<sup>26</sup> The table is a formational place of education where one learns how to interact with other people.

Whether it is a picnic table, a church fellowship hall set up with folding tables, a front porch, or a dining room within a house, there is something about sharing a meal that unifies people. When people plant, grow, and harvest food in their own garden, there is an experience of consuming food from the fruit of their labor. There is a correlation with creation in the Garden of Eden when people tended to the ground, which is where the food source began.<sup>27</sup> “God meets people at the table; it is place of common in everyday life.”<sup>28</sup>

The statistics are astounding when it comes to the number of meals people eat within their vehicles. According to research, the average Western American person eats one in five meals in the car per week. One in four people eat at least one fast food meal every single day. American households spend roughly the same amount per week on fast food as on groceries.<sup>29</sup> According to Cody Delistraty, writer for the Atlantic, the majority

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<sup>26</sup> Gary W. Fick, *Food, Farming, and Faith* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2008), 8-9.

<sup>27</sup> Jennifer R. Ayres, *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 2-4.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>29</sup> Cody C. Delistraty, “The Importance of Eating Together,” *The Atlantic*, July 18, 2014, accessed November 29, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/search/?q=The+Importance+of+Eating+together>.

of American families report it is rare to eat a single meal together on a regular basis. There are not only financial and relational ramifications of meals eaten in vehicles, but the food that is eaten is usually less healthy than foods cooked in a home. Homemade foods generally have lower fat, salt, and caloric content.<sup>30</sup>

There has been a movement within restaurants nationwide to create a space that is more like home than a fast food restaurant. Wendy's and McDonald's restaurants have both done significant remodels to their franchisees in the past few years where they are creating living room environments with fireplaces and communal tables.<sup>31</sup> All the while, table sales along with dishware sales are declining, because more and more people are eating take-out, pre-made food, and are sitting in front of screens or standing at the counter to consume their meals.<sup>32</sup>

In recent years, more restaurant owners are converting the tables in their restaurants, cafes, and diners into spaces that place people near one another, or seat multiple people together, even if they are strangers. This is not a new idea, as counter seating and cafeteria-style tables have been around for years.<sup>33</sup> The founder of Starbucks, Howard Schultz has the desire for people to consider their Starbucks coffee shop a third space (assuming that home and work occupy the first and second location where people

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Pollan, *Cooked: A Natural History of Transformation* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2014), 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Adele Braun, "Alone Together: The Return of Communal Restaurant Tables." *The Atlantic*, March 31, 2014, accessed November 29, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/03/alone-together-the-return-of-communal-restaurant-tables/284481/>.

<sup>32</sup> Louise O. Fresco, "Why We Eat Together." *The Atlantic*, November 26, 2015, accessed November 29, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/11/dinners-ready/416991/>.

<sup>33</sup> Braun.

spend their time). He would like to welcome people by name and have them be known for their drink of choice.<sup>34</sup> Coffee is no longer just something that you drink. When you go to Starbucks, you have an experience.<sup>35</sup> Is that what people are longing for, an experience? An authentic connection with another human being is something that people ache for daily. Often people will settle for a connection at a café or coffee shop, even if the staff only know their name and their drink of choice.

Recovery of the familial identity around a table is a need, as it is a vital formational tool for spiritual, relational, and physical nourishment. Paul Fieldhouse, who has an interdisciplinary Ph.D. in food and religion, offers these insightful words, “Across cultures and time, food sharing is an almost universal medium for expressing fellowship; it embodies values of hospitality, duty, gratitude, sacrifice, and compassion. Giving, receiving, and sharing food are gestures of friendship and symbols of trust and interdependency.”<sup>36</sup>

Cooking meals together and creating a hospitable space are primary ways to expand who is present at the table within a home. People feel welcome when there is an invitation to share a meal at someone else’s house.<sup>37</sup> Times of celebration and loss are often when people need the hospitality offered by a meal. It is important to remember that

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<sup>34</sup> Howard Schultz and Joanne Gordon, *Onward: How Starbucks Fought for Its Life Without Losing Its Soul*, rep. ed. (New York, NY: Rodale Books, 2012), 13.

<sup>35</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Gospel According to Starbucks: Living with a Grande Passion* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2007), 3.

<sup>36</sup> Fieldhouse, 3.

<sup>37</sup> Alice P. Julier, *Eating Together: Food, Friendship and Inequality* (Champagne, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 1.



people need others during the immediate time of joy and loss. People need tangible support: often-times fruits and vegetables are what is needed, the basics of life.<sup>38</sup>

The shaping that takes place around breaking bread together is formational. Henri Nouwen shares,

What happens during meals shapes a large part of our memories. As we grow older we forget many things, but we mostly remember the Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners in our families. We remember them with joy and gratitude or with sadness and anger. They remind us of the peace that existed in our homes or the conflicts that never seemed to get resolved. These special moments around the table stand out as vivid reminders of the quality of our lives together. Today fast-food services and TV dinners have made common meals less and less central. But what will there be to remember when we no longer come together around the table to share a meal? Maybe we will have fewer painful memories, but will we have any joyful ones? Can we make the table a hospitable place, inviting us to kindness, gentleness, joy, and peace and creating beautiful memories?<sup>39</sup>

In order to proclaim the power, salvation, and hope of Jesus, the table needs to be experienced as a place where the truth of Jesus transfigures identity. How can we build stories that help Christians pass on their faith, build identity, and create ecclesia in order to reseed our faith?

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<sup>38</sup> Susan Roberts McWilliams, "Love, Loss and Fruit Salad," *Cooking Light*, October 2015, 239-240.

<sup>39</sup> J. M. Henri Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey: A Daybook of Wisdom and Faith* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2006), February 18 entry.

## SECTION 2:

### OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

It is imperative to understand what is keeping people from coming to the table, as well as why people come to the table to break bread with others. The yearning for meaning and belonging, lack of faith identification, as well as the decline in familial identity around a table are all contributing factors for why people do not come to the table. There is a desire that people have for a transfigurational experience around the table with other people while breaking bread that has been a part of the human story since time began.

In this section, four texts will offer an overarching understanding of the table, through the origins of the table in the church, the identity that formed around the table, the faith community that is built around the table, and finally the connection with the neighborhood to the table. The progression of these texts will begin with an overarching view of the table throughout scripture and proceed to the nuances of sharing the table with neighbors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The first text, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* by professor John Mark Hicks, depicts the communion meal throughout scripture. The second text, *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed* by prolific church historian and futurist Leonard Sweet, offers metaphoric insights into how the table can be a place for identity formation. The third text, *Bread & Wine: A Love Letter to Life Around the Table, With Recipes* by Shauna Niequist, offers a personal memoir of life as a church leader around a shared table. Finally, *The Turquoise Table: Finding Community and Connection in Your Own Front Yard* by Kristin Schell, offers a fresh perspective of

the practicalities of creating space for neighborhood relationships to form while at a picnic table in the front yard. Kristin is the founder of the movement called Turquoise Table and Front Yard People, which are nationally recognized in neighborhoods throughout America.

To begin, in *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper*, Hicks offers foundational insight to the created image of humanity in the likeness of the triune God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup> This book is profoundly important for contextualizing how the table informed the formation of communion throughout the scripture narrative.

The sharing of communion was a covenant that took place in the Old Testament. The meals continued into the future when Jesus shared meals with individuals and large groups of people. During the Last Supper, Jesus modeled communion with his disciples and with Judas, who would betray him within hours of that shared meal.<sup>41</sup> Communion at the Last Supper marked the beginning of the eucharist for the ecclesia, which the Church has implemented as a sacrament for future generations.

In the Old Testament, the altar was a space for offering a sacrifice as a means of repentance and a place to remember the covenant God made with his sons and daughters. An altar was a place where people made vows of commitment in front of God, each other, and their community. This is participation in the faithfulness of God. *hesed* is the

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<sup>40</sup> John Mark Hicks, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2008), 14-15.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

Hebrew word that represents the covenant of loving-kindness, mercy, and loyalty of Yahweh God to his people.<sup>42</sup>

After an altar experience took place, the table was set as a means to participate in *hesed*.<sup>43</sup>

The altar in the Old Testament depicts that blood sacrifices, followed by a meal together. Exodus 24:11 shares that after Moses encountered God through the blood covenant, “they beheld god, and they ate and drank.” Following the meal, a cleansing and forgiveness took place. “The blood of the covenant establishes our relationship with God so that we may eat in his presence as we affirm our allegiance to the covenant, participate in the forgiveness of that altar, and experience the presence of God at the table.”<sup>44</sup>

To engage in table celebrations after an altar experience was a joyful expression of the covenantal love that was a symbol of renewal of union with God and others. Hicks offers insight through multiple stories of this renewal in the Old Testament: entering into the promised land in Joshua 8, sacrificing offerings at the completion of the temple in 2 Chronicles 7:10, rebuilding the temple after there had been captivity in Babylon in Ezra 6. The feasts of the Old Testament represent the joining around a table to acknowledge renewal that was taking place with God.<sup>45</sup>

Throughout his writings, Hicks argues that the table is a place for joy and communion in the presence of God. At the table, “God is a participant because he is a party to the covenant ... God shares his holy presence with his people and renews his

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<sup>42</sup> “Hesed,” *The New Strong's Expanded Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, expanded ed. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2001), 93.

<sup>43</sup> Hicks, 28-31.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-37.

own commitment to his people.”<sup>46</sup> God was present at the meals he shared with Israel and in sending Jesus Christ to earth he manifests his presence to eat with his people in the New Testament.

In the account of the Last Supper (Matthew 26:17-30), Jesus models that it is not just to drink of the wine and eat the bread, it is experienced by sharing a full meal together.

[The] table ... is not simply about vertical communion with God. On the contrary, to sit at the table is to commit to serving those who sit at the table with you. It is to participate in the community of faith. It is a moment of mutual commitment and mutual service. The table involves communion between God and his people and among the people of God. God in Jesus serves that table and at the table we serve each other.<sup>47</sup>

The table is a place where people can come as invited guests to participate with God in the very nourishment of the covenantal relationship that his people have with him. It is a place to model his values, and as Hicks says, “To honor him by sharing in his values and imitating his character.”<sup>48</sup> This communal act bears the image of the triune God manifest in human interaction.

Communal restoration is needed at the table in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hicks writes, “It is necessary to restore the table. ... This is about retrieving the original intent and meaning of the supper. The Lord’s supper must become real table fellowship if it is to recover its original function.”<sup>49</sup> The genesis of the table was to participate with God and

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 80-81.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 138.

then it evolved over time to be a space to share with other people to bring covenant relationship into daily life.

The Lord's Supper is our grateful response in conventional commitment. While the supper is a divine act, it is nevertheless also a human need. It is a human affirmation of covenantal commitment and thanksgiving. When we eat and drink, we commit ourselves to the values of the gospel, which the meal embodies. We offer thanks for divine grace. Through the supper, we commit ourselves to God and to each other. When we sit at table with the Lord who humbled himself to give his life for others, we commit ourselves to the humble service of others, even to the point of giving our lives (and belongings) for each other. Eating and drinking without commitment is to eat and drink judgment, but to eat and drink with commitment is to visibly take up your cross at the table and follow Jesus.<sup>50</sup>

In following the way of Jesus, breaking bread at the table, there is recognition that the host is present as the living God. "The present table is a foretaste of the eschatological table in the new heaven and new earth where God will fully dwell with his people as their God. There the goal of God is fully accomplished and God sits at table with his people as he always intended."<sup>51</sup> The Spirit of the Living God will bring reformation and renewal to the conflict that has created disunity around the table. When unity takes place, the restoration as image bearers of the triune God enhances the identity of Jesus' followers.

While Hicks' book has a comprehensive overview of the table historically in the Old and New Testament, as well as the need for the table in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is a lack of acknowledgment of the consistency or rhythm of the time spent around the table breaking bread with others. Hicks recognizes that God has initiated time around the table with other people, but does not talk about how people have a transfigurational experience by breaking bread together with others around the table.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 149.

Although Hicks offers an exhaustive look at the table from the Scriptural vantage point, in *From Tablet to Table: Where Community is Found and Identity is Formed*, Leonard Sweet offers an overarching perspective of the effects on identity from time shared around a table. “If we were to make the table the most sacred object of furniture in every home, in every church, in every community, our faith would quickly regain its power, and our world would quickly become a better place. The table is the place where identity is born – the place where the story of our lives is retold, re-minded, and relived.”<sup>52</sup> People are bountiful fields of stories waiting for harvest.

Stories are the blood that keeps the oxygen flowing from generation to generation with the story of Jesus Christ. The table is the prime location for sharing these stories. Sweet articulates, “At the table, where food and stories are passed from one person to another and one generation to another, is where each of us learns who we are, where we come from, what we can be, to whom we belong, and to what we were called.”<sup>53</sup>

The identity formation that takes place through sharing space and stories around the table is in crisis in a time in history when one in five meals per week are eaten in the car.<sup>54</sup> The time that people spend eating meals in front of a screen or without anyone else around during mealtime is on the rise. Sweet shares the concern of this type of meal-eating behavior because it does not promote the intentions of Jesus’ life on earth as it pertained to breaking bread.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Sweet, *From Tablet to Table*, 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 11-13.

Jesus' intentions orient communally, which promote identity formation around the story of the triune God. Sweet articulates,

The table is necessarily communal. And for Christians, there is a Trinitarian component to the table. Even when only two gathered together, three are always present. Wherever we break bread together, Jesus is always at the table. And we are to re-member him, bring him to life in every heart. Because the life of your table becomes the preeminent art of your life. You "become" a disciple to the Master Artist through your time spent together at Jesus' table.<sup>56</sup>

The stories that people embody are as vast as the horizon and as deep as the ocean floor. Throughout church history, stories around the table are present. Sweet says, "When you tell a story, you are transferring your experiences directly to the brains of those listening; they feel what you feel, think what you think, smell what you smell. You are teleporting your story to their brain."<sup>57</sup> The individual stories of Jesus followers are pointing to the larger narrative of the triune God.

To engage in the larger story of the triune God, people must acknowledge the need for identity formation and its rootedness around sharing stories at the table. The intentional act of breaking bread is for people to experience what Jesus gave to his disciples, "storied identity – meaning that he framed their identity in the stories he told as he walked about, healed, and taught in ancient Palestine."<sup>58</sup> This enhancement of understanding of identity around the table is a way to model the life of a Jesus follower through being a host, a guest, as well as someone who welcomes strangers along with enemies to dine together.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 49.



To love another is to experience the core identity of the triune God. As Kierkegaard so eloquently shares, “He who cannot reveal himself cannot love, and he who cannot love is the most unhappy man of all.”<sup>59</sup> To engage in love and care for another around the shared space at the table where conversations are not limited, and to welcome silence, means that there can be a healing balm for people to process their emotion.

As the evolution of a Jesus follower’s identity unfolds around the table the sincerity of hospitality is of utmost importance. Sweet summarizes this art in a profoundly beautiful way by sharing, “I used to think hospitality was a lost art. Now I am convinced it is a lost heart.”<sup>60</sup> To offer from a person’s heart is an outpouring of one’s core, it is courageous.<sup>61</sup> The identity formation of the heart happens around a table.

While Sweet articulates the need for Christian orthopraxy around the table, the content of the book could be stronger with practicalities of how to facilitate interactions that encourage identity formation around the table. The content of the book is as if one were going to catch crabs: there is a thorough explanation of the crab itself, yet limited details as to how to utilize the necessary crabbing supplies to get the crab out of the water and into the boat.

If Jesus followers engage in storytelling that is formational to identity around the table there must be practicalities to this execution in one’s daily life. Shauna Niequest

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<sup>59</sup> Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 32.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>61</sup> Brené Brown, *I Thought It Was Just Me (But It Isn't): Making the Journey from “What Will People Say” to “I am Enough”* (New York, NY: Avery, 2007), xxiii.

shares her perspective in the book, *Bread & Wine: a Love Letter to Life around the Table with Recipes*. Niequest identifies herself as,

...a bread-and-wine person. By that, I mean that I'm a Christian, a person of the body and blood, a person of the bread and wine. Like every Christian, I recognize the two as food and drink, and also, at the very same time, I recognize them as something much greater – mystery and tradition and symbol. Bread is bread, and wine is wine, but bread-and-wine is another thing entirely. The two together are the sacred and the material at once, the heaven and earth, the divine and the daily.<sup>62</sup>

The need for daily reminders around the table coordinates to a life of understanding how identity can form around breaking bread together. Niequest writes,

It's not, actually, strictly about food for me. It's about what happens when we come together, slow down, open our homes, look into one another's faces, listen to one another's stories. It happens when we leave the office and get a sitter and skip our workouts every so often to celebrate a birthday or an accomplishment or a wedding or a birth, when we break out of the normal clockwork of daily life and pop the champagne on a cold, gray Wednesday for no other reason than the fact that the faces we love are gathered around our table. It happens when we enter the joy and the sorrow of the people we love, and we join together at the table to feed one another and be fed, and while it's not strictly about the food, it doesn't happen without it. Food is the starting point, the common ground, the thing to hold and handle, the currency we offer one another.<sup>63</sup>

The stories that flavor each day can share space around the table with others in order to point to the transformational power of the triune God.

The triune God invites soulful cultivation to take place around the table and Niequest has shared her collection of essays, "... about family, friendships, and the meals that bring us together. It's about the ways God teaches and nourishes us as we nourish the

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<sup>62</sup> Shauna Niequist, *Bread and Wine: A Love Letter to Life around the Table with Recipes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 11.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 13.

people around us, and about hunger, both physical and otherwise, and the connections between the two.”<sup>64</sup> She continues a further explanation that

the most sacred moments, the ones in which I feel the goodness of the world most arrestingly take place, are at the table. The particular alchemy of celebration and food, of connecting people and serving what I’ve made with my own hands, comes together as more than the sum of their parts. I love the sounds and smells and textures of life at the table, hands passing bowls and forks clinking against the plates and bread being torn and the rhythm and energy of feeding and being fed.”<sup>65</sup>

The yearning for a place to belong can come through an invitation to come to the table to share a meal.

The presentation, preparation of recipes, and taste of food are all aspects of the table hospitality that are important. These components are elements of hosting dinner clubs with friends around the table in order to engage in stories of one another. These stories can take place around the meal preparation as well as the act of eating at the table. These stories include those of losses and joys, processing as well as readings, recipes, and questions to ask around this topic of bringing people together.<sup>66</sup>

When people come together around a table it can be for a variety of reasons: holidays, game nights, or for other entertainment reasons, each offering an opportunity to make memories.<sup>67</sup> Niequest shares, “Gather the people you love around your table and feed them with love and honesty and creativity. Feed them with your hands the flavors and smells that remind you of home and beauty and the best stories you’ve ever heard,

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 12-16.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 107.

the best stories you've ever lived."<sup>68</sup> People will inevitably remember old stories, but will also create new ones through shared experiences around the table.

There is a need for someone to offer their time if they are willing to come to the table. Neiquist shares her personal experience of stopping time,

Most of the time, I eat like someone's about to steal my plate like I can't be bothered to chew or taste or feel, but I'm coming to see that the table is about food, and it's also about time. It's about showing up in person, a whole and present person, instead of a fragmented, frantic person, phone in one hand and to-do list in the other. Put them down, both of them, twin symbols of the modern age, and pick up a knife and fork. The table is where time stops. It's where we look people in the eye, where we tell the truth about hard it is, where we make space to listen to the whole story, not the textable sound bites.<sup>69</sup>

The effort to slow oneself down long enough to come to the table requires acknowledging that there is need for a transfigurational experience.

Accepting an invitation to slow down and participate at the table is a need if someone would like to be needed by what takes place around the table. In closing, Niequist shares,

We don't come to the table to fight or to defend. We don't come to prove or to conquer, to draw lines in the sand or to stir up trouble. We come to the table because our hunger brings us there. We come with a need, with fragility, with an admission of our humanity. The table is the great equalizer, the level playing field many of us have been looking everywhere for. The table is the place where the doing stops, the trying stops, the masks are removed, and we allow ourselves to be nourished, like children. We allow someone else to meet our need, on going longer and faster, on going without, on powering through, the table is a place of safety and rest and humanity, where we are allowed to be as fragile as we feel. Come to the table.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 256.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 258.

Niequest's writing has strength in the depiction of stories around the table and shared meals, but lacks in explicit articulation of depth to the correlation of shared meals to the narrative of scripture. There is significant effort put forth to host and attend gatherings around the table, but the lack of exhortation on how identity formation happens or constructed throughout these shared meals is disappointing because it lacks invitation to the larger shared table spoken of in scripture.

A significant portion of the Scriptural narrative is devoted to the teachings on welcoming other people into a hospitable space. It is imperative to look at the recently published book by Kristin Schell entitled, *The Turquoise Table: Finding Community and Connection in Your Own Front Yard*. This practical book offers insightful ideas, stories from experience, and activities for gathering people together in a neighborhood around a table.

"The Turquoise Table offers simplicity. It is more than a table; it's a symbol of reaching out and making room without all the fuss and frenzy."<sup>71</sup> The turquoise table is in one's front yard as a space for people to gather spontaneously in the neighborhood. It is a place to sit down with one another and participate in day-to-day life with those who live in proximity. So often people live in neighborhoods for years and never get to know the stories of the people they cross paths with on a daily basis.

Francis Schaeffer, theologian and founder of L'Abri Community shares, "Don't start with a big program. ... Start personally and start in your home. I dare you. I dare you in the name of Jesus Christ. Begin by opening your home for community. All you

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<sup>71</sup> Kristin Schell, *The Turquoise Table: Finding Community and Connection in Your Own Front Yard* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2017), 9.

have to do is open your home and begin.”<sup>72</sup> Over ninety times in scripture there is instruction on welcoming and caring for a stranger.<sup>73</sup> As a Jesus follower, there is an invitation in James 1:27 to offer care for the orphan and the widow. As Schnell shared from her experience of yearning to belong, know, and be known by her neighbors, it began with a simply prayer: “Here I am, God. Give me eyes to see.”<sup>74</sup>

Where people are in juxtaposition with other people, there are what Schnell calls “rhythms and cadence” to how people live out their routines.<sup>75</sup> A beautiful Irish proverb articulates space by saying, “It is in the shelter of each other that people live.” When people have space to express, articulate, and share their stories with others there is a sense of life breathed into interdependent relationships.

After reading through these texts, it is clear that the table has held a meaningful place historically throughout scripture and still is a present day icon. Hicks depicts the scriptural recognition of the table in the church through his research. Simultaneously, Sweet articulates the formation of one’s identity through storytelling around the table as it pertains to the narrative of scripture. Storytelling can also be found in the act of taking communion of bread and wine in Niequest’s writing about people gathering. And finally, the formation that is present around the table is a part of care for other people’s stories that is communicated through Schnell’s Turquoise Table movement among

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>73</sup> Welcoming the Stranger, World Relief, “Scripture and Immigration,” accessed September 9, 2017, [http://welcomingthestranger.com/wp\\_welcoming/learn-and-discern/scripture-and-immigration](http://welcomingthestranger.com/wp_welcoming/learn-and-discern/scripture-and-immigration).

<sup>74</sup> Schell, 37.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 93.

neighborhoods. It has a profound invitation to people who are known and unknown living in proximity.

While it is important to acknowledge the historical Scriptural importance, the identity formation of sharing bread and wine, and the neighborhood importance of sharing the table with others; there is also a need to communicate that there is a transfigurational experience with the triune God that takes place by breaking bread together.

The ecclesia of the first century was made of the people of the New Testament era who were called out of their way of living to follow a new way of the redemptive message of Jesus Christ. In the time of gathering, bread was broken to share the story of the Gospel. In the book of Matthew, the reference to breaking of bread and drinking from the cup was symbolic to communion, as it was a continual metaphor throughout scripture.<sup>76</sup> In Acts, the ecclesia came together around a table to break the bread together.<sup>77</sup> When people gathered around a table together to break bread they were nourishing their bodies physically, and simultaneously embodying the story of Jesus' body broken to set people free through his resurrection. Breaking bread together is a way to share the story of Jesus' death and resurrection through participation with others by embodying and retelling his story.

As the story of scripture concludes, the final invitation in the book of Revelation is for people to come and “drink freely”<sup>78</sup> from the water of life. There is continually an

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<sup>76</sup> Matthew 26:26 (NIV).

<sup>77</sup> Acts 2:47, 20:11 (NIV).

<sup>78</sup> Revelation 22:17 (NIV).

invitation to come, partake, and receive. Throughout scripture, the triune God set the table for us to partake, but people must choose to come to the table.

To experience a transfigurational meaning around the iconic table on a daily basis with a strong lyrical tempo of transformation can shape people into the image of the triune God. Will Jesus followers take the opportunity to enter into genuine relationship with the triune God to invite, participate, and communicate around the table with others by breaking bread together on a consistent basis?



## SECTION 3:

### THESIS

[The] sacredness of the physical world – and the potential of the physical world for sacredness – provides a powerful and surprising path towards understanding the existence of God.  
— Christopher Alexander

### Introduction

In the very beginning, God created male and female in the image of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Shortly after the creation of humankind, the gift of food became a central part of the Biblical narrative. He gave the first human beings, Adam and Eve, permission to roam the garden and eat of all food, except for the tree of knowledge of good and evil.<sup>79</sup> From this portion of scripture, we learn that God is a communicator, there was plenty of food to eat, and there were boundaries in place. God's first communication about the food was a resounding "yes, eat and enjoy!" As the narrative unfolds, sin enters the scene when Adam and Eve violate the boundary and eat of the forbidden fruit. From this point on throughout scripture, God initiates relationship with his people, he is among his people and he creates space for people to gather.

Even today, a meal around the table breaking bread can be a place for narratives to unfold. Each day is full of emotions, relationships, and stories that affect the way people interpret how the world works. Over time, these stories influence the way people

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<sup>79</sup> Genesis 2:17 (NIV).

see themselves, and yet who are the recipients of the communication of these experiences? Relationships are sharing less face-to-face time together because of the connectedness that happens via technology as well as less time shared together due to busy life schedules. In addition to this, the definition of a home does not always include the traditional family with a dad, mom, and children. The number of people who are choosing not to marry is on the rise along with single-parent homes. These relational shifts are present inside and outside of the church.<sup>80</sup>

As disconnected relationships are on the rise, people created in the image of a triune God long for interconnected relationships that are transfigurational. Relationships are formational to bear the image of the triune God. In order to share life with other people, one must be in relationship and respond to the invitation to come to the table, choose to participate in breaking the bread together. When this happens, it communicates the story of his redemption in a transfigurational way, as modeled by the ecclesia in the first century. The table is a space where people can come together to break bread, pray, share in song, liturgy, and story with other people to strengthen their identity as image bearers of the triune God and as a flourishing ecclesia. This is a gathering of people coming together in order to build a community of meaning and belonging. This happens through relationship with the triune God, invitation, participation, and communication around breaking bread with one another as an expression of worship for the triune God as

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<sup>80</sup> Sarah Hamaker, "Pew for One: How Is the Church Responding to Growing Number of Singles?" *The Christian Post*, February 29, 2012, accessed September 17, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pew-for-one-how-is-the-church-responding-to-growing-number-of-singles-70586/>.

a testimony to the world of divine love through a transfigurational experience around the table.

This testimony establishes the identity of believing in the Truth of a present and powerful Jesus who can transfigure lives, offer forgiveness, and hope for those who allow him to live his life through them, the power to experience healing, joy, and peace. As my parents, John and Jill Hurlow, have shared from their forty plus years of hosting meals in their home, “It is through sharing stories around the table, that we really do understand how to care for each other because of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. It is truly a blessing to gather together.”<sup>81</sup>

### **Relationship with the Triune God**

You are to be taken, blest, broken and distributed,  
that the work of the Incarnation may go forward.  
— Augustine of Hippo

The narrative of scripture includes an offer to choose to be in relationship with the triune God. This section will cover three areas: living as transfigurational image bearers; the rhythm of stories from scripture; and how the table creates space for metamorphic change. Theologian Kelton Cobb writes, “The table, the trough, has God’s fingerprints all over it. We participate in a mystery whenever we eat food. Indeed, every meal is sacramental. Through eating, death is resurrected into life. Dead fish, dead figs and dead cornflakes transformed into the living tissue of our bodies. Through some mystery brewing deep inside of us all that is dead matter comes to life ... This is an event I would call a sacred occurrence.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> John and Jill Hurlow, interviewed by author, Mansfield, Ohio, May 15, 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Deanna M. Minich PhD, *The Rainbow Diet: A Holistic Approach to Radiant Health through Foods and Supplements* (Newburyport, MA: Conari Press, 2018), 78.

YHWH is a God of provision.<sup>83</sup> “The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing” (Psalm 145:14-16). Throughout the Old Testament, fellowship over a meal was a way of reaching out and bringing reconciliation.<sup>84</sup> The New Testament recounts that more people received an invitation to lunch from Jesus than an invitation to the synagogue.<sup>85</sup>

Sharing food and stories among other people are practices that span across cultural and social boundaries. A shared meal around a table at one time was a central focal point of a home and has been a place for people to share stories on a consistent basis ever since. The time spent together around breaking bread in the scriptures, according to pastor and professor Hal Taussig, was where,

They made decisions together about their inner workings and their relationship to the broader world. Meals were the place where they taught and learned together and where they worshipped, prayed, and sang their songs together. This was the time that they had arguments, sorted out differences, went their own ways, and reconciled with one another. It was a central community event. These meals provided the primary experiential evidence for those who opposed them, those who dropped in for visits, and those who were curious about them.<sup>86</sup>

Interconnected relationships bear the image of the triune God.

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<sup>83</sup> Nathan MacDonald, Kathy Ehrensperger, and Luzia Sutter Rehmann, eds., *Decisive Meals: Table Politics in Biblical Literature* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 2.

<sup>84</sup> Douglas Webster, *Table Grace: The Role of Hospitality in the Christian Life* (Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2001), 11.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Hal Taussig, *In the Beginning Was the Meal: Social Experimentation and Early Christian Identity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2009), 21-23.

### *Transfigurational Image Bearers*

The Transfiguration of Jesus spoken of in Matthew 17:1-3; 5-8 shares that,

Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother brought them up on a high mountain by themselves and was transfigured before them. His face shown like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. A bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear him!’ And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, ‘Arise, and do not be afraid.’

This story offers perspective of the divinity of Jesus to his close disciples. According to Don Stewart, a contributing writer for Blue Letter Bible, “The Transfiguration in scripture was the glorification of the human body of Jesus. On this occasion, his body underwent a change in form, a metamorphosis, so that it shone as brightly as the sun. At the time of the Transfiguration, Jesus’ earthly ministry at its end. He had acknowledged that he was the Messiah and predicted his death and resurrection. Now he was to reveal his divine glory.”<sup>87</sup> This transformation was representational of the change that is possible for the believer when one will live into the likeness of God as an image bearer of the Divine.

Metamorphic change is possible for the Jesus follower to embody the attributes of the triune God. Carl McColman, a contemplative speaker shares, “... to learn the curriculum of a truly spiritual life ... [people are] grounded in love, mercy, tenderness, compassion, forgiveness, hope, trust, simplicity, silence, peace, and joy. To embody

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<sup>87</sup> Don Stewart, “What Was the Significance of Jesus’ Transfiguration,” *Blueletter Bible*, accessed October 8, 2017, [https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don\\_stewart/don\\_stewart\\_786.cfm](https://www.blueletterbible.org/faq/don_stewart/don_stewart_786.cfm).

union with God is to discover these beautiful characteristics emerging from within and slowly transfiguring us to remake us in the very image and likeness of God.”<sup>88</sup>

To embody the life of the triune God is to receive what is given. Paul Pastor, author and speaker, writes, “My word will not return to me without benefit, without life, without nourishing all who call me Father. I will feed you, just as I water my fields that lay full of the sprouting seeds, raising the bread of God. You will be given bread and body. You will become bread and body.”<sup>89</sup>

A transfigurational experience communicates what is necessary when it comes to teaching why gathering around a table to share a meal is helpful to build interpersonal relationships as well as share stories of faith. In an interview with my uncle, Len Calhoun he shared the following thoughts, “What is the big significance of the ‘table’ that we experience? There is most likely something about that joining of all believers that will weld/meld/join us together for eternity.”<sup>90</sup>

### *Places for Scriptural Storytelling on a Rhythmic Basis*

A rhythm builds into the infrastructure of each day through mealtime, which is something that often takes place at a table. Jennifer Ayers, a professor and writer on faith formation and food justice, communicates the power of storytelling in a beautiful way by saying, “at the center of the Christian tradition sits a table. It was around tables the Jesus

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<sup>88</sup> Richard Rohr, “Mysticism: Week 2 Summary,” *Center for Action and Contemplation*, October 7, 2017, accessed October 7, 2017, <https://cac.org/mysticism-week-2-summary-2017-10-07/>.

<sup>89</sup> Paul J. Pastor, *The Listening Day: Meditations On the Way*, vol. 1 (Portland, OR: Zeal Books, 2017), 46.

<sup>90</sup> Len Calhoun, interviewed by author, via email, April 5, 2017.

taught, loved, shared with, and challenged the disciples. At meal times, Jesus and the disciples shared a beloved community that understood sharing, hospitality, and attention to material needs to be at the heart of their life together.”<sup>91</sup> Teaching through verbal direction as well as nonverbal modeling are important aspects of meal times around the table for children to learn the social norms of the family or those present within the home.<sup>92</sup> To share daily reflections around mealtime offers an opportunity for interdependence to take place, which emulates the triune God. The prominence of the table throughout scripture has variations of what takes place in these settings as rhythms form.

Throughout the Biblical narrative, the variety of spaces for meals to take place when people come together are plentiful. These encounters over meals take place in order to bring God to the people and people to a deeper understanding of God. Sharing conversations of the story of God’s timeless narrative are foundational. Each time there is a gathering together for a meal, there is a purpose that draws the individuals present to experience something about the triune God. Jim Calhoun, an architect of church spaces has shared, “There is worship experience that is established around the table, within the church building, as well as the home.”<sup>93</sup>

Six places as it pertains to the narrative of storytelling throughout scripture are included in this section, including *koinonia*, *anamnēsis*, *deipnon*, *syneuōcheomai*, *symposium*, and *aineō*.

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<sup>91</sup> Ayres, 55.

<sup>92</sup> Fieldhouse, 5.

<sup>93</sup> Jim Calhoun, interviewed by author, Columbus, Ohio, March 4, 2016.

## Koinonia

Koinonia is a place for participation, communion, and gathering. A meal is a place for fellowship together. This happens when there is participation in an effort to create unity. There cannot be a separation of the bread and wine with the idea of sharing a meal together because the table is a place for telling through a Eucharistic practice which is essential to unifying believers.<sup>94</sup>

Where koinonia is present there is fellowship as a body of Christ.<sup>95</sup> Where there is true love for one another, the practice of ecclesia is present. When this is present, the incarnation of Jesus Christ offers a transfigurational experience. The unity of koinonia across denominational lines, economic strata, and social constructs is dependent on love.<sup>96</sup> People practice and understand koinonia in a variety of ways. For example, Sara Hightower-Yoder shares from her experiences with her University colleagues around the table. She shares that unity can result from, “facilitating connection and intimacy through conversation.” As a mother of three toddlers, Rachel Carlberg shares that the connection that takes place around the table happens through ongoing developmental learning. Another perspective comes from a woman who has hosted holiday meals for decades. Molly Calhoun shares, “Hosting people is really about creating opportunities - not putting on a performance.”<sup>97</sup> Koinonia requires genuine intentionality to bring people together.

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<sup>94</sup> Michael Welker, *What Happens in Holy Communion?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 37.

<sup>95</sup> Kokichi Kurosaki, *One Body in Christ* (Northridge, CA: Voice Christian Publications, 1968), 49.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>97</sup> Molly Calhoun, interviewed by author, Columbus, Ohio, May 14, 2016.



There is a need to put aside distractions in order to participate with the people present at the table, because as William Willimon has stated, “the disintegration of table fellowship often leads to the dissolution of the family.”<sup>98</sup> There must be a commitment to protect the space at the table and to participate with one another in order to integrate storytelling of scripture.

### **Anamnésis**

A second place is anamnésis, which is a place for remembering. In the Jewish culture, meals are eaten weekly at Shabbat as a time to remember and retell the ancient Exodus story. These were not stories about the Jewish people from long ago, but are shared for the retelling and identification of the story of who they are from past generations to the present.<sup>99</sup> The table is a covenant for people to come together in mutual agreement to remember the extension of grace, and to believe in Jesus’ redemptive power through communion together.<sup>100</sup> Matthew 18:20 explains there is something profound that takes place when people gather together around a table. “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the midst of them.” If people take the time to gather in his name with the purpose of remembering whose they are, there will be an experience of God’s presence in profound ways.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Willimon, 107.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 14-16.

<sup>100</sup> Laurence Hull Stookey, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast with the Church* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 20-21.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

### **Deipnon**

A third place is deipnon, a place for the sole purpose of eating. The food consumed is an important aspect of the story of scripture. A typical diet consisted of a grain product, olive oil, and wine. These three items mentioned in Deuteronomy 7:13 and 11:14 were important representations of the covenantal agreement between YHWH and the Israelites.<sup>102</sup> The food was for nourishment but also held ritual recognition that was so very important to the culture. In addition to the types of food that made up a meal, the portions of the food were a part of the delineation of the guest's importance and at times social class.<sup>103</sup> Throughout scripture, there was an awareness of the type of food eaten among different cultures as a sign of respect. Paul speaks of this in Romans 14 and 15, addressing the preferences of Jews and Gentiles.<sup>104</sup> The foods that people eat can tell a story of the Scriptural narrative of faith.

### **Syneuōcheomai**

A fourth place, syneuōcheomai, is a place for feasting. Historically, in the ancient Near East, the king's power and authority was denoted through the royal table. "The earliest evidence for large royal feasting goes back to the third millennium BC. An inscription of Sargan of Akkad records that '5,400 men daily eat in the presence of Sargan, king of the world, the king to whom the god Enlil gave no rival.'"<sup>105</sup> In

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<sup>102</sup> Peter Altmann and Janling Fu, *Feasting in the Archaeology and Texts of the Bible and the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 187.

<sup>103</sup> Taussig, 71-73.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>105</sup> MacDonald, Ehrensperger, and Rehmann, 7-10.

Esther 1:1-41, King Xerxes offers an example of great wealth and prestige through the elaborate table and the extravagant feast that he prepared for his companions and guests.

The English words for companion and company are both from Latin, defined as, “Those who share bread with each other.”<sup>106</sup> Throughout scripture there is a sharing in the bread and wine that brings people together. In Genesis 2, the early words that God spoke to Adam and Eve were in regards to the freedom in the garden to eat, and the entire narrative of scripture closes in Revelation 19:9 with the grand finale of the wedding feast of heaven, a grandiose banquet.

The ending of the story of the prodigal son in Luke 11:15-32 includes an elaborate celebration of the prodigal son’s coming home. The father holds a meal with a fattened calf in order to rejoice in the return of his wayward son. The gift of an elaborate party can be an opportunity to recognize that God is abundant in his love and celebration.

### **Symposiums**

A fifth place is a symposium for a discussion or teaching. Symposiums often have wine poured for a shared meal around a table to encourage ongoing discussion even after the consumption of the meal. Hal Taussig describes this space as “The part of the meal where most of the social interaction, community discussion, singing, and teaching occurred.”<sup>107</sup> This space is vitally important.

People have the opportunity to share meals together as a way to extend hospitality. For instance, on a number of occasions, Martin and Kate Luther’s neighbors

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<sup>106</sup> Stookey, 13.

<sup>107</sup> Taussig, 47, 74.

would share the experience of dining at their home. Written accounts by Cara Strickland, who studied the life of Martin Luther shares, “With a constant stream of visitors in his home, it’s likely Martin rarely ate and drank alone. Not only was beer a constant of daily life while Martin was alive, sharing it together was a way to show hospitality to one’s neighbors.”<sup>108</sup>

Culturally speaking, symposiums were dinners, which for the majority of the time included men from an upper echelon. When the early Christians would host open Eucharistic symposiums including all people from all social classes, they were functioning in society in a counter-cultural way.<sup>109</sup> The teaching component that accompanies a meal has profound implications as it brings people together for telling the story of God.

### **Aineō**

The final place is aineō, a space for worship. When Jesus was sharing meals, he was giving people an experience of the kingdom of God right in front of them as a form of worship.<sup>110</sup> The Eucharist is an opportunity for people to remember what the Lord has done and embody the experience through worship. Revelation 19 portrays the wedding feast with worship to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.<sup>111</sup> The opportunity to worship

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<sup>108</sup> Cara Strickland, “Hospitality by the Pint,” Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, September 11, 2017, accessed September 21, 2017, <https://www.livinglutheran.org/2017/09/hospitality%E2%80%85by-the-pint/>.

<sup>109</sup> Eugene LaVerdiere, *Dining in the Kingdom of God: the Origins of the Eucharist According to Luke* (Chicago, IL: Liturgy Training Publications, 2007), 16-19.

<sup>110</sup> Ayres, 62.

<sup>111</sup> Rohr, “Mysticism.”

together with other people tells the story that the creation of humans was in the image of relationship.

As a place for worship, College Wesleyan Church in Marion, Indiana has held worship spaces for sharing weekly meals within the church as a way for the congregation to share time with their neighbors at a dinner prepared by volunteers. This is a time to participate in the teachings of scripture and share space with people over a meal. The altar table where the Eucharist is shared within the church is focused on a time that calls people to celebrate the life of Christ, remember his sacrifice, and share in the communal experience of communion together. These tables within College Wesleyan Church, both over Wednesday night meals, as well as communion itself, has been space for the church to be reminded she has a place to host other people, while also being hosted. There are times to offer and times to receive. This worshipful church space provides examples of what it means to be intentional: to reach out and invite people to join as well as to share their stories.<sup>112</sup>

When people have a place to come to the table, figuratively and metaphorically, the action of contribution can be an enhancement to partaking in the daily bread. Richard Rohr writes, “Yes, you – and all of creation – are invited to sit at the divine table. You are called to consciously participate in the divine dance of loving and being loved.”<sup>113</sup> Opportunities for people to participate at the divine table are present through the invitation to come. Jesus followers are of one body, for people all partake of one bread.

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<sup>112</sup> Rhonda Conrad, Judy Crossman, Emily Vermilya, and Jackie White, interviewed by author, Marion, Indiana, October 21, 2015.

<sup>113</sup> Richard Rohr, *The Divine Dance: the Trinity and Your Transformation* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 2016), 22.

Sharing a meal with other people is key to this process of fellowship and imitating the creation of relationship.<sup>114</sup> I Corinthians 10:17 reiterates this by saying, “As there is one loaf, so we, although there are many of us, are one single body, for we all share in the one loaf.”

### *The Table as a Space for Metamorphic Change*

Jesus asked his disciples to partake in the breaking of bread and drinking of wine as a means of remembrance of the redemption that was taking place because of his relational love. 1 Corinthians 11:24 states, “He took the bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”<sup>115</sup> The word Eucharist means thanksgiving.<sup>116</sup>

Remembering and thanksgiving are the core of the Eucharist, as it is a way of partaking in the transfigurational act of the triune God and his loving relationship to us. Laurence Hull Stookey, a professor and pastor, shares these insightful words,

Do this in remembrance of me. Yet when we come often enough and stay long enough, unwittingly the faithful find there a banquet whose richness and delight cannot be anticipated. The feast is intended to allure, then compel, and finally draw into true community those who share it. The wonder of this banquet –

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<sup>114</sup> Bruce Milne, *We Belong Together: The Meaning of Fellowship* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 67.

<sup>115</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:24 (NRSV).

<sup>116</sup> “Eucharist,” Dictionary.com, accessed July 5, 2017, <http://www.dictionary.com/browse/eucharist>.

Christ's feast with the church – we now pursue, the better to enjoy it and to be nurtured, changed and emboldened by it.<sup>117</sup>

To understand the Eucharist, one must remember the transfigurational experience that took place through the redemption story of Jesus Christ. If I were to ask a Jewish person to remember their graduation, they would reenact the story. This example is how we can take the Eucharist; we can reenact it.<sup>118</sup> The past integrates into the present, to recreate the actual process. To engage in this process of breaking the bread and drinking the wine it is vital to participate in all of the embedded meaning that is within the heart and spirit by means of transfiguration by the living, present Jesus.

The table is a place where identity is offered as one can receive the gift that has been given for our redemption with Christ. To partake of the Eucharist is a means of partaking in the transformational power that the redemption holds for followers of Jesus.<sup>119</sup> The table is prepared: come expecting. “To actually come and participate is to worship. In the Hebrew and Greek, this means that you are physically doing something in response to him. You are responding.”<sup>120</sup>

As a social justice advocate, William McElvany has written so eloquently, “We belong to the common loaf and to each other. We belong to the one chalice which binds us together.”<sup>121</sup> When practicing communion regularly, it has the opportunity to become

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<sup>117</sup> Stookey, 12.

<sup>118</sup> Willimon, 26-27.

<sup>119</sup> Vander Zee, 189-191.

<sup>120</sup> Pastor Daniel Rife, interviewed by author, Marion, Indiana, March 15, 2017.

<sup>121</sup> William K. McElvaney, *Eating and Drinking at the Welcome Table: the Holy Supper for All People* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998), 23.

an integral part of the way in which a community celebrates and reflects the Incarnation of Jesus' life. This time spent together is a worship experience.<sup>122</sup>

### **Invitation into a Place of Belonging**

If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.  
— Lilla Watson

The narrative of scripture includes an invitation to have places to belong. This section will explore the importance of places where God and Jesus are a host, how space can offer hospitality, and the concept of *xenia* hospitality.

YHWH is a God who cares about places. From the beginning of time, having a space to eat has been a care of God's. Lisa Graham McMinn, a professor of sociology, writes, "Earth is a place of beauty, blessing, diversity, and delight, where all the pieces fit together into a complete whole."<sup>123</sup> In Genesis 2:16 it is written, "The Lord God commanded the man (and woman), 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.'" From then on eating has been a part of everyday life, a natural rhythm that takes place and human accomplishments take place because of the food people eat.<sup>124</sup> Adam and Eve could share in this daily practice together, which offers a beautiful model of including other people by extending an invitation to break bread together.

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<sup>122</sup> Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 293.

<sup>123</sup> Lisa Graham McMinn and Megan Anna Neff, *Walking Gently On the Earth: Making Faithful Choices about Food, Energy, Shelter and More* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 20.

<sup>124</sup> Lisa Graham McMinn, *To the Table: a Spirituality of Food, Farming, and Community* (Ada, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 5.



In Genesis 18, Abraham and Sarah naturally offer an invitation of hospitality to the three strangers who came to their tent. When they offered them something to drink and eat, they offered space for their guests to share a meal. As an architect, Carolyn Steel writes, “Few acts are more expressive of companionship than the shared meal. Someone with whom we share food is likely to be our friend, or well on the way to becoming one.”<sup>125</sup> To offer kindness in friendship offers companionship. The word “companion” comes from the Latin “cum” (together) and “panis” (bread).<sup>126</sup> Sharing the table by breaking bread together is a means of offering space to share in the experience of companionship with the triune God here on earth.<sup>127</sup>

The kingdom of God here on earth can be an expression of the relational triune God when there is shared space around a table. As an author and speaker on community living, Dustin Willis states, “Many Christians have bought into the cultural view that our homes are our personal and private fortresses. Leveraging our personal refuges for this mission of welcoming others may feel like a great cost, but it is a cost that is repaid with an abundance of superior joys. Loneliness is traded for community, comfort is surrendered for an eternal purpose, and detached apathy is left behind for a mission meaningful enough to give your life to.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Carolyn Steel, *Hungry City: How Food Shapes Our Lives*, rep. ed. (London, UK: Random House, 2013), 212.

<sup>126</sup> Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission Around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 10.

<sup>127</sup> Derrick J. Lemons, “Communities at the Tables: Jesus, the Marginalized, and the Modern Church,” *The Asbury Journal* 70, no. 1 (2015): 165.

<sup>128</sup> Dustin Willis and Brandon Clements, *The Simplest Way to Change the World: Biblical Hospitality as a Way of Life* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017), 18, 27.

Loneliness is a pervasive epidemic in humanity, one that is not new to society. The need for relationship is at the very ethos of human existence as image bearers of the Triune God. When Jesus invited someone to share a meal, he was communicating his inclusion. Dustin Willis further shares, “I see you, and if I see you, then God sees you.”<sup>129</sup> In an interview with John Hurlow the question was asked, “How is sharing a meal around a table representational of the triune God?” He responded, “It is the sharing with family and the fact that we have always accepted each person in the family and their friends.”<sup>130</sup>

The invitation to welcome other people to share a meal around the table allows people to experience relationship, as does the triune God. Expanding further on this thought, Dustin Willis states, “We are called to be the kind of people who enfold and embrace the lonely into community, recognize and include those who feel invisible, allow God to sustain us through food, and also through relationships he designed us to walk in and to share the truth to prodigal sons and daughters that their Father is looking for them.”<sup>131</sup> This kind of sharing is an outward expression of the ecclesia of the early church. As Aquinata Böckmann, a professor in Germany, so beautifully shares, “In the early Christian community, the table community of Jesus with his disciples and other people found its expression in the Lord's Supper and the following agape meal (I Corinthians 11:17-34). We recall how important it was to Paul that especially in the agape meal social differences in the community not be seen; if this still occurred, he

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<sup>129</sup> Willis and Clements, 51.

<sup>130</sup> John Hurlow, interviewed by author, via email, March 28, 2017.

<sup>131</sup> Willis and Clements, 54.

terms it an unworthy celebration of the Lord's Supper.”<sup>132</sup> Breaking bread with other people has been taking place for thousands of years and bringing people together in ways that can offer nourishment for the body and soul.

There are meals throughout scripture, from mass feedings to the Eucharist. The actual shared table also was formational. As a Scottish biblical scholar, Nathan MacDonald writes, “[The table] has decisive significance in the early Christ-movement. Meals are seen as *loci* of identity formation and transformation.”<sup>133</sup>

Inviting people to the table is a way to offer love, acceptance, and hospitality. The whole narrative of scripture is about the triune God offering hospitality. In Genesis he created space for Adam and Eve and as Dustin Willis writes, “He provides everything they needed to thrive in created joy.”<sup>134</sup> When Jesus came to earth, he went to people’s houses often to share meals. Kay Warren shares the insight that, on a regular basis, “Jesus was invited to parties!”<sup>135</sup> The invitation to welcome people to share a meal opens up opportunities for the Holy Spirit to work among people.

When people care for others in a way that identifies that the needs of another are noticed and important it is an opportunity for what Joseph Hellerman, a New Testament professor, calls “relational solidarity:” a way to exhibit loving kindness.<sup>136</sup> When other

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<sup>132</sup> Böckmann, 187.

<sup>133</sup> MacDonald, xvii.

<sup>134</sup> Willis and Clements, 37.

<sup>135</sup> Kay Warren, *Choose Joy Devotional: Finding Joy No Matter What You're Going Through* (Grand Rapids, MI: Revell, 2015), 22.

<sup>136</sup> Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church Was a Family: Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2009), 216-217.

people are hurting, take time to invite them to share, while listening to their need. Out of this place, one can give to another with love.<sup>137</sup> The scriptures that invite people to show hospitality include: Romans 12:13, “Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality;” and Hebrews 13:2, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unaware.” In these passages of scripture, there is an invitation that God has given to extend the same offer to others in a way of hospitality “without grumbling” as I Peter 4:9 clearly states. Hospitality offers love.

Paul uses hospitality, which would culturally include a meal, as a time that could represent a “sacrament of forgiveness.”<sup>138</sup> In regards to forgiveness, 2 Corinthians 7:2 says, “Make room in your hearts for us.” Paul is speaking of the forgiveness that needs to take place. In addition, David, the writer of Psalms, takes it one step further: when there is conflict present, prepare and share a meal together. Psalm 23:5, “you prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.” This is a way to live out the blessing of Solomon’s model of love in Song of Songs 2:4, “He brought me to the banqueting table and his banner over me is love.”

Loving hospitality is a need for all people present. This love is captured in thoughts from Abby McLaughlin, co-founder of “The TABLE Ministries” a student organization, “We wanted it to be a relationship; we wanted to have participation with college students as we weekly shared a meal together. We were hoping for relationship building, with people from the community, rather than looking down on people. We

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<sup>137</sup> Warren, 128-129.

<sup>138</sup> Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus: Discovering Grace, Community, and Mission around the Table* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 48-49.

believe that these people have so much to teach us.”<sup>139</sup> An invitation to come to the table to share a meal offers a place for belonging. The poem entitled, *You are Here* by Arlita Ibach, Gloria Darr, and Cindy Helton offers stunning imagery that welcomes people together right where they are in their story. It is displayed in their east Michigan coffee shop, The Red Dot Coffee Company.

Here... Today...  
 in this place with a story that is unique to you.  
 Each of us has a story that is unfolding,  
 Chapter by chapter, page by page.  
 The chapters are sometimes thrilling and adventurous,  
 Occasionally dark and difficult,  
 At times mundane and dull.  
 Perhaps, both beautiful and messy all at once.  
 Your story is important because you  
 have something to tell.  
 Something you've walked through,  
 something you've longed for,  
 something true.  
 Right now, the place you're in,  
 that dot on the map, is real.  
 And your story matters.  
 So come on in.  
 You are welcome here!  
 We'll pour the coffee.  
 You pull up a chair, right where you are.

### *God and Jesus as Host*

YHWH is a God who hosts. Hospitality is core to the interconnectedness of the triune God. Henri Nouwen shares, “Hospitality is one of the richest biblical terms that can deepen and broaden our insight in our relationships to our fellow human beings.

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<sup>139</sup> Abby McLaughlin, interviewed by author, Marion, Indiana, March 20, 2017.

Throughout the Bible, guests carry precious gifts with them which they are eager to reveal to a receptive host.”<sup>140</sup>

Russian painter Andrei Rublev, in the fifteenth century, depicted the Old Testament story from Genesis 18 of the three strangers who came to Abraham and Sarah: *The Hospitality of Abraham*, or simply *The Trinity*. Richard Rohr has noted, “As icons do, this painting attempts to point beyond itself, inviting a sense of both the beyond and the communion that exists in our midst.”<sup>141</sup>



Rohr continues to articulate the details of this painting through the variation of the color palette noting there is a depth to the intentionality of the color choices.

There are three primary colors in Rublev’s icon, each illustrating a facet of the Holy One. Gold: ‘the Father’—perfection, fullness, wholeness, the ultimate Source; blue: ‘the Incarnate Christ’—both sea and sky mirroring one another (In the icon, Christ wears blue and holds up two fingers, telling us he has put spirit

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<sup>140</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Show Me the Way: Readings for Each Day of Lent* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992), 25.

<sup>141</sup> Rohr, *The Divine Dance*, 29-30.

and matter, divinity and humanity, together within himself. The blue of creation is brilliantly undergirded with the necessary red of suffering). Finally green: “the Spirit”—the divine photosynthesis that grows everything from within by transforming light into itself.

The icon shows the Holy One in the form of three, eating and drinking, in infinite hospitality and utter enjoyment between themselves. If we take the depiction of God in *The Trinity* seriously, we have to say, “In the beginning was the Relationship.” The gaze between the Three shows the deep respect between them as they all share from a common bowl. Notice the Spirit’s hand points toward the open and fourth place at the table. Is the Holy Spirit inviting, offering, and clearing space? I think so! And if so, for what, and for whom?

At the front of the table there appears to be a little rectangular hole. Most people pass right over it, but some art historians believe the remaining glue on the original icon indicates that there was perhaps once a mirror glued to the front of the table. It is stunning when you think about it—there was room at this table for a fourth. The observer. You!”<sup>142</sup>

Jesus models hospitality throughout the New Testament as he sits at the table with others and invites people to the table. He cares for his disciples, welcomes friends, invites people who carry with them pain, are ill, and are living in sin. Jesus would welcome people to the table and wash their feet. For Jesus, holiness was less about clay tablets than common tables. Jesus did not just heal the lepers; he ate with them and touched them. Jesus did not just raise the dead; he ate with them and touched them. Jesus did not just come close to the hemorrhaging women; he touched her and channeled his strength to her. Jesus did not just love prostitutes; he ate with them.<sup>143</sup>

In the Jewish tradition, intentionality is a part of the daily hospitality.<sup>144</sup> In that culture it was a responsibility to offer hospitality as protection to others. To provide food, shelter, and protection was a way of showing partnership with others. This place of

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Nudge: Awakening Each Other to the God Who's Already There* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2010), 180.

<sup>144</sup> Rabbi David Wirtschafter, interviewed by author, Lexington, Kentucky, October 12, 2015.

provision is as an act of mercy.<sup>145</sup> Hosts see the spoken and unspoken needs of the guests and seek to provide extraordinary hospitality. May the prayer of Mabel Boggs Sweet be ever true to the way people are welcomed to the table, “O Lord, let me not yearn for power seats or judgment seats but for the towel of washing feet.”<sup>146</sup>

### *Space that Offers Hospitality*

Hospitality is not some stuffy, outdated practice. It is clearly a biblical idea of utmost importance, because it is the primary way we tell the astounding story that God hasn’t given up on us.  
— Dustin Willis

A hospitable space offers sincerity of love. As historians Wilford McClay and Ted McAllister write, “A firmer sense of place, in short, may be an essential basis for our human freedom, and the necessary grounding for a great many other human goods. They need to find some ‘there’ that can become an enduring ‘here’ for them.”<sup>147</sup> There must be a welcoming presence in order to experience hospitality with others. A person cannot be selfish and be hospitable at the same time; the two cannot coexist. People are stewards of the space God has provided.<sup>148</sup> Steve Clapp, a food advocate shares this insight, “Hospitality is the attitude and practice of providing the atmosphere and opportunities, however risky, in which strangers are free to become friends, thereby feeling accepted,

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<sup>145</sup> Michele Hershberger, *A Christian View of Hospitality: Expecting Surprises* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Pr, 1999), 18.

<sup>146</sup> Leonard Sweet, *Mother Tongue: How our Heritage Shapes Our Legacy* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2017), 12.

<sup>147</sup> Wilfred M. McClay and Ted V. McAllister, eds., *Why Place Matters: Geography, Identity, and Civic Life in Modern America* (New York, NY: Encounter Books, 2014), 9.

<sup>148</sup> Milne, 85-88.



included, and loved. The relationship thus opens up the possibility for eventual communion among the host, the stranger, and God.”<sup>149</sup>

Throughout scripture the recognition of love and hospitality are central to the Gospel message. Romans 12:9-13 articulates this by saying, “Love from the center of who you are; do not fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. Do not burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Do not quit in hard times, pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive in hospitality.” Dietrich Bonhoeffer has written, “We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. It is part of the discipline of humility that we must not spare our hand where it can perform a service and that we do not assume our schedule is our own to manage, we allow it to be arranged by God.”<sup>150</sup>

The Greek word that articulates hospitality is *philoxenia*. The word can be broken down into philo, which is one of the four Greek words for love, and xenia, for stranger. The Greek translation for hospitality is the love of a stranger.<sup>151</sup> To recognize the gift of offering space for a stranger is to extend hospitality which involves being a good neighbor.<sup>152</sup> C.S. Lewis shares the idea of hospitality being a space for sacramental love

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<sup>149</sup> Steve Clapp and Fred Bernhard, *Hospitality: Life Without Fear* (The Lifequest Growing in Faith Series) (Fort Wayne, IN: LifeQuest, 2000), 31.

<sup>150</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian in Community* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2009), 99.

<sup>151</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *An Altar in the World: a Geography of Faith*, rep. ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), 96.

<sup>152</sup> Lisa Graham McMinn, *The Contented Soul: the Art of Savoring Life* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006), 152.

by writing, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal ... next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.”<sup>153</sup> To extend love to another through hospitality embodies the image of the triune God.

There can be transformation that takes place through hospitality. Steve Clapp shares, “True hospitality is rooted in the spiritual life and transforms the way we view ourselves, other people and God.”<sup>154</sup> Tim Chester, a pastor in England, further shares, “Hospitality involves welcoming, creating space, listening, paying attention and providing. Meals slow things down. Some of us do not like that. We like to get things done. But meals force you to be people oriented instead of task oriented. Meals bring you close. You see people in life, as they are. You connect and communicate. It is not always easy - it involves people invading your space or going to places where you don't feel comfortable.”<sup>155</sup>

As a spiritual leader in the church, Peter Leithart shares, “We don't welcome the naked so they can be naked in our presence; we don't show hospitality to the hungry so they can watch us eat. We welcome the naked and the hungry to change their circumstances. We make room for them so we can clothe and feed them. [Hospitality] is universal welcome for the sake of renewal. We make room not to tolerate, but to

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<sup>153</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory and Other Addresses* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2001), 19.

<sup>154</sup> Clapp and Bernhard, 35.

<sup>155</sup> Chester, 15-16, 47.

transform.”<sup>156</sup> The basic needs people have can be met through loving hospitality. Henri Nouwen expounds on this idea by writing,

We all need to eat and drink to stay alive. Having a meal is more than eating and drinking. It is celebrating the gifts of life we share. A meal together is one of the most intimate and sacred human events. Around the table, we become vulnerable, filling one another's plates and cups and encouraging one another to eat and drink. Much more happens at a meal than satisfying hunger and quenching thirst. Around the table we become family, friends, community, yes, and a body.<sup>157</sup>

When there is mutual dwelling, there is an opportunity to see another person as a place where you are safe to dwell, which then speaks, “I am his; he is mine.”<sup>158</sup> As an influential leader among university students, Scott Barrett has shared on the table by sharing this blessing, “My hope is that you have moments to practice being both host and guest. That you have the chance to welcome a stranger or a friend to the table and to let them be who they are without the expectation of something different. The is hope that you have the chance to be welcomed in the same way and that you will continue to offer hospitality, I am hopeful that you will continue to seek opportunities to live out values of hospitality.”<sup>159</sup>

### *Xenia: Whom to Invite?*

Xenia “is the ancient Greek concept of hospitality, the generosity and courtesy shown to those who are far from home and/or associates of the person bestowing guest-

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<sup>156</sup> Leithart, 110.

<sup>157</sup> Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, 15.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>159</sup> Scott Barrett, interviewed by author, Upland, Indiana, May 16, 2017.

friendship.”<sup>160</sup> This opportunity for offering hospitality through social bonding is an opportunity to enhance and celebrate with other people and this takes place around a meal.<sup>161</sup> The destruction of community will happen to people if there is force, but to create conditions in which one can freely develop and discover ways that lead to redemption will create a harvest.<sup>162</sup>

The table is a place where things are as they should be, meaning that they are in a place where hope lives out among others; living as Jesus lived with his disciples.<sup>163</sup> It is virtually impossible to taste a meal that someone else has prepared and not feel as if you have received one of the greatest blessings, the depth of a bond that come from sharing time together telling stories over a meal.

Xenia is care with the intent of extending love and care for the stranger, friend, family member, or neighbor. Christine Pohl, a leading hospitality researcher writes, “Part of hospitality includes recognizing and valuing the stranger or guest.”<sup>164</sup> It is clear throughout scripture that God the Father and Jesus did not have limitations to whom they would include in a meal. As Derrek Lemons, a religion professor at University of Georgia shares, “Jesus used the context of a meal purposefully to encourage the invited guests to consider the uninvited guests and redistribute God’s blessing to the fringes of society

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<sup>160</sup> “Xenia the Ancient Greek Concept of Hospitality,” Xenia, 2016, accessed October 8, 2017, <http://www.sfakia-xenia-hotel.gr/en/ancient>.

<sup>161</sup> Dennis E. Smith and Hal Taussig, eds., *Meals in the Early Christian World: Social Formation, Experimentation, and Conflict at the Table* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 31.

<sup>162</sup> Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), 81.

<sup>163</sup> Lemons, 161.

<sup>164</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 31.

within *communitas*. *Communitas* results as Christians share their pilgrimage with others.”<sup>165</sup>

“Jesus was willing to meet people where they were in their lives because this was what it looked like to live an unbiased life of who came to the table. This was staying True to the Gospel.”<sup>166</sup> Revelation 3:20 shares, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me.” The invitation for other people intends to provide a place of belonging where meaning establishes transfigurational experiences around the table, breaking bread.

### **Participation in the Faith Narrative**

The narrative of scripture includes an offer for participation. In this section, the concepts that will be explored are: Jesus followers as image bearers, how *ecclesia* offers a space for spiritual identity to be established; and how the breaking and partaking of bread is nourishment.

The actions of participation around a meal are numerous. They can include, but are not limited to, finding a recipe, buying the ingredients, bringing a dish to pass, offering a beverage, sharing a host or hostess gift, setting the dishes on the table, or pulling out the chair for another. Actually taking a seat at the table is participation. Offering to speak a blessing, prayer, or song before passing the food, helping to pass the food around, cutting up the food for one who needs extra attention, or offering to re-fill beverage glasses throughout the meal is participation. Once there is a conclusion to the

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<sup>165</sup> Lemons, 158 and 163.

<sup>166</sup> Webster, 113.

meal, engaging in the clean-up process is also participation. All of these ways of participation allow a person to engage in the experience of the breaking bread alongside another person. This is a way to offer companionship. Just by sitting down and eating with other people, Jesus has the name friend.<sup>167</sup>

### *Jesus Followers as Image Bearers*

People have the capacity to participate and be involved in the formation of what happens on earth.<sup>168</sup> In Genesis, the creation of human beings came with the responsibility to tend and care for the earth. Through the fallen decisions made by Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, God the Father sent Jesus Christ to earth to be among humankind.

Jesus came to live among people. He came to be in relationship with humankind, even as he is in relationship with his Father and the Holy Spirit. He came to earth to bring redemption through his death on the cross, which would offer redemption for the separation that sin created in Genesis 3. At the Last Supper, Jesus shared space with his disciples by breaking bread and pouring wine as a remembrance of his body and blood poured out on behalf of the sins of the world.

The broken bread and poured out wine was a metaphoric tool as a way for Jesus to model what it would look like for Jesus followers to remember their own story of redemption and to be in relationship with their image bearer, the triune God. The words of I Corinthians 10:16 are as follows, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in

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<sup>167</sup> Smith and Taussig, 31.

<sup>168</sup> Chester, 122-123.

the body of Christ?” These questions offer opportunity for reflection as to what it means to participate in the drinking of the cup and breaking the bread.

*Ecclesia Offers a Space for Spiritual Identity to Establish*

To welcome people into a space and offer people something to eat is an opportunity to experience transformation; this is the heart of change.  
— Peter J. Leithart

Jesus followers are those anointed by the Holy Spirit, willing to live their lives for Jesus, with the body of believers, as an ecclesia. The ecclesia of the early church was a place for belonging guided by the Holy Spirit, a community with a strong faith and familial identity with the purpose of telling the story of redemption while breaking bread around the table. Jonathan Gottschall, an English professor, describes storytelling by writing,

We tell some of the best stories to ourselves. Scientists have discovered that the memories we use to form our own life stories are boldly fictionalized. And social psychologists point out that when we meet a friend, our conversation mostly consists of an exchange of gossipy stories. We ask our friend ‘What’s up?’ or ‘What’s new?’ and we begin to narrate our lives to one another, trading tales back and forth over cups of coffee or bottles of beer, unconsciously shaping and embellishing to make the tales hum. And every night, we reconvene with our loved ones at the dinner table to share the small comedies and tragedies of our day.<sup>169</sup>

R. Newton Flew, an advocate of ecumenism in the church, articulates the origin of ecclesia by writing,

The Ecclesia of God is the People of God, with a continuous life which goes back through the history of Israel, through the prophets and martyrs of old, to the call of God to Abraham; it is traced back farther still to the purpose of God before the world began. The origin of the Ecclesia lies in the will of God. All that Israel had

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<sup>169</sup> Jonathan Gottschall, *The Storytelling Animal: How Stories Make Us Human* (New York, NY: Mariner Books, 2013), 18.

from God the Church has through Christ. The Spirit is a result of the revelation of God in the whole work of Christ, in his earthly life, in his suffering on the cross, in his Resurrection from the dead. All who accepted this revelation through Christ as a divine message entered immediately into the New Israel, the one universal Ecclesia of God, which is manifest on the earth, inheritors of a glorious past, and destined to a still more glorious future in the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem which is the home of the saints.<sup>170</sup>

A commonality throughout many religious sects is that people regularly come together to share their beliefs. The sharing of faith, religious, and beliefs can take place within spiritual communities, congregations, tribes, groups, and sects in a variety of locations such as a temple, church, mosque, or synagogue. A table is a gathering place for anyone to come and articulate, share, and engage in conversations of religious philosophies, beliefs, and stories that contribute to faith identity. If the table is a place of conversing about sacred beliefs there are foundational elements to the storytelling practice of passing on the religious tales to the next generation.

The weekly rhythm of teaching, group discussions, preaching, and lifestyle practices, often are the means by which information is communicated when it comes to religious education. The communication can take place in many different variations, but each time there is an essential message communicated with the purpose of encouraging interpersonal growth with a deity.<sup>171</sup> The importance of understanding the robust heritage of a person's religious beliefs is a process of learning that will create depth, which will affect the family, and communal narrative of sharing stories to enhance faith identity

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<sup>170</sup> R. Newton Flew, *Jesus and His Church: A Study of the Idea of the Ecclesia in the New Testament* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1938), 257-258.

<sup>171</sup> Jeaneane Fowler, et al., *World Religions: An Introduction for Students*, rev. ed. (Portland, OR: Sussex Academic Press, 1997), 1-6.



development. Communication is an important aspect to building relationships.<sup>172</sup> In order to communicate around a meal, the table can offer a stage for sharing stories.

There are strong integrated narratives that come from communal experiences at a table where bread is broken and enjoyed together. When people have a space to come and sit together at a table, share a meal, along with communicating their thoughts with one another, they are embodying the relational essence of their religious narrative. A table is a gathering space for stories of faith identity to develop, experience exploration, and share stories.

Charles and Jayne share a portrayal of the development of familial identity within a small Mennonite community in rural America as they recount the stories around their table. Their table has been a gathering place for over sixty-five years. By sharing about their experience as a quintessential gathering place for families, as it directly correlates with faith in Jesus, these meals highlight how the table brings their family together in one space, and when one person is missing, it is noticeable. The trinity is a relational connection and it emulates the original creation of human beings. This experience of connection happens in the shared-ness of meals.<sup>173</sup>

The belonging of the early church experience happened through participation around breaking bread with other people. The participation around the table takes place through partaking in the nourishment of the bread with other people. The ecclesia takes form through participation.

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<sup>172</sup> Julia T. Wood, *Interpersonal Communication: Everyday Encounters*, 8th ed. (Boston, MA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2015), 11-15.

<sup>173</sup> Charles, Jayne, and Levi Huffman, interviewed by author, Pandora, Ohio, October 23-25, 2015.

*Breaking of Bread by Partaking of Nourishment*

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return there until they have watered the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty.  
— Isaiah 55:10-11

From a physical standpoint, the need for food is replenishment for the body. The spiritual life needs nourishment as well. As Jesus followers, there is belief in a connection that symbolically takes place when people involve themselves in the Eucharist on a regular basis. Therefore, there needs to be more emphasis spent on time sharing daily meals with one another in order to consume the communal nourishment of being together.<sup>174</sup> The food that is on the table becomes muscles, tissues, and bones, while the food of the Eucharist incorporates us into the Body of Christ.<sup>175</sup> Shannon Jung, a theology professor, shares this meaningful thought, “Food is itself a means of revelation; when we eat together we taste the goodness of God.”<sup>176</sup> There are nourishment opportunities with food that can be a part of telling the story of how God is our daily bread.

The table is one of the most intimate places in our lives. It is there that we give ourselves to one another. When we say, “Take some more, let me serve you another plate, let me pour you another glass, don't be shy, enjoy it,” we say a lot more than our words express. We invite our friends to become part of our lives. We want them to be nurtured by the same food and drink that nurture us. We desire communion. That is why a refusal to eat and drink what a host offers is so offensive. It feels like a rejection of an invitation to intimacy. Strange as it may sound, the table is the place where we want to become food for one another.

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<sup>174</sup> Ayres, 4.

<sup>175</sup> Elizabeth T. Groppe, *Eating and Drinking* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>176</sup> L. Shannon Jung, *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 81.

Every breakfast, lunch, or dinner can become a time of growing communion with one another.<sup>177</sup>

The need for food is universal throughout scripture, whether kings, queens, or peasants there is still hunger spoken of as a need. The satisfaction of food at times came through grandiose banquets; other times it was manna, each time hunger was satisfied.<sup>178</sup> There is not a single person who does not need to eat to stay alive. The opportunity to share space around a table, as well as share meals, is a tangible expression of the extension of the image bearers that humans are of the triune God. William Willimon captures this thought by writing, “In all those Sunday dinners, family night suppers, Lord’s Suppers, church picnics, pancake breakfasts, barbecues, and all the rest, I learned how close our God is to us.”<sup>179</sup>

College Wesleyan Church in Marion, Indiana offers the Eucharist to people to engage physically as well as spiritually in the breaking of bread. Incorporating the Eucharist in an incarnational way, on a regular basis around a table, is helpful for people to connect their faith to what takes place inside and outside of the church. As a Worship Pastor at a local church, Jordan Rife shares, “Christ has fed you, now go and feed the world that you are actively involved in! Transformation over time, it is over a lifetime we can become holy. Partaking in communion is a part of that process.”<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Nouwen, *Bread for the Journey*, 1.

<sup>178</sup> MacDonald, xvi-xvii.

<sup>179</sup> Willimon, 11.

<sup>180</sup> Pastors Jordan and Daniel Rife, interviewed by author, Marion, Indiana, March 15, 2017.

## Communication into Familial Identity

The narrative of scripture begins with communication and is present throughout. The Spirit of understanding, communicating around the table with truth-telling conversations, listening ears, forgiving words, and celebration are the five areas that cover aspects of communication.

The notion of interpersonal communication has been on the minds of people for a very long time.<sup>181</sup> People have been asking questions about health and connection with those they love for years. Cooking as well as eating together is a way to expand one's relational connection.<sup>182</sup> According to the Mennonite faith tradition, spending time together in sharing stories develops richness to their connectedness.<sup>183</sup>

The opportunity to break bread with others, as well as have participation in the hospitable space, is not complete without the sharing, through communication, with other human beings for the purpose of connection. Throughout the New Testament, to share a meal was a social interchange. When Jesus ate with the tax collectors it was of high concern for the Pharisees, because he was having a social interaction with people who others in the culture did not include around their tables.

Around the table where the Last Supper was shared, Jesus communicated with his disciples about what the process of remembering him would be after he was gone which would be done through the Eucharist. Since then, this has been a way that Jesus followers

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<sup>181</sup> Wood, 2-5.

<sup>182</sup> Pollan, 1-5.

<sup>183</sup> Calvin Redekop, *Mennonite Society* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 130-141.

remembered, thanked, celebrated the life, and freedom through Jesus Christ. As Simone Weil, a mystic has so clearly written, “At the center of the Catholic religion a little formless matter is found, a little piece of bread.”<sup>184</sup> Through the breaking of the bread, Henri Nouwen has written, “A truly Eucharistic life means always sayings thanks to God, always praising God, and always being more surprised by the abundance of God's goodness and love.”<sup>185</sup> As Jesus followers remember his abundance through more than the nourishment of the bread, words of communication are vital. As we read in Matthew 4:4, “Man shall not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.”

Each day there are opportunities to engage in sharing meals together around the table for physical and relational nourishment. Meals can remind people of their dependence on something greater.<sup>186</sup> Leonard Sweet shares, “For Christians, every day is a reminder of the Resurrection. Each and every day should be a grand celebration of God's amazing gift of Jesus. Everything in life is filled with resurrection moments. And every person is filled with resurrection hope just waiting to be celebrated.”<sup>187</sup> The celebration is poignant to the way of following Jesus through daily nourishment.

A significant hindrance to following Jesus in an age of significant media obligations and temptations is the cellular device. A study by researchers at Virginia Tech

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<sup>184</sup> Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (Minneapolis, MN: Harper, 2009), 199.

<sup>185</sup> Nouwen, *Show Me the Way*, 15.

<sup>186</sup> Chester, 122.

<sup>187</sup> Leonard Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live Right in a World Gone Wrong* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2016), 87.

found that the quality and depth of a conversation between two people had significant decline by the simple act of one of them either holding a mobile device or placing it on the table between them.<sup>188</sup> According to Dustin Willis, “One of the most countercultural things we can do is have an entire conversation with someone without checking our phone.”<sup>189</sup> The phone inhibits communication with the people who are in front of you sharing a meal together.

### *Spirit of Understanding*

The ability to understand another requires a shared experience. The triune God exemplifies this relationship through its oneness, yet its individuality. This portrayal of relationship is the image human beings can embody. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 Paul’s words offer a portrait of this interconnected relationship: “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

The Spirit offers an ability to experience togetherness through understanding. Isaiah 11:2 calls the Spirit understanding. In John 14, Jesus is preparing his disciples for what is to come after the resurrection and he does so by saying the Holy Spirit will come. It is through the practice of the Eucharist that the actualization of the triune God will be experienced within community and we will be able to understand.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Maureen O’Connor, “Addicted to Likes: How Social Media Feeds Our Neediness,” *The Cut* February 20, 2014, accessed April 26, 2017, <http://nymag.com/thecut/2014/02/addicted-to-likes-social-media-akes-us-needier.html>.

<sup>189</sup> Willis and Clements, 59-60.

<sup>190</sup> John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimirs Seminary Press, 1997), 81.

The intention of life is not to be experienced alone, although some may try. When people enter into communication to have a shared experience of understanding it is difficult to destroy that relationship.<sup>191</sup> The shared space around a table breaking bread together is space that can be shared daily even in the midst of an ever-changing life.

Milton Brasher-Cunningham, a curator of experiences through music and food writes,

Change is a part of the fabric of our human existence. We eat the same meal at Communion each time and yet it is not exactly the same because some have gone and others have joined the circle. We bring new joys and sorrows along with new understandings of how we live with our losses. We have new questions new hopes, new hungers even as we year for new perspectives on things that continue to eat at us. Wait and hope. Come and learn. Take and eat.<sup>192</sup>

The hope is that the Spirit of understanding will be present at each table where bread is broken together.

### *Truth-telling Conversation*

Truth telling can entail conflict. Families desire to have households that include conversations of truth telling. In Jewish families, the primary way of handling disagreements is to have parents who are on the same page when it comes to the basics and then allow space for the children and the parents to ask questions which will help to reduce the potential of having resistance present. Questions hold esteem for Jewish families because they create space to understand what is taking place behind the unsettledness that the family member is experiencing. When there are disagreements, the primary hope is to uphold respect for each other along with modeling this taking place

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<sup>191</sup> Aaron James, *Assholes: A Theory*, repr. ed. (New York, NY: Anchor, 2014), 140-153.

<sup>192</sup> Milton Brasher-Cunningham, *Keeping the Feast: Metaphors for the Meal* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2012), 53.

through the disagreement. It is important to have boundaries in place with clear expectations within the family structure. When this is in place, it creates a parameter for the expected behavior of each family member. The boundaries though, should be appropriately in place for the age of the children so that there is room for individual expression of one's own identity. Seeking counsel is utterly important within a family and the Jewish culture believes that this will help create a more robust family experience when people speak the truth in love and each person experiences respect.<sup>193</sup>

Conflict is a part of what takes place on a daily basis. It is inevitable that there will be grievances from the day that could infiltrate into the meal hour. This can become part of the fabric of the family learning, as well as sharing in transparency, what is taking place. People must recognize that conflict is a part of relationships. Often the role of the one who keeps the peace is something that is glorified in families, when in reality there is a more appropriate way to speak the truth and mend relationships without sweeping the disagreements under the rug.<sup>194</sup>

Christine Pohl, a leader in the movement of hospitality, has written, "We are not called to create ideal families, communities, or congregations. Building faithful communities of truth and hospitality, however, is at the heart of our grateful response to the one who 'became flesh and lived among us... full of grace and truth.'"<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>193</sup> Anita Diamant and Howard Cooper, *Living a Jewish Life, Updated and Revised Edition: Jewish Traditions, Customs, and Values for Today's Families*, rev. ed. (New York, NY: William Morrow Paperbacks, 2007), 149.

<sup>194</sup> Peter Scazzero, *Emotionally Healthy Spirituality: It's Impossible to Be Spiritually Mature, While Remaining Emotionally Immature*, updated ed. (Nashville, TN: Zondervan, 2017), 32-34.

<sup>195</sup> Christine D. Pohl, *Living Into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 176.



### *Listening Ears*

Those who are present at the table can participate in communication, but they can also listen for those who have not shared and then welcome each voice to use their words to share. They are listening to spoken words as well as what has not been verbally shared. When words are communicated it can be used as a way to enhance a person's understanding with a more prolific vocabulary because it is being modeled through conversation. The art of listening at the dinner table begins with people simply asking for the things that they desire which in turn encourages people to make eye contact, which opens up opportunity to form relationship.

In Genesis 18, there was relationship present as Abraham had conversations with God about what was going to take place when it came to Abraham and Sarah having a son. This conversation took place as he listened over a meal. The hospitality of the guests took place, all the while Abraham and Sarah would hear news that would fulfill the promise of having a son. The components of a shared space, meal, and the conversation would allow for listening that would change their future.

Listening takes relationship, invitation, and participation, as well as communication. David Isay, founder of an organization called StoryCorps, which focuses on preserving stories, shares, "Listening is an act of love. We're listening creatures, it's an everyday art."<sup>196</sup> To elicit understanding, one must listen.

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<sup>196</sup> Krista Tippett, "Listening is an Act of Love" On Being podcast, May 12, 2016, accessed May 20, 2016, <https://onbeing.org/programs/david-isay-listening-as-an-act-of-love/>.

### *Forgiving Words*

To experience forgiveness is to experience love. In order to forgive or to have forgiveness there is a need to let things go, to release unmet expectations, and grieve the pain of what has been lost in the process.<sup>197</sup> When people take time to reflect on what has taken place in their lives and in the lives of those around them, there is a chance to recognize what has kept people from connecting with each other. In Matthew 26:26-28, Jesus recognized the need to come to the table and remember the forgiveness we have experienced. He invited people to take part in communion as a place of remembrance of what he has done in order to offer freedom from sin. The table is representational of a space open for all who no longer need to live without forgiveness.

Forgiveness requires you to encounter pain as well as the hurt that surrounds that pain.<sup>198</sup> There is a need to reflect on the emotion surrounding the pain, in order to forgive. Desmond Tutu shares, “To forgive is not to pretend that what happened did not happen. Healing does not draw a veil over the hurt. Rather, healing and reconciliation demand an honest reckoning. For Jesus followers, Jesus Christ sets the pattern for forgiveness and reconciliation.”<sup>199</sup> In order to love and receive the love that God intended, we must allow forgiveness to take place in order for healing to occur. As Grandmother Showalter shares, “Time will heal all wounds, unless they are infected.”<sup>200</sup> We must take time to heal

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<sup>197</sup> Brené Brown, *Rising Strong: the Reckoning. the Rumble. the Revolution* (New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 150.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 149-156.

<sup>199</sup> Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving: the Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World*, repr. ed. (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2014), 23-24.

<sup>200</sup> Kristin Green, interviewed by author, Goshen, Indiana, October 19, 2015.

through forgiveness for relationships to be reflective and restored. Gordon Smith shares, “The table is never merely about our forgiveness. It is also about the forgiveness we offer to others. The Lord’s Supper enables us to live the gospel, to embody what it means to be a people who are transformed by the good news.”<sup>201</sup>

Time for reflection around the table can offer a place to tell the story of forgiveness. It is through repentance that this relationship is restored. The Aramaic definition of repentance is, “returning home.” Old things have passed away and things have become new, as it is said in 2 Corinthians 5:17.<sup>202</sup> Tim Chester shares, “Generous hospitality leads to reconciliation. It is expressed forgiveness. Unresolved conflict can’t be ignored when we gather around the meal table; you can’t eat in silence without realizing there’s an issue to address.”<sup>203</sup>

When there is conflict, opposing thoughts, or a disagreement among people in a community, it is vitally important to stay present in the necessary conversations that will help to foster movement towards reconciling understanding. Although it is at times quite painful, the healing that can take place has a profound impact on strengthening relationships.<sup>204</sup> There is power in communicating through confession as James 5:16 speaks of, “confess your sins to one another.” There is room to experience freedom with

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<sup>201</sup> Gordon T. Smith, *A Holy Meal: The Lord's Supper in the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 57-65.

<sup>202</sup> Leonard Sweet and Frank Viola, *Jesus Speaks: Learning to Recognize and Respond to the Lord's Voice* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2016), 8.

<sup>203</sup> Chester, 48-49.

<sup>204</sup> Hellerman, 152-155.

one another when you are working together to commune and come together for the purpose of experiencing freedom from sin and walk in forgiveness together.<sup>205</sup>

### *Celebration*

Celebration can only really come about where fear and love, joy and sorrow, tears and smiles can exist together. Celebration is the acceptance of life in a constantly increasing awareness of its preciousness.  
— Henri Nouwen

The opportunity to experience celebration is sacred.

The divine ecstatic joy of the house of love becomes manifest in celebration. Celebration marks the life of the disciple of Jesus as well as the life of new community. The disciple leaves behind the old life in search of a new life. The community is ecclesia, a people ‘called out’ from the land of opposition to the land of freedom. For every disciple as well as for the entire fellowship, following the Lord involves celebration, the ongoing, unceasing lifting up of God’s love that has proved victorious. Celebration is the concrete way in which God’s ecstatic joy becomes visible among us.<sup>206</sup>

There are necessary preparations that help create an environment where guests enjoy a delicious meal for the sake of celebration. However, there are also things that can be done to prepare to make guests feel welcome to come as they are. The Lord delights in those who host because it mirrors what he has done as he breaks bread and pours out wine.<sup>207</sup> In Psalm 23 the Good Shepherd represents a metaphor through the imagery of one who is taking care of the sheep, by hosting a meal in the presence of even enemies. In the Mennonite culture, J. Craig Haas shares his thoughts on the value of participation in

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<sup>205</sup> Milne, 82.

<sup>206</sup> Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the House of the Lord: The Journey from Fear to Love* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co Inc., 1986), 65.

<sup>207</sup> Webster, 21-22.

festivities by stating, “Participation in the festive reenactments of that story brings us closer to our own cultural and historical roots ... BUT people must participate.”<sup>208</sup>

Celebration with friends, family, and even enemies, illuminates the story of scripture that all are welcome.

## Conclusion

Woody Allen once said that 80 percent of success is simply showing up ... ‘showing up’ means facing into your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors willingly, with curiosity and kindness.

— Susan David

The table is a gathering place. A place of invitation where people come and sit, participate in the shared meal, as well as communicate while sharing this space. The ecclesia modeled this practice as a way to engage in the relational interactions that mirror the triune God.

God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are love. Spending time around the table creates an opportunity to extend that kindness of love. Romans 12:9-13 offers encouragement to love well, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, and serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.”

The table is a place for gathering, remembering, eating, feasting, discussing, as well as worshipping. Gordon Smith offers insight into the first meals of scripture by

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<sup>208</sup> J. Craig Haas, *Readings from Mennonite Writings, New and Old* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1992), 304.

saying, “the meal is a central motif in the Bible.”<sup>209</sup> Ecclesiastes 10:19 shares about food by stating, “Bread is made for laughter and wine gladdens life.” Psalm 34:8 uses our sense of taste to share about the goodness of God by saying, “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” He is continually offering his unending love even through daily provisions.

Jesus’ ministry consistently enjoyed people opening up their homes for meals and hospitality to him as he was on his journey.<sup>210</sup> “Give us this day our daily bread,” Luke 11:2-4.<sup>211</sup> Jesus ate with the purpose of sharing.<sup>212</sup> The opportunity to learn from the Biblical narrative can have profound impact on the way that the western culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century lives life. The sharing of stories with intentionality, creativity, and integration retell the story of the redemptive Gospel.

Leonard Sweet shares this idea in his book *Tablet to Table*: “...narraphors are stories made with metaphors that help us understand world, God, and ourselves in a clearer way. Narraphors are the *lingua franca* of the Christian faith. They are table talk.”<sup>213</sup> The table must be a place of invitation for the stories of the Bible to become metaphors for how we live our lives. The space around a table is an opportunity to have sacred encounters with other people with the purpose of bringing the narrative of scripture to life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is the foretelling of a great banquet of heaven,

We are going home! The swell we feel in our gut when we read of God’s eternal banquet table is not some childish fantasy story, but our destiny. We will sit at the table we were originally created for- the one where our Creator sits. All our

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<sup>209</sup> Smith, 11.

<sup>210</sup> LaVerdiere, 9.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., viii.

<sup>212</sup> Stookey, 20-21.

<sup>213</sup> Sweet, *From Tablet to Table*, 3-4.

desires will be met completely, like a cup running over, and all effects of sin and death and evil will be done away with for good (Rev. 21:1-5). All of the shadows of home we experienced on earth will give way to the realities, and we will be fully, finally, forever, home. This is the joy set before us - an eternity with the hospitable God, enjoying relationship with him and our many brothers and sisters around his table.<sup>214</sup>

The present quest to create and experience meaning in the world has propelled people to explore the essence of belonging for a very long time. As Jesus followers continue to pursue the abundant life that John 10:10 describes, there will come a day when the chaos of earth will experience full restoration: the exposure of the kingdom of heaven through the calling forth of the Bride of Christ to the great banquet feast table of heaven. Until that day comes, there is an ongoing invitation for movement toward oneness with the triune God, while still living at peace with his mercy in the process until that day comes. In the final scene in the Chronicles of Narnia, C.S. Lewis portrays the end of the story as people know it here on earth, while the one of eternity is about to begin:

And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.<sup>215</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Willis and Clements, 144.

<sup>215</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, repr. ed. (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2002), 72.

## SECTION 4:

### ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The previous sections offered a framework for the elements that are a part of the transfigurational experience around the table while breaking bread with other people. The proposed artifact is a coffee table book written for Jesus followers entitled *Transcendence at the Table: a collection of poems, songs, vignettes, blessings, and prayers*. While books are plentiful as it pertains to topics around the table, this visually stimulating book is comprised of quotes, poems, songs, vignettes, liturgies, blessings, and prayers. The goal of this work is to give Jesus followers a compelling visual for reimagining what can take place around a table while breaking bread together.

*Transcendence at the Table: a collection of poems, songs, vignettes, blessings, and prayers* will be a nonfiction book containing photographs of table settings along with various elements that will speak to the four sections from this academic research. These four areas include: relationship with the triune God, invitation into a place of belonging, participation in the faith narrative, and communication builds a familial identity. Each section will contain photography along with complementary written content with a variety of quotes, poems, songs, vignettes, liturgies, blessings, and prayers that explore each section.

The book proposal will be offered to traditional publishers before considering self-publishing, though self-publishing is an option.



SECTION 5:  
ARTIFACT SPECIFICATION

**Query and Cover Letter**

InterVarsity  
Press PO Box 1400  
Downers Grove, IL 60515

Greetings!

My name is Julia Hurlow. I am an avid traveler born in Middle America, currently living in Indiana. I live with an insatiable curiosity for the world around me. I enjoy exploration of nature, pour-over coffee, wine tasting, snowshoeing, reading, the art of cooking, hosting celebrations, and gathering people together for shared meals. The experiences that I have had through my undergraduate education in Christian Education and Leadership as well as my Master's degree in Counseling have influenced my desire to share my experiences as to why authentic relationships are an important element of our growth in community. I believe a primary way to experience relationships is on a consistent basis through sharing meals together. This has led to my desire to author a photographically visually stimulating book of quotes, poems, songs, vignettes, liturgies, blessings, and prayers entitled *Transcendence at the Table*: a collection of poems, songs, vignettes, blessings, and prayers.

The contribution that I would like to make to this field of research is to write a publishable table book for people to use as a guide in their homes, churches, and communities to explore how the Biblical view of breaking bread together can offer growth for ecclesia. This text would include the Scriptural themes of relationship with the triune God, invitation into a place of belonging, participation in the faith narrative, and communication that builds a familial identity around a table.

There is a beautiful sacredness of breaking bread together. I hope I can offer ideas for re-establishing new forms of "table" and table practices for building faith communities within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I hope to inspire, challenge, and educate creative ways to expose the story of God in ways that nourish and uplift people around breaking bread together at the table.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It would be a joy to collaborate with you on this literary project in this upcoming season. I look forward to sitting down at a table with you.

Cheers!

Julia Rachelle Hurlow M.A.

## **Book Proposal**

**Title:** Transcendence at the Table: a collection of poems, songs, vignettes, blessings, and prayers

**Author:** Julia Rachelle Hurlow M.A.  
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**Hook:**

Seeing that disconnected relationships are on the rise, people created in the image of a triune God are intended for interconnected relationships that are transfigurational. Relationships are formational to bear the image of the triune God. In order to share life with other people, we must be in relationship and respond to the invitation to come to the table, choose to participate in breaking the bread together. When this happens, it communicates the story of his redemption in a transfigurational way as modeled by the ecclesia in the first century on a regular basis. The table is a space where people can come together to break bread, pray, share in song, liturgy, and story with other people to strengthen their identity as image bearers of the triune God. A gathering of people coming together in order to build a community of meaning and belonging. This happens through relationship with the triune God, invitation, participation, and communication around breaking bread with one another.

**Overview:**

The contribution that I will make to this field of research is to write a publishable table book for people to use as a guide in their homes, churches, and communities to explore how the Biblical view of breaking bread together can offer growth for ecclesia. This text would include the Scriptural themes of relationship with the triune God, invitation into a place of belonging, participation in the faith narrative, and communication that builds a familial identity around a table.

There is a beautiful sacredness of breaking bread together. I will offer ideas for re-establishing new forms of “table” and table practices for building faith communities within the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The book will inspire, challenge, and educate creative ways to expose the story of God in ways that nourish and uplift people around breaking bread together.

**Purpose:**

- Use photographs of a variety of tables where bread can be broken together.
- Incorporate quotes, poems, songs, vignettes, liturgies, blessings, and prayers for the purpose of formation and identity as Jesus followers around the table.

**Promotion and Marketing:****Statistics:**

- Statistics have shown that parents spend 38.5 hours a week of significant conversation with their children. “Interesting Statistics On Family Dinners,” Dinner Trade, March 16, 2010, accessed September 17, 2015, <http://dinnertrade.com/568/interesting-statistics-on-family-dinners>.
- The number of people who are choosing not to marry is on the rise along with single-parent homes. These relational shifts are present inside and outside of the church. Sarah Hamaker, “Pew for One: How Is the Church Responding to Growing Number of Singles?” *The Christian Post*, February 29, 2012, accessed September 17, 2015, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/pew-for-one-how-is-the-church-responding-to-growing-number-of-singles-70586/>.

**Marketing tools:**

- Wesleyan Church Magazine
- ACSD: website and promotional material
- Social Media: Instagram and Facebook

**Competition:**

1. *Communing with the Father: at the Table of the Lord* by: Wayne C. Anderson, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016.  
For centuries, the table has been a place for believers to come to a place of worship to partake of communion. Anderson offers perspective of what it could mean to integrate the transformational elements of communion into everyday life.
2. *From Tablet to Table: Where Community Is Found and Identity Is Formed* by: Leonard Sweet. NavPress, 2015.  
The theology of the table has profound impact on how people live their lives on a daily basis. Sweet offers insightful outlook on reclaiming this space within one’s home as well as brings to light the sacred gift of being a host as well as a guest.
3. *Bread and Wine: A Love Letter to Life around the Table with Recipes* by: Shauna Niequist, Zondervan, 2013.  
The relationships that form the around by sharing meals together can be healing and nourishing for a community. Niequist offers her own stories as well as recipes as way to help bring people together around a shared meal.

**Uniqueness:**

The distinctive element that I would contribute through this book would be to offer photographs of tables where sharing meals is a means of building identity formation among Jesus followers. This book would also be a collection of quotes, poems, songs,

vignettes, liturgies, blessings, and prayers to spark the interest of what it means to break bread together as a means of ecclesia.

**Endorsements:** Leonard Sweet: author and speaker  
 Lisa Graham McMinn: author, speaker and professor  
 Miles Welch: pastor and speaker at 12 Stone Church

**Book Format (non-fiction):**

1. Photographs that could be included (options, but not limited to):
  - A picnic table
  - Coffee shop table
  - Holiday gathering table
  - Wedding banquet table
  - Dinner tables within homes
2. Quotes, poems, songs, vignettes, liturgies, blessings, and prayers.

**Chapter Outline:**

There are four sections:

1. Relationship with the triune God
2. Invitation into a place of belonging
3. Participation in the faith narrative
4. Communication builds a familial identity

**Intended Readers:**

Primary audience

- Jesus followers of all ages
- Agencies working with faith and community development
- Church pastors and leaders
- University students

Secondary audience

- Small group ministries at churches
- Collegiate Discipleship groups

**Manuscript:** Intended word count: approximately 12,000-16,000 words.  
 Manuscript is ready (see Appendix A)

**Author Bio:**

When people gather, the kingdom of heaven here on earth seems much more tangible. Whether it is around a table sharing a meal, on a walk, sharing a pour-over coffee, or participating in something of a shared interest, I deeply believe in the sharing of stories through communal living.

As I have lived in a number of states, worked at a number of different Christian Universities as well as lived in shared housing for the past fifteen years I have found deep joy in living among others to share in celebration as well as sorrow experienced here on earth. The stories we have experienced are to be shared as a proclamation of the

redemption story of Jesus' resurrection for our freedom. The narrative of scripture encompasses so many stories of healing, reconciliation, and mercy.

Throughout my own narrative of joy, longing, loss, and healing the triune God is present. Along with the educational experiences that I have had in Christian education, a master's degree in Community Counseling as well as my current work on my doctoral degree in Semiotics and Future Studies, I have found that each of life's experiences have guided my desire to make meaning in the world that portrays the love of the triune God.

After moving to five different states to work at a number of universities, it is a joy to return to Middle America and establish my home in Indiana. I am able to live, work, and cultivate communal living at a Christian University. I enjoy sharing my experiences in order to foster growth as Jesus followers.

A portion of one of my favorite poems clearly articulates the desire that I have to create space with others. The poem entitled *You are Here* by Arlita Ibach, Gloria Darr, and Cindy Helton.

*"Here... Today...in this place with a story that is unique to you.  
Each of us has a story that is unfolding,  
Chapter by chapter, page by page.  
The chapters are sometimes thrilling and adventurous,  
Occasionally dark and difficult,  
At times mundane and dull.  
Perhaps, both beautiful and messy all at once.  
Your story is important because you  
have something to tell."*

It is my prayer that stories may be shared, heard, and told around the table to expose the love of the triune God.

## SECTION 6:

### POSTSCRIPT

As I began the dissertation process, I knew I wanted to write about how the table is a unifying space for people to come together. I thought about how hospitality, participation, and telling the truth are significant aspects of the early church's experience around the table. The stories of scripture were guides to my understanding of how God cares about preparation around the table.

Over the course of the past three years, I have developed a more holistic understanding of the transcendence that takes place around breaking bread with other people as Jesus modeled by sharing the eucharist. The breadth of this transformational act is something that the ecclesia was able to experience and it is something that to this day we can partake in. The triune God is present at the table through interdependent relationships and it is a very beautiful invitation that we can join, and offer to others.

The coffee table book is my artifact and it seems to be fitting as a tangible resource: a collection of words and images that can enhance one's understanding and experience of the table. Although originally I thought I would create a manuscript for a non-fiction book, it seemed that over time it became clear that there would be limitations, as photography would not be a part of that type of book. The artistic design through photographs and the collection of poems, songs, vignettes, blessings, and prayers, offers enhanced beauty.

Further research ideas include:

- A collection of table practices for groupings of Jesus followers to utilize when breaking bread together.
- Additional writing on the food that is present at a table and how that speaks to the larger narrative of caring for the earth that God has created.
- Written insight on how to consider multi-ethnic tables as a way of preparing for eternity.
- Comparative research on the similarities and differences of the tables of Jesus followers from ecclesia to the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## APPENDIX A:

### ARTIFACT



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*Transcendence at the*  
**TABLE**

*A collection of poems, songs, vignettes, blessings, & prayers*

BY JULIA HURLOW

*Transcendence at the*  
**TABLE**

*A collection of poems, songs, vignettes, blessings, & prayers*

**BY JULIA HURLOW**

“A spiritual community, a church, is full of broken people who turn their chairs toward each other because they know they cannot make it alone. These broken people journey together ..... [and] are able to see beyond their brokenness to something alive and good, something whole.”<sup>1</sup>

*Larry Crabb*

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**“PATIENCE, PLEASE”**

*By Penny and Sparrow*

Please come home

Please come home

Please come home

Please come home

Please come home

Please come home

Please come home

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This book holds an eclectic array of theological stances as it pertains to the table. This is deliberate so that it may connect with a variety people so that it may benefit an assortment of traditions, theologies, and contexts. The hope is that this would allow space for the creativity for you as the reader to adapt the ideas to whatever traditions and contexts you identify with as a Jesus follower.

*To those who have set the table for Thanksgiving in your Walhalla home.*

*.....you have exposed me to the beauty of showing up in sharing His story, our story, around the table!*

*To those who have come, participated, and communicated around the table, it has been sacred.*

*.....it is quite an unforgettable experience to share our times of listening, crying, and celebrating together!*

*To those who have still yet to come and join us at the table for a Calhoun & Hurlow Thanksgiving....*

*....may this table always, always have room to pull up another chair with your nametag awaiting!*

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# Introduction

“The crucible of our formation is in the anonymous monotony of our daily routines.”

*Tish Harrison Warren*

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I grew up in the church, and I can remember engaging in the fifteen minutes a month devoted to the Eucharist. During this first Sunday of the month’s sacramental ritual, the Pastor would use words about remembering, thanksgiving, and celebrating the death and resurrection of Jesus. This ritual was passing the gold platters of stale wafers (to represent the breaking of bread) and drinking grape juice from plastic cups (to represent the wine).

My childhood church created a rhythm for this practice of sharing the sacrament of the Eucharist around the table. Breaking bread together and drinking wine was a once-a-month sacramental ritual tacked onto the end of the Sunday morning service. When something takes place on a regular basis, there is an opportunity to develop a rhythmic experience. This is an opportunity to utilize the table daily, integrating the practice of breaking bread and drinking wine together as a way to remember, offer thanksgiving, and celebrate God’s relationship to us as well as our relationship with others. Pastor Daniel Rife of College Wesleyan Church shares his wisdom on the sacramental worship of the Eucharist, “The sacrament of the Eucharist is experiencing ‘Christ is present in a peculiar way’ as the senior Pastor Steve DeNeff says on a consistent basis. It is Emmanuel, God with you, in a tangible way. He is here and He is aware of you. To participate in the Eucharist is to recognize there are implications upon building an identity in reflection of God’s power.”<sup>2</sup>

My beginning memories of identity, meaning, and belonging are around a table. I remember times spent around the table with people from multiple generations. It was late fall, with the transitioning clothed trees to naked ones covering the ravine in our Middle American town. The robust decorations of pumpkins, dry cornhusks, and straw bales awaited their Thanksgiving Day table debut before the accents of Advent and all its Fraser fir pine scented décor would take center stage. I hold sacred this memory, one of gathering together with others, around a table. Because there was always a place set for each person who was coming, each person had a place of belonging at the table. There was space for each person to join in and partake in the breaking of bread.

The space around the table had dried apple decorations and hand painted ceramic figurines spaced out along the beautifully ironed white tablecloths. Along with the distinct memorabilia of childhood art class, the table was embedded with a variety of family members and friend’s narratives. Names tags were set with intention as each had responded to the invitation of the hosts, my gracious aunt and uncle. The tradition of circling up around the large table to share in a blessing, hymn, and prayer was as natural as taking one’s place in a rousing song of ‘ring-around-the-rosy.’ Reaching for the hand of the one next to you, held with care, symbolizes a time of gathering relationships together to offer reflective thankfulness. Breaking bread together, as well as listening to each other’s stories — their experiences of sorrows and celebrations — offers space to remember the provisions of the previous year, as well as the triune God who offers these provisions. People graciously offered one another stories of thankfulness and redemption. It is because of the Trinitarian relationship that humanity can have relationships with one another.



Thanksgiving Day celebrations are held once a year as a way of remembering the first Thanksgiving gathering in 1621 where two of the most unlikely groups of people came together around a meal to celebrate the harvest together over three days. The Plymouth colonists and Wampanoag Indians shared space together to tell a story.<sup>3</sup> A gathering of many people sharing the story of bountiful provisions of food from the harvest. As Rachel Held Evans has said, “It’s easier to remember things together than alone.”<sup>4</sup> Sharing stories as each takes time to remember how they have come to this shared space together along with words of thanksgiving for the abundance of the provision.

The Thanksgiving Day table will be set each year, along with the invitation to show up, and participate in the remembering, thanksgiving, and celebrating the sharing together as an ecclesia able to worship the triune God through relationship around breaking bread together.

I remember the meals when we have come around the Thanksgiving table and sharing tearful conversations about losses throughout the past year. I remember when life choices led to painful consequences that were less than ideal.

I can also remember the year my cousin shared his story of falling in love and proceeded to pass around the dazzling diamond ring that would be a part of surprise engagement. I was awe struck as a young girl by this profound love and celebrated the joyful event that would take place. I can vividly remember the pregnancy announcements of new family members, travel opportunities, along with opportunities for jobs that promoted furthering skills. Stories rooted in sheer joy and celebration.

There have also been times over tears people have shared about the waiting that they are experiencing in their lives. For a child. For adventure. For a different job. For wisdom. For a life partner. For patient endurance. For redemption. Sharing stories has been significant to me because it has been clear that is welcome at the table.

This stirs in me a longing for this experience to be more than just one day a year. There is a longing for meaningful belonging that is telling the relational story of the triune God on a daily basis. The longing for what took place around the Thanksgiving table once a year along with the first Sunday of the month’s Eucharistic ritual were formational and sacred to my understanding of ecclesia.

Christ brings us into communion with Himself and each other through the means of sharing in the Eucharist.<sup>5</sup> I long for a rhythm where invitations are given to people who will chose to participate as well as communicate around the table on a regular basis to experience the transfiguration and breaking bread around a table on a regular basis offers a sacred rhythm to individual lives coming together as relational image bears of the triune God. To engage in soulful nourishment as well as physical nourishment among others is a transfigurational opportunity where there is embodiment of the triune God around a table while breaking bread together.

Meaning and belonging are central to the longing of humanity. In order to build ones identity as a Jesus follower there needs to be time and energy spent towards establishing oneself around engaging in the essential practice of breaking bread around the table. This offers an opportunity to experience the transfigurational nourishment of the relational triune God with other people on a regular basis in a physical space.

“The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.”

*2 Corinthians 13:14*

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“I think there is something to be learned about God’s character when interacting with other human beings. The gathering around a table is multiple facets of God’s character in one place.”

*Josh Craton*

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“[The mystics help us] to learn the curriculum of a truly spiritual life . . . grounded in love, mercy, tenderness, compassion, forgiveness, hope, trust, simplicity, silence, peace, and joy. To embody union with God is to discover these beautiful characteristics emerging from within and slowly transfiguring us to remake us in the very image and likeness of God.”<sup>6</sup>

*Carl McColman*







# Relationship with the Triune God

**RELATIONSHIP: “A connection, association, or involvement.”<sup>7</sup>**

“The table, the trough, has God’s fingerprints all over it. We participate in a mystery whenever we eat food. Indeed, every meal is sacramental. Through eating, death is resurrected into life. Dead fish, dead figs and dead cornflakes transformed into the living tissue of our bodies. Through some mystery brewing deep inside of us all that is dead matter comes to life... This is an event I would call a sacred occurrence.”

*Kelton Cobb*

In the very beginning, God created male and female in the image of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Shortly after the creation of humankind, the gift of food became a central part of the Biblical narrative. He gave the first human beings, Adam and Eve, permission to roam the garden and eat of all food, except for the tree of knowledge of good and evil.<sup>8</sup> From this portion of Scripture, we learn that God is a communicator, there was plenty of food to eat, and there were boundaries in place. God’s first communication about the food was a resounding “yes, eat and enjoy!” As the narrative unfolds, sin enters the scene when Adam and Eve violate the boundary and eat of the forbidden fruit. From this point on throughout Scripture, God creates space to gather and is among His people.

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## **HONEY AT THE TABLE**

**By: Mary Oliver**

It fills you with the soft  
essence of vanished flowers, it becomes  
a trickle sharp as a hair that you follow  
from the honey pot over the table  
and out the door and over the ground,  
and all the while it thickens,  
grows deeper and wilder, edged  
with pine boughs and wet boulders,  
pawprints of bobcat and bear, until  
deep in the forest you  
shuffle up some tree, you rip the bark,  
you float into and swallow the dripping combs,  
bits of the tree, crushed bees — — — a taste  
composed of everything lost, in which everything lost is found.



THOUGHTS FROM LISA GRAHAM MCMINN

“Eat, be satisfied, and bless” is the motto of Tuv Ha’Aretz, and the blessing part has stuck with me since Jonathan’s visit. Historically Jews offered a hundred blessings, or bracha, a day, a practice honored by some contemporary Jews as well. A hundred blessings a day averages about one every ten minutes during waking hours, and while there are specific blessings in the Jewish tradition, I thought about how saying 100 blessings (or so) a day can’t help but put one into a posture of gratitude. If at some point in the day we bless the air we breathe, the water we drink, the house we live in, flowers and trees growing outside, might life be richer, might we be more humble regarding how we live it?

What if I took a moment to bless this time I have to write, to bless words themselves, and the grounding given me by my Judeo-Christian heritage? In a moment I’m going to go make a mocha; what if, while the soymilk steams, I say a blessing for the farmers and laborers, the cocoa, coffee, and soy plants, the land that grew it all, and the bees who make the honey I’ll use to sweeten it? I can hardly imagine living this way, but want to make blessing feel less optional, and more a natural outpouring of living my Christian life. Saying blessings is less about tacking a spiritual discipline onto my must-do list than it is about using my head, heart, and body to bless and to be grateful rather than allowing my mind to wander aimlessly, picking up this worry or that, festering over some offense or embarrassing moment, or scheming somehow for more recognition, achievement, stuff, or love.

Blessing leans us into the reality that we belong to something bigger than ourselves, and are in an interdependent relationship with other individuals, with ever-widening community circles (family, church, city, state, nation, world), and with God’s creation itself.

As our conversation with Jonathan meandered we landed on what it means to live an embodied faith, not just one attending to our hearts and minds. So how we feed ourselves (what we eat, yes, but also where food comes from and how it is grown and harvested) is part of lived-out embodied faith. Might living from an outpouring of blessing lead us to more compassionate and gracious choices? Similarly, what might it look like to learn to listen to what our bodies have to say to our mind and soul as we make our way through our days?<sup>9</sup>

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“The life of faith is not one of uninterrupted splendor, but the resplendence of the common, the glory of the ordinary, the marvel of a table hosting people eating, a country road taking in bikers, a field receiving hikers, a seashore impressed by footsteps, a bed engulfing lovers, a ball being tossed successfully by your favorite team, a helping hand extended to another, a runway to an altar and the Eucharist.”

*Leonard Sweet*

“Jesus did more at a table than He ever did at a church. When He sat down and ate with them, He turned the culture upside down.”

*Santes Beatty*

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“The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season. You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.”

*Psalms 145:14-16*<sup>10</sup>

YHWH is a God of provision.<sup>11</sup>

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[Here at the table, we come as welcomed guests and recognize] “The purpose of the Table is to engage in acts of worship that enact and celebrate the story of how God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, raised Christ from death, overcame the powers of evil, and offers to use the forgiveness, healing, love, and power for victorious living in community and the world.”

*Constance Cherry*

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Manna was a daily reminder for the Israelites of His provision.

*Exodus 16*<sup>12</sup>

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“To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.”

*Wendell Berry*



AT THE TABLE

By: Josh Garrels

I went the way of wayward winds  
In a world of trouble and sin  
Walked a long and crooked mile  
Behind a million rank and file  
Forgot where I came from  
Somewhere back when I was young  
I was a good man’s child

‘Cause I lost some nameless things  
My innocence flew away from me  
She had to hide her face from my desire  
To embrace forbidden fire  
But at night I dream  
She’s singing over me  
Oh, oh, my child

Come on home, home to me  
And I will hold you in my arms  
And joyful be

There will always, always be  
A place for you at my table  
Return to me

-----

“I recognize the bread and wine as something much greater – mystery and tradition and symbol. Bread is bread, and wine is wine, but bread-and-wine is another thing entirely. The two together are the sacred and the material at once, the heaven and earth, the divine and the daily.”<sup>14</sup>

Shauna Neiquist

Wondering where I might begin  
Hear a voice upon the wind  
She’s singing faint but singing true  
Son, there ain’t nothing you can do  
But listen close and follow me  
I’ll take you where you’re meant to be  
Just don’t lose faith

So I put my hand upon the plow  
Wipe the sweat up from my brow  
Plant the good seed along the way  
As I look forward to the day  
When at last I see  
My Father run to me  
Singing oh, my child

Come on home, home to me  
And I will hold you in my arms  
And joyful be

There will always, always be  
A place for you at my table  
Return to me  
My child<sup>13</sup>

“When Jesus said: ‘Make your home in me as I make mine in you’, he offers us an intimate place that we can truly call ‘home’. Home is that place or space where we do not have to be afraid but can let go of our defenses and be free, free from worries, free from tensions, free from pressures. Home is where we can laugh and cry, embrace and dance, sleep long and dream quietly, eat, read, play, watch the fire, listen and be healed. The word ‘home; gathers a wide range of feelings and emotions up into one image, the image of a house where it is good to be: the house of love.”<sup>15</sup>

Henri Nouwen

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“My soul thirsts for God, the living God.”

Psalms 42:2<sup>16</sup>







# Invitation into a Place of Belonging

INVITATION: “An often-formal request to be present or participate.”<sup>17</sup>

“If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

*Lilla Watson*

YHWH is a God who cares about places. From the beginning of time, having a space to eat has been a care of God. Lisa Graham McMinn, a professor of sociology, writes, “Earth is a place of beauty, blessing, diversity, and delight, where all the pieces fit together into a complete whole.”<sup>18</sup> In Genesis 2:16 it is written, “The Lord God commanded the man (and woman), ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden.’” From then on eating has been a part of everyday life, a natural rhythm that takes place and all human accomplishments take placed because eat food.<sup>19</sup> Adam and Eve could share in this daily practice together, which offers a beautiful model for what it looks like for us to include other people by extending an invitation to include others to break bread together.

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“He brought me to the banqueting house and His banner over me is love.”

*Song of Songs 2:4*<sup>20</sup>





ALL YE REFUGEES

by Sandra McCracken

I am the One, the earth is my handmade work  
The skies I laid them wide, beauty unfurled  
Horizon to horizon  
Creation to creation, sings you home

Welcome home, gather round  
all ye refugees, come in.

Oh refugee, I did not cast you out In death and broken ground,  
Salvation springs  
My body and my blood, the healing that you need  
Come and receive

Welcome home, gather round all ye refugees, come in.

Watch and wait and see, what is yet to be  
Watch and wait and see, for the morning

Go out in joy and join the great procession  
The mountains and the heav’ns all will rejoice  
horizon to horizon, creation to creation  
horizon to horizon, creation to creation  
With one voice

Welcome home, gather round all ye refugees, come in

-----

“Every good relationship between two or more people, whether it is friendship, marriage, or community, creates space where strangers can enter and become friends. Good relationships are hospitable. When we enter into a home and feel warmly welcomed, we will soon realize that the love among those who live in that home is what makes that welcome possible.

When there is conflict in the home, the guest is soon forced to choose sides. “Are you for him or for her?” “Do you agree with them or with us?” “Do you like him more than you dome?” These questions prevent true hospitality - that is, an opportunity for the stranger to feel safe and discover his or her own gifts. Hospitality is more than an expression of love for the guest. It is also and foremost an expression of love between the hosts.”

Henri Nouwen

“Hospitality: generous space for others in our midst, created for their benefit at our expense.”

Tim Keel

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“All are welcome at the banquet and when you invite all, then you will be blessed!”

Luke 14:12-14

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YOU ARE HERE.

by Arlita Ibach, Gloria Darr and Cindy Helton

Here... Today...  
in this place with a story that is unique to you.  
Each of us has a story that is unfolding,  
Chapter by chapter, page by page.  
The chapters are sometimes thrilling and adventurous,  
Occasionally dark and difficult,  
At times mundane and dull.  
Perhaps, both beautiful and messy all at once.  
Your story is important because you  
have something to tell.  
Something you’ve walked through,  
something you’ve longed for,  
something true.  
Right now, the place you’re in,  
that dot on the map, is real.  
And your story matters.  
So come on in.  
You are welcome here!  
We’ll pour the coffee.  
You pull up a chair, right where you are.



“Love from the center of who you are; don’t fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply; practice playing second fiddle. Do not burn out; keep yourselves fueled and aflame. Be alert servants of the Master, cheerfully expectant. Do not quit in hard times; pray all the harder. Help needy Christians; be inventive inhospitality.”

*Romans 12:9-13<sup>21</sup>*

## PRAYERS OF BLESSING ON A HOME

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. “Peace be to this house and: to all who dwell here, in the name of the Lord. Blessed be God forever. When Christ took flesh through the Blessed Virgin Mary, he made his home with us. Let us now pray that he will enter this home and bless it with his presence. May he always be here among us; may he nurture our love for each other, share in our joys, comfort us in our sorrows. Inspired by his teachings and example, let us seek to make our home before all else a dwelling place of love, diffusing far and wide the goodness of Christ. A reading from the letter of Paul to the Colossians You are God’s chosen race, his saints; He loves you, and you should be clothed in sincere compassion, in kindness and humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another; forgive each other as soon as a quarrel begins. The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, to keep them together and complete them, put on love. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is for this that you were called together as parts of one body. Always be thankful. Let the message of Christ, in all its richness, find a home with you. Teach each other, and advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God; And never say or do anything except in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. The word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

O God, protect our going out and our coming in; Let us share the hospitality of this home with all who visit us, that those who enter here may know your love and peace. Grant this through Christ our Lord. O God, give your blessings to all who share this space that we may be knit together in companionship. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

O God, you fill the hungry with good things. Send your blessing on us, as we work in this space and make us ever thankful for our daily bread. Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen. Blessed are you, Lord of heaven and earth, for you give us food and drink to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad. Help us to be grateful for all your mercies, and mindful of the needs of others. Grant this through Christ our Lord.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name; thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. Be our shelter, Lord, when we are at home, our companion when we are away, and our welcome guest when we return and at last receive us into the dwelling place you have prepared for us in your Father’s house, where you live forever and ever. May the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, and may the word of Christ in all its richness dwell in us, so that whatever we do in word and in work, we will do in the name of the Lord. Amen.<sup>22</sup>

“God works through life, through people, and through physical, tangible and material reality to communicate his healing presence in our lives; God does not meet us outside of life in an esoteric manner. Rather, He meets us through life incidents, and particularly through sacraments of the church. Sacrament then is a way of encountering the mystery.”<sup>23</sup>

*Robert E. Webber*

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HOW TO BE A POET (TO REMIND MYSELF)

*by Wendell Berry*

Make a place to sit down.  
Sit down. Be quiet.  
You must depend upon  
affection, reading, knowledge,  
skill—more of each  
than you have—inspiration  
work, growing older, patience,  
for patience joins time  
to eternity...

Breathe with unconditional breath  
the unconditioned air.  
Shun electric wire.  
Communicate slowly. Live  
a three-dimensional life;  
stay away from screens.  
Stay away from anything  
that obscures the place it is in.  
There are no unsacred places;  
there are only sacred places  
and desecrated places.

Accept what comes from silence.  
Make the best you can of it.  
Of the little words that come  
out of the silence, like prayers  
prayed back to the one who prays,  
make a poem that does not disturb  
the silence from which it came.”

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.”

*Psalms 23:5*<sup>24</sup>

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“Here exiles accepted one another as fellow citizens. Here the scattered were gathered. Here the prisoners became ambassadors and ambassadors were received by the poor. Here all were impoverished and all enriched. Those sent were received by others who were also sent. Here, hospitality is the sign of the existence of a new kind of community where every image was destined for incarnation.”

*Paul S. Minear*

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FOR BELONGING

*by John O’Donahue*

May you listen to your longing to be free. May the frames of your belonging be large enough for the dreams of your soul. May you arise each day with a voice of blessing whispering in your heart that something good is going to happen to you. May you find a harmony between your soul and your life. May the mansion of your soul never become a haunted place. May you know the eternal longing which lives at the heart of time. May there be kindness in your gaze when you look within. May you never place walls between the light and yourself. May your angel free you from the prisons of guilt, fear, disappointment, and despair. May you allow the wild beauty of the invisible world to gather you, mind you, and embrace you in belonging.<sup>25</sup>





RECEIVE

by Audrey Assad

Holy Wisdom, God in Heaven  
Here in human time  
Humble Godhead bending low and  
Touching bread and wine

Faith is making plain the truth beneath the veil  
Faith supplying where our feeble sense fail

To the Father, to the Son  
And to the Spirit be  
Blessing, honour, glory, power  
Might, and majesty  
It is God who we encounter  
It is God that we receive

From this altar we do believe

Jesus by Your hand you feed us  
Your own life and bread  
Jesus risen, Savior lead us  
Out of sin and death

Word of God in flesh and blood, we're here for You  
Bread of life, the love of God, our heav'nly food

To the Father, to the Son  
And to the Spirit be  
Blessing, honour, glory, power  
Might, and majesty

It is God who we encounter  
It is God that we receive

-----

“The purpose of the sacraments, of the church-to help us see, to point to the bread and wine, the orchids and the food pantries, the post-funeral potlucks and the post-communion dance parties, and say: pay attention, this stuff matters; these things are holy.”<sup>26</sup>

Rachel Held Evans



The tabernacle had a table present to represent God would meet with his people and on the table was the bread of His presence.

Exodus 25<sup>27</sup>

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Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”

John 6:35<sup>28</sup>

**LORD, AT THY TABLE WE BEHOLD**

*by Joseph Stennett*

Lord, at Thy table I behold  
The riches of Thy grace;  
But wonder, most of all, that I  
Should find a welcome place:

I that am all defiled with sin,  
A rebel to my God;  
I that have crucified His Son,  
And trampled on His blood.

What strange, surprising grace is this,  
That such a soul has room!  
My Saviour takes me by the hand,  
My Jesus bids me come.

“Eat, oh my friends,” the Saviour cries,  
“The feast was made for you:  
For you I groaned, and bled, and died,  
And rose, and triumphed too.”

With trembling faith, and bleeding hearts,  
Lord, we accept Thy love:  
‘Tis a rich banquet we have had,  
What will it be above!

Had I ten thousand hearts, dear Lord,  
I’d give them all to Thee;  
Had I ten thousand tongues, they all  
Should join the harmony.<sup>29</sup>

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“When you have all you need, build a longer table, not a higher fence.”

*Jenna Kutcher*



**THE GUEST HOUSE**

*by Rumi*

This being human is a guest house.  
Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,  
some momentary awareness comes  
As an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!  
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,  
who violently sweep your house  
empty of its furniture,  
still treat each guest honorably.  
He may be clearing you out  
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice,  
meet them at the door laughing,  
and invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,  
because each has been sent  
as a guide from beyond.

“Sitting at a table with other people sets us apart from animals.”

*Fresco*

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“Come to the table and eat this book, for every word in the book is intended to do something in us, give health and wholeness, vitality and holiness to our souls and body.”

*Eugene Peterson*



“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby you have entertained angels.”

*Hebrews 13:2<sup>30</sup>*

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“One cannot think well, love well, sleep well, if one has not dined well.”

*Virginia Woolf*



REMEMBRANCE

by Matt Maher

Oh, how could it be  
That my God would welcome me into this mystery  
Say take this bread, take this wine  
Now the simple made divine for any to receive  
By Your mercy, we come to Your table  
By Your grace, You are making us faithful  
Lord, we remember You  
And remembrance leads us to worship  
And as we worship You  
Our worship leads to communion  
We respond to Your invitation, we remember You  
See His body, His blood  
Know that He has overcome every trial we will face  
None too lost to be saved  
None too broken or ashamed, all are welcome in this place  
By Your mercy, we come to Your table  
By Your grace, You are making us faithful  
Lord, we remember You  
And remembrance leads us to worship  
And as we worship You  
Our worship leads to communion  
We respond to Your invitation, we remember You  
Dying You destroyed our death  
Rising You restored our life  
Lord Jesus, come in glory  
Lord Jesus, come in glory  
Lord Jesus, come in glory  
Lord Jesus, come in glory  
Lord, we remember You  
And remembrance leads us to worship  
And as we worship You  
Our worship leads to communion  
We respond to Your invitation  
We respond to Your invitation, we remember You

AT THE TABLE

by Emily Vermilya, Daniel Rife, and Jordan Brown

There's a feast set before us  
A table that's filled with the riches and wealth of a  
King  
And though undeserving,  
His welcome receive  
Let your soul be refreshed and redeemed  
  
It's a table that feeds every longing  
Where water will quench thirsty souls  
Come tattered and torn with your shame, your  
scorn  
There will always be room for one more  
At the table

There's a feast set before us  
Our famine to end, let us praise the good Giver of  
all  
He calls to us gently,  
His bounty to share  
Oh drink deep of the cup He extends

It's a table that feeds those who look to the King  
For acceptance, forgiveness, and joy  
No matter your crime, there's no difference you'll  
find  
There will always be room for one more  
At the table

Brothers and sisters, all called to come  
From each nation, each tribe, and each tongue  
You are His guest of honor  
His friend to receive  
The goodness of Jesus our Lord

So lay down your hate and your neighbor embrace  
Let your differences be cast aside  
Let the balm of His cup reunite you in love  
Cause there'll always be room for one more  
At the table

He's a Savior who sees every tear when we grieve  
And His blood can cleanse dirty souls  
Mercy and grace  
Offered free in this place  
And there'll always be room for one more

He's a Savior who pleads, come sit at my feet  
In my presence, you are made whole  
So sit down, stay a while  
You've been called, you're my child  
And there'll always be room for one more...and one  
more  
At the table

There's a Savior before us  
The Lamb who was slain  
For our pardon so we might be free  
To come to the table  
Come to Christ's table

“Something about communion triggers our memory and helps us see things as they really are. Something about communion opens our eyes to Jesus at the table.”<sup>31</sup>  
*Rachel Held Evans*

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“There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places.”  
*Wendell Berry Given*



“Part of hospitality includes recognizing and valuing the stranger or guest.”<sup>32</sup>  
*Christine Pohl*

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**PRAYER OF REPENTANCE**

Father, you show favor to all, regardless of our worthiness before you. I repent of thinking that some people should not be brought into your community, and pray that you would give me your gracious nature. Amen.<sup>33</sup>

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**FOR USE BEFORE EATING**

Bless us O Lord, and these thy gifts,  
Which we are about to receive, from thy bounty,  
Through Christ, Our Lord.  
Amen.<sup>34</sup>

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“My hope is that you have moments to practice being both host and guest. That you have the chance to welcome a stranger or a friend to the table and to let them be who they are without the expectation of something different. The is hope that you have the chance to be welcomed in the same way and that you will continue to offer hospitality, I am hopeful that you will continue to seek opportunities to live out values of hospitality.”  
*Dr. Scott Barrett*

**PRAYERS FROM ACTS 4**

May there be life together.  
That no threat could restrain or silence the word that faith constrained them to proclaim.  
That the power at work within them could be expressed in unanimity of praise and prayer.  
That the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul.  
That oneness of loyalty, of love, of wonder, and of courage would represent the center of gravity of the story.  
That the fellowship would be marked with great power and great grace.  
That the results of participation in this power and grace was a transformation in the idea of property.  
Being possessed by the same spirit, no longer considering their own possessions as their own, but that as the early church lived that they would have everything in common.  
Consequently no one would be needy.  
Amen.<sup>35</sup>



**FOR USE BEFORE EATING**

We give you thanks, almighty God, for these and for all your blessings, who live and reign for ever and ever.  
Bless, Lord, this food you give us.  
We thank you for those who have prepared it  
and ask that this time will be one of fellowship and good cheer.  
Help us not to forget those who are hungry, or in need;  
make us eager to share what we receive with others  
and to use the energy you give us in these gifts  
not only to think but to work for peace and justice for all.  
  
Bless, O Lord, this food and ourselves to your service,  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.<sup>36</sup>







# Participation in the Faith Narrative

**PARTICIPATION:** “The state of being related to a larger whole.”<sup>37</sup>

“We tell some of the best stories to ourselves. Scientists have discovered that the memories we use to form our own life stories are boldly fictionalized. And social psychologists point out that when we meet a friend, our conversation mostly consists of an exchange of gossip stories. We ask our friend ‘What’s up?’ or ‘What’s new?’ and we begin to narrate our lives to one another, trading tales back and forth over cups of coffee or bottles of beer, unconsciously shaping and embellishing to make the tales hum. And every night, we reconvene with our loved ones at the dinner table to share the small comedies and tragedies of our day.”

*Jonathan Gottschall*

The actions of participation around a meal are plenty. They can include, but are not limited to: preparing a menu, purchasing food, meal prep, bringing a dish to pass, a beverage to share, a host or hostess gift, offering to set the dishes on the table, or pulling out the chair for another. Actually taking a seat at the table is participation. Offering to speak a blessing, prayer, or song before passing the food, helping to pass the food around, cutting up the food for one who needs extra attention, or offering to re-fill beverage glasses throughout the meal engage in participation. Once there is a conclusion to the meal engaging in the clean-up process is also participation. All of these ways of participation allow a person to engage in the experience of the breaking bread alongside another person. This is a way to offer companionship, just by sitting down and eating with other people, Jesus has the name friend.<sup>38</sup>

## THE LORD’S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as in heaven.  
Give us today our daily bread.  
Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Lead us not into temptation  
but deliver us from evil.  
For the kingdom, the power,  
and the glory are yours  
now and forever.  
Amen.<sup>39</sup>

“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

*Acts 2:46-47*<sup>40</sup>

## WESLEYAN METHODIST COMMUNITY: THE THREE MAIN POINTS

*by Francis Ritche*

1. We remember what Jesus did for us on the cross and look forward to the hope of new life present in the Resurrection and promise of all things being renewed. In this we fulfill Jesus request to do it in remembrance of him (Luke 22:19). This is the retelling and recapturing of our imagination to shape our identity over and over again.

2. We unite with the universal Christian Church throughout history and at present. Whether we all believe ourselves to be united or not, Communion is the meal (even with all the different views of it) that has stood at the center of communal Christian practice since Jesus’ last supper. So when we take it we kneel with the whole Church throughout time.

3. We participate in the Real Presence of Jesus. We believe in Communion as a sacrament — a means of grace. Through it we willfully open our lives to the grace of God and we believe him to be truly present in the elements. Through it we say yes to the Spirit’s transforming power and we express our desire to be shaped by Him. We believe (as freaky as it may sound to some) that we participate in his flesh and blood as we consume the elements of bread and juice/wine. We believe that those things are mysteriously present (John 6:53-59) in some way that we cannot properly explain, so we engage in a silence about the technicalities of what occurs.<sup>41</sup>

“Come with all your shame.  
Come with all hurt.  
Come with every ugly part  
of your story... and let me love you and let me choose you anyway.”

*Vienna Pharaon.*



“The first thing the world knew about Christians was that they ate together. At the beginning of each week they gathered- the rich and poor, slaves and free, Jews and Gentiles, women and men- to celebrate the day the whole world changed, to toast to resurrection. While each community worshipped a bit differently, it appears most practiced communion by enjoying a full meal together, with special prayers of thanksgiving, or eucharisteo, for the break and wine. They remembered Jesus with food, stories, laughter, tears, debate, discussion, and cleanup. They thanked God not only for the break that came from the earth, but also for the Bread that came from heaven to nourish the whole world. According to church historians, the focus of these early communion services was not on Jesus’ death, but rather on Jesus’ friendship, his presence made palpable among his followers by the tastes, sounds, and smells he loved.”<sup>42</sup>

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“With joy you will drink deeply from the fountain of salvation! In that wonderful day you will sing: “Thank the LORD! Praise his name! Tell the nations what he has done. Let them know how mighty he is! Sing to the LORD, for he has done wonderful things. Make known his praise around the world. Let all the people of Jerusalem shout his praise with joy! For great is the Holy One of Israel who lives among you.”

*Isaiah 12:3-6*<sup>43</sup>

“The Locke family shared regularly in meals together. It was normal for us to eat dinner together almost every night of the week. At the beginning of each meal, it was in our rhythm to pray together, and growing up we would often do that in song. Here are a few of them, none of them have name that I know of:

**ONE :**

The Lord is good to me,  
and so I thank the Lord,  
For giving me, the things I need,  
the sun and the rain and the apple seed,  
The Lord is good to me.  
Hallelujah! Amen.

**TWO :**

Leader: Thank you Jesus  
(Others: Thank you Jesus)  
Leader: For this food!  
(Others: For this food!)  
Leader: And our many blessings  
(Others: And our many blessings)  
Leader: Amen  
(Others: Amen)

**THREE :**

Also, when my Dad prays, he often ends the prayer with the phrase  
“and we know that all good things are ours in Christ.”<sup>44</sup>

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**COME WITH US, O BLESSED JESUS**

Come with us, O blessed Jesus,  
with us evermore to be.  
And, in leaving now thine altar,  
let us nevermore leave thee!  
Let thy bright celestial chorus  
never cease the heav’nly strain;  
but in us, thy loving children,  
come with peace, good will to reign.<sup>45</sup>

## TASTE

*by Sleeping at Last*

I am alive. I am awake. I am aware of what light tastes like. the curtains drawn, the table set;  
I want to be. I want to be at my best.

it's bittersweet, it's poetry. a careful pruning of my dead leaves. it's holy ground, a treasure chest.  
I'm on my knees and only scratch the surface.

like fists unraveling, like glass unshattering. we're breaking all the rules; we're breaking bread again.  
We're swallowing light 'til we're fixed from the inside

out of the woods, out of the dark, I'm well aware of the shadows in my heart. I want to feel tectonic shifts.  
I want to be. I want to be astonished. I want to be astonished. so I propose a toast:

to fists unraveling, to glass unshattering. to breaking all the rules, to breaking bread again. we're swallowing light,  
we're swallowing our pride. we're raising our glass 'til we're fixed from the inside. 'til we're fixed from the inside.  
we're nothing less than a work in progress, sacred text on post it notes. we only speak of a world in pieces, let's make  
a map of what matters most, where every fracture is a running river leading us back to our golden coasts. here's to  
showing up:

to fists unraveling, to glass unshattering. to breaking all the rules, to breaking bread again. we're swallowing light,  
we're swallowing our pride. we're raising our glass 'til we're fixed from the inside.  
'Til we're fixed from the inside.<sup>46</sup>



“Jesus takes what we bring him -- our bread, our fish, our wine, our goats, our sheep, our sins, our virtues, our work, our leisure, our strength, our weakness, our hunger, our thirst whatever we are. At every table we sit down to we bring first of all and most of all ourselves. Jesus takes it - He takes us. Jesus blesses and gives thanks for what we bring, who we are in our bringing. He takes it to the Father by the Holy Spirit. Whatever is on the table and is around the table is lifted up in blessing and thanksgiving. Jesus breaks what we bring to him. All too often we come to the table with our best manners and a pose of impenetrable self-sufficiency. We're all surface, all role-polished and poised performers in the game of life. But Jesus is after what is within, and he exposes the insides- our inadequacies. At the table we're not permitted to be self-enclosed. We're not permitted to remain self-sufficient. We are taken into the crucifixion. Then Jesus gives back what we bring him, who we are. Who we are, this self that we offer to him at the Table, is changed into what God gives, what we sing of as Amazing Grace. Transformation takes place at the Table as we eat and drink the consecrated body and blood of Jesus. A resurrection meal. “Christ in me. We initiate the practice of resurrection at the Eucharistic Table, but it doesn't end there. We continue the identical practice at every meal we sit down to. For the Christian, every meal derives from and extends the Eucharistic meal into our daily eating and drinking, tables at which the risen Lord is present as host. All of the elements of formation-by-resurrection are present every time we sit down to a meal and invoke Jesus as host. It's a wonderful thing, really, that one of the most common actions of our lives is also the setting in which the most profound transactions take place. The fusion of natural and supernatural that we witness and engage in the shape of the liturgy continues - or can continue at your kitchen table.”<sup>47</sup>



ITALIAN TOAST FROM THE SALLEE FAMILY

Questo vino e bello e garbato  
Da questa mani si e ritirato  
E venuto curioso and furioso  
Ha vista la gente e si e travato confuso  
E pagate in contante  
Alla salute di tutti quanti

Here is the precise english interpretation:

This wine is beautiful and friendly  
From these hands it was withdrawn (as if pulling it from a barrel of wine)  
It came curious and furious  
It has seen the people and has found itself confused  
It has been paid for in cash  
To the health of all the people

Here is the Sallee family interpretation:

This wine we are about to drink is beautiful and friendly to the palate  
I pulled it from the barrel with my own hands  
It came out with a furious yet curious force  
Then it opened itself up to the people and found itself a little confused  
But, it is paid for in cash, so let’s all toast to the health of everyone here!!!

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”The next day there was a wedding celebration in the village of Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples were also invited to the celebration. The wine supply ran out during the festivities, so Jesus’ mother told him, “They have no more wine.” “Dear woman, that’s not our problem,” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.” But his mother told the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Standing nearby were six stone water jars, used for Jewish ceremonial washing. Each could hold twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus told the servants, “Fill the jars with water.”When the jars had been filled, he said, “Now dip some out, and take it to the master of ceremonies.” So the servants followed his instructions. When the master of ceremonies tasted the water that was now wine, not knowing where it had come from (though, of course, the servants knew), he called the bridegroom over. “A host always serves the best wine first,” he said. “Then, when everyone has had a lot to drink, he brings out the less expensive wine. But you have kept the best until now!”This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was the first time Jesus revealed his glory. And his disciples believed in him.”

John 2:1-11<sup>48</sup>

DRAW NIGH AND TAKE THE BODY OF THE LORD

Draw nigh and take the body of the Lord  
And drink the holy blood for you outpoured.  
Offered was He for greatest and for least,  
Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest.

He that His saints in this world rules and shields  
To all believers life eternal yields,  
With heavenly bread makes them that hunger whole,  
Gives living waters to the thirsting soul.

Approach ye, then, with faithful hearts sincere  
And take the pledges of salvation here.  
O Judge of all, our only Savior Thou,  
In this Thy feast of love be with us now.<sup>49</sup>



“What happens during meals shapes a large part of our memories. As we grow older we forget many things, but we mostly remember the Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners in our families. We remember them with joy and gratitude or with sadness and anger. They remind us of the peace that existed in our homes or the conflicts that never seemed to get resolved. These special moments around the table stand out as vivid reminders of the quality of our lives together. Today fast-food services and TV dinners have made common meals less and less central. But what will there be to remember when we no longer come together around the table to share a meal? Maybe we will have fewer painful memories, but will we have any joyful ones? Can we make the table a hospitable place, inviting us to kindness, gentleness, joy, and peace and creating beautiful memories?” In order to proclaim the power, salvation and hope of Jesus the table needs to be experienced as a place where the Truth of Jesus transfigures identity. How can we built stories that help Christians pass on their faith, build identity, and create ecclesia in order to reseed our faith?<sup>50</sup>





**PRAYER OF PEACE—BASED ON A NAVAHO PRAYER**

*by David Haas*

Peace before us,  
Peace behind us,  
Peace under our feet.

Peace within us,  
Peace over us,  
Let all around us be peace.

Christ before us,  
Christ behind us,  
Christ under our feet.

Christ within us,  
Christ over us,  
Let all around us be Christ.

“As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him.”

*Luke 24:30-31*<sup>51</sup>

After Jesus’ resurrection, He revealed His identity around the table.



**GRACE BEFORE MEALS**

*by John O’Donohue*

As we begin this meal with grace,  
Let us become aware of the memory  
Carried inside the food before us:  
The quiver of the seed  
Awakening in the earth,  
Unfolding in a trust of roots  
And slender stems of growth,  
On its voyage toward harvest,  
The kiss of rain and surge of sun;  
The innocence of animal soul  
That never spoke a word,  
Nourished by the earth  
To become today our food;  
The work of all the strangers  
Whose hands prepared it,  
The privilege of wealth and health  
That enables us to feast and celebrate.<sup>52</sup>

## GRACE AFTER MEALS

by John O'Donohue

We end this meal with grace.  
For the joy and nourishment of food,  
the slowed time away from the world  
to come into presence with each other  
and sense the subtle lives behind our faces,  
the different colors of our voices,  
the edges of hungers we keep private,  
the circle of love that unites us.  
We pray the wise spirit who keeps us  
To change the structures that make others hunger  
And that after such grace we might now go forth  
and impart dignity wherever we partake.<sup>53</sup>

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“Taste and see that the LORD is good. Oh, the joys of those who take refuge in him!”

*Psalms 34:8*<sup>54</sup>



## BREAKING OF THE BREAD

We break this bread  
to share in the body of Christ.  
Though we are many, we are one body,  
because we all share in one bread.  
Lamb of God,  
you take away the sins of the world,  
have mercy on us.  
Lamb of God,  
you take away the sin of the world,  
grant us peace.<sup>55</sup>

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“Man shall not live by bread alone.”

*Luke 11:3*

Meals can remind us that we are dependent on one greater than we are.<sup>56</sup>



## THE EUCHARISTIC PRAYER

The Lord is here.

His Spirit is with us.

We lift up our hearts to the Lord.

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

Holy, holy, holy Lord,

God of power and might,

Heaven and earth are full of your glory.

[Great is the mystery of faith:]

Christ has died:

Christ is risen:

Christ will come again.

[Praise to you, Lord Jesus:]

Dying you destroyed our death,

rising you restored our life:

Lord Jesus, come in glory.

[Christ is the bread of life:]

All When we eat this bread

and drink this cup,

we proclaim your death,

Lord Jesus,

until you come in glory.

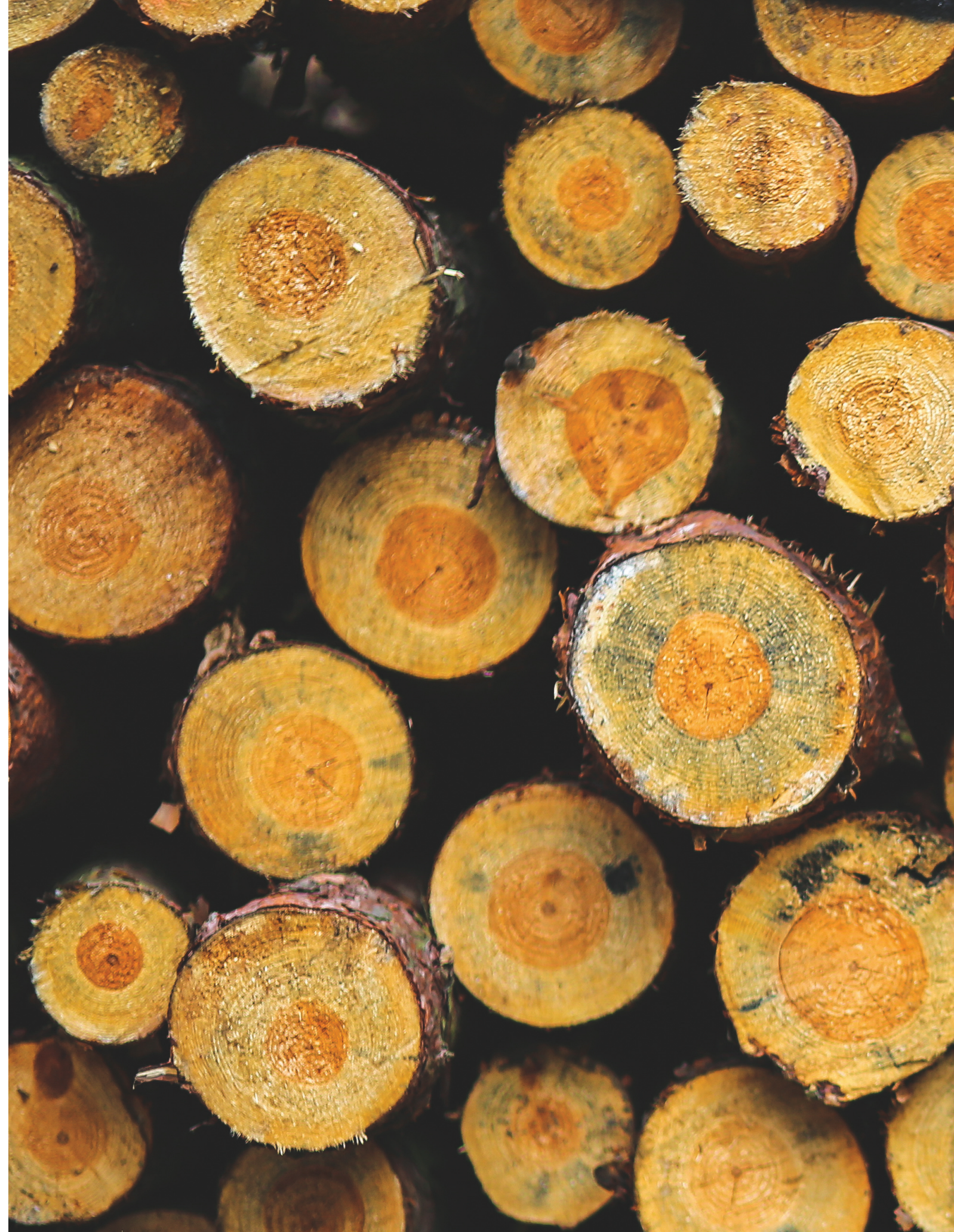
[Jesus Christ is Lord:]

Lord, by your cross and resurrection

you have set us free.

You are the Saviour of the world.

Amen.<sup>57</sup>





# Communication Into Familial Identity

**COMMUNICATION: “A process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, signs, or behavior.”<sup>58</sup>**

“Celebration can only really come about where fear and love, joy and sorrow, tears and smiles can exist together. Celebration is the acceptance of life in a constantly increasing awareness of its preciousness.”<sup>59</sup>

*Henri Nouwen*

The narrative of Scripture begins with communication and is present throughout around tables. Healthy communication is possible because of the Spirit of understanding, truth-telling conversations, listening ears, forgiving words, and celebration.

The notion of interpersonal communication has been on the minds of people for a very long time.<sup>60</sup> People have been asking questions as it pertains to health and connection with those they love for years. Cooking as well as eating together is a way to expand one’s relational connection.<sup>61</sup>

The opportunity to receive an invitation to break bread with others as well as have participation in the hospitable space is not complete without the sharing through communication with other human beings for the purpose of connection. Throughout the New Testament to share, a meal was a social interchange. When Jesus ate with the tax collectors it was of high concern for the Pharisees, because he was having a social interaction with people that other people in the culture did not include around their tables.

Around the table where the Last Supper was shared, Jesus communicated with His disciples about what the process of remembering Him would be after He was gone which would be done through the Eucharist. For years, this has been a way that Jesus followers remembered, thanked, celebrated the life, and freedom through Jesus Christ. As Simone Weil, a mystic has so clearly written, “At the center of the Catholic religion a little formless matter is found, a little piece of bread.”<sup>62</sup> Through the breaking of the bread Henri Nouwen has written, “A truly Eucharistic life means always sayings thanks to God, always praising God, and always being more surprised by the abundance of God’s goodness and love.”<sup>63</sup> As Jesus followers remember His abundance is more than the nourishment on the bread, words of communication are vital as we read in Matthew 4:4, “Man shall not live by bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

Each day there are opportunities to engage in sharing meals together around the table for physical and relational nourishment. Meals can remind people of their dependence on something greater.<sup>64</sup> Leonard Sweet shares, “For, Christians every day is a reminder of the Resurrection. Each and every day should be a grand celebration of God’s amazing gift of Jesus. Everything in life is filled with resurrection moments. And every person is filled with resurrection hope just waiting to be celebrated.”<sup>65</sup> The celebration is poignant to the way of following Jesus through daily nourishment.

## PERHAPS THE WORLD ENDS HERE

*by Joy Harjo*

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.”<sup>66</sup>

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“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”

*1 Corinthians 11:26*

There is an act of identity formation that takes place when we participate in breaking bread together.<sup>67</sup>

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“It was in these late hours that we formed some of the most important friendships of our lives, the kind that go beyond small talk and beyond theological discussions to raw, unedited truth-telling. We confessed our deepest fears and greatest doubts. We speculated endlessly about our futures and shared in one another’s joys and disappointments. We argued and apologized. We spewed hot chocolate across the kitchen in laughing fits and watched reruns of Arrested Development. This was out communion, our confession. This was the church that made our little three-bedroom-two-bathroom house grow spacious as a cathedral. In the company of these friends, questions and doubts were met with sympathy, no fear. No one felt the need to correct or understand or approve. We just listened, and it was sacred.”<sup>68</sup>



## HERE AT THY TABLE, LORD, WE MEET

Here at Thy table, Lord, we meet,  
To feed on food divine;  
Thy body is the bread we eat,  
Thy precious blood, they wine.

He that prepares this rich repast.  
Himself comes down and dies;  
And then invites us thus to feast,  
Upon the sacrifice.

O was there ever love so free,  
Dear Saviour, so divine!  
Well Thou may'st claim that heart of me  
Which owes so much to Thine.  
Yea, surely Thou shalt have my heart,  
My soul, my strength, my all;  
With life itself I'll freely part,  
My Jesus, at Thy call.  
Amen.<sup>69</sup>

Over an interview with Joel Thomas, barista at the Abbey Coffee in Marion, Indiana, we drank coffee, shared cookies, conducted the interview, and took photographs. Joel offered insightful thoughts on the formation that can take place over conversation with people.

*“This has often been a space I have felt and experienced the harsh reality and beautiful truth of Philippians 2:1-18...  
“Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his ow advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross! Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose. Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.” Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life. And then I will be able to boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor in vain. But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.”*

*I have felt led by the Holy Spirit to serve my customers out of a genuine desire to know His children and love them. I have grown in patience as I have learned how people have many things going on and often need someone to point or put their frustration out on. This space has made Philippians 2:1-18 more real and necessary to me as I have been at the table and interacted with those who come to my table.”<sup>70</sup>*







“Hospitality is not some stuffy, outdated practice. It is clearly a biblical idea of utmost importance, because it is the primary way we tell the astounding story that God hasn’t given up on us. Any time we practice hospitality we follow in the steps of our lavishly hospitable God. Here’s the potentially scary part: because of our role in representing God to the world, when we don’t walk in hospitality, we do not tell the truth about God.”<sup>71</sup>

*Dustin Willis*

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“Confess your sins to one another.”

*James 5:16*

There is room to experience freedom with one another when you are working together to commune and come together for the purpose of experiencing freedom from sin and walk in forgiveness together.<sup>72</sup>

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“Sacredness requires specificity. The grand esoteric themes of theology have their place, but love takes root in those specific moments when we voluntarily and intentionally enter one another’s pain.”<sup>73</sup>

*Milton Brasher-Cunningham, a minister and chef*

**THE GATHERING OF THE COMMUNITY**

*by Amanda Jagt*

Some days  
we sing new songs.  
Some days  
we sing old songs.  
Some days  
we sings songs of sorrow.  
Some days  
we sings songs of joy.  
This day,  
in the face of violence and war,  
in the face of injustice and degradation,  
in the face of apathy and greed,  
we come to raise hopeful voices;  
we come to sing as many and as one;  
we come to be pointed toward home.<sup>74</sup>



“The table is one of the most intimate places in our lives. It is there that we give ourselves to one another. When we say, “Take some more, let me serve you another plate, let me pour you another glass, don’t be shy, enjoy it,” we say a lot more than our words express. We invite our friends to become part of our lives. We want them to be nurtured by the same food and drink that nurture us. We desire communion. That is why a refusal to eat and drink what a host offers is so offensive. It feels like a rejection of an invitation to intimacy. Strange as it may sound, the table is the place where we want to become food for one another. Every breakfast, lunch, or dinner can become a time of growing communion with one another.”<sup>75</sup>

*Henri Nouwen*

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**B O R N**

*by Over the Rhine*

I was born to laugh  
I learned to laugh though my tears  
I was born to love  
I’m gonna learn to love without fear

Pour me a glass of wine  
Talk deep into the night  
Who knows what we’ll find

Intuition, deja-vu  
The Holy Ghost haunting you  
Whatever you got  
I don’t mind

Put your elbows on the table  
I’ll listen long as I am able  
There’s nowhere I’d rather be

Secret fears, the supernatural  
Thank God for this new laughter  
Thank God the joke’s on me

We’ve seen the landfill rainbow  
We’ve seen the junkyard of love  
Baby it’s no place for you and me

I was born to laugh  
I learned to laugh through my tears  
I was born to love  
I’m gonna learn to love without fear<sup>76</sup>

Ted Loder beautifully writes the following poem as a way to remember the gentleness that can offered to one another as each person is navigating their own paths of griefs, joys, sorrows, and celebrations...

**P R A Y E R S   F O R   T H E   B A T T L E**

Guide Me into an Unclenched Moment

Holy One,  
into an unclenched moment,  
a deep breath,  
a letting go  
of heavy experiences  
of shriveling anxieties  
of dead certainties  
that, softened by the silence,  
surrounded by the light,  
and open to the mystery,  
I may be found by wholeness,  
upheld by the unfathomable,  
entranced by the simple,  
and filled with the joy  
that is, you.<sup>77</sup>





HERE, O MY LORD, I SEE THEE FACE TO FACE

1 Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face;  
Here would I touch and handle things unseen;  
Here grasp with firmer hand th’eternal grace,  
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

2 Here would I feed upon the bread of God,  
Here drink with Thee the royal wine of heav’n;  
Here would I lay aside each earthly load,  
Here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiv’n.

3 This is the hour of banquet and of song;  
This is the heav’nly table spread for me;  
Here let me feast and, feasting still prolong  
The brief bright hour of fellowship with thee.

4 I have no help but Thine; nor do I need  
Another arm but Thine to lean upon.  
It is enough, my Lord, enough indeed;  
My strength is in Thy might, Thy might alone.

5 Mine is the sin, but Thine the righteousness;  
Mine is the guilt, but Thine the cleansing blood;  
Here is my robe, my refuge, and my peace;  
Thy blood, Thy righteousness, O Lord, my God.

6 Too soon we rise; the vessels disappear;  
The feast, though not the love, is past and gone;  
The bread and wine remove; but Thou art here,  
Nearer than ever; still my shield and sun.

7 Feast after feast thus comes and passes by,  
Yet, passing, points to that glad feast above,  
Giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,  
The Lamb’s great marriage feast of bliss and love.<sup>78</sup>

“There’s much left to be talked through, wept over, listened to, cared about.  
Not false starts at communication through social media or anonymous letters.  
Face to face, looking into the eyes of ones we say we despise, fear or distrust; then, speaking words, listening and taking responsibility.  
There’s a lot of anger, fear and distrust in our country, our workplaces, our homes.  
This is our chance to do better.  
To learn.  
So, what would Jesus do, besides never wear a bracelet with WWJD on it?  
Stay at the table.  
Add more leaves and chairs.  
Forgive.  
Show mercy.  
Listen.  
Heal.  
Feed.  
Touch the leper hiding within.  
Call us by name, not names.  
Love, anyway.  
Then imbue us with His Love so potent, as to change the world.  
Love can.  
Where to start?  
Follow Jesus.”<sup>79</sup>







“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread.”

*1 Corinthians 10:17*

Breaking bread is an act for the community.

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“Our communities flourish when we regularly tell stories of God’s faithfulness and goodness and when we find opportunities to express gratitude and celebrate the gifts we have received.”<sup>80</sup>

*Christine D. Pohl*





# Conclusion

“Woody Allen once said that 80 percent of success is simply showing up... “showing up” means facing into your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors willingly, with curiosity and kindness.”<sup>81</sup>

*Susan David*

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The table is a gathering place. A place where relationships with people receive an invitation to come, sit, participate in the shared meal, as well as communicate while sharing this space. The ecclesia modeled this practice very well as it was a way to engage in the relational interactions that mirror the triune God.

God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are love. Spending time around the table offers an opportunity to extend that kindness of love. Romans 12:9-13 shares so succinctly these words of wisdom as it pertains to sincerity in hospitable love, “Don’t just pretend to love others. Really, love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically. Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying. When God’s people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.”<sup>82</sup>

The present quest to create and experience meaning in the world has propelled people to explore the essence of belonging for a very long time. As Jesus followers continue to pursue the abundant life, that John 10:10 writes about, there will come a day when the chaos of earth will experience full restoration. The exposure of the kingdom of heaven through the calling forth of the Bride of Christ to the Great Banquet feast table of heaven. Until that day comes, there is an ongoing invitation for movement toward oneness with the triune God, while still living at peace with His mercy in the process until that day comes. As C.S. Lewis so eloquently portrays the final scene in the Chronicles of Narnia with the portrayal of God as the lion named Aslan, there is a beckoning at the end of the story of, as people know it here on earth, while the one of eternity is about to begin. “And as He spoke, He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before.”<sup>83</sup>





# Questions for Reflection

## RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRIUNE GOD:

How does your relationship with the triune God influence how you engage in breaking bread with people around the table in your daily life?

Throughout Scripture, people encountered the triune God at a number of places where meals were shared. How does this shape your understanding of space around the table as it pertains to encountering God in your current stage of life?

What are specific aspects of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit you bear? How do you offer these attributes to people around the table?

Describe a time when you were at a table with people and you experienced the triune God in a meaningful way?



## INVITATION INTO A PLACE OF BELONGING:

Think about a time when you were a host. How did you feel throughout this experience; before, during, and after the time you were a host?

Think about a time when you were a guest. How did you feel throughout this experience; before, during, and after the time you were a guest?

As you reflect on these experiences, what are a few things you can learn as you reflect on how Scripture talks about hosting?

Describe a time you experienced generous hospitality with people around a table? How did you feel as you sat and ate at this table?

What does your present table relationally look like? What do you want it to look like? What potentially keeps you from inviting people to your table?

## PARTICIPATION IN THE FAITH NARRATIVE:

How does the historical framework of a table appear in Scripture in comparison to how it is represented today?

What can Jesus followers in the 21st century learn from the ecclesia in the New Testament? How did people interact with one another similarly? Differently?

How has your your understanding of yourself been shaped by breaking bread with people around a table?

COMMUNICATION BUILDS A FAMILIAL IDENTITY:

Who are the people most present at your table?

What are the stories being shared consistently around your table?

What (if any) are the themes to the stories you hear?

How can you foster an environment conducive to growth and intimacy around your table, even if it includes conflict, tension, or differences?

Who is present at your table in need of forgiveness? From whom might you need to seek forgiveness?

In what ways do you celebrate others around your table? How (if at all) would you like this to change?



End Notes

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This project is a collection of years of sharing meals, participating in the Eucharist, asking questions, listening, celebrating, and crying around the table. There is something so inviting when there is a chair for you at a table, but also a vulnerability that accompanies sitting down for literal and metaphoric nourishment. I could share a story about one of these times with each of you; it has been shaping, difficult at times, and an expression of love. I look forward to the transcendence that will come in days ahead as we experience transfigurational moments while breaking bread around the table together!

Thank you.... “Go ahead and put dinner on the table, dad will be home shortly.” This common phrase spoken throughout my childhood, around 5pm, constituting it was dinnertime on Hanley Road. This regular gathering through my formative developmental years, allowed me to begin to understand the complexities of the table. Thank you, dad & mom for making this time a priority for our family. Jodi and Joy, you two were the faces I looked at across the table and oh, what a memory. Holding hands for family prayers are still bearing fruit today, thank you!

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# About the Author



When people gather, the kingdom of heaven here on earth seems much more tangible. Whether it is around a table sharing a meal, on a walk, sharing a pour over coffee, or participating in something of a shared interest I deeply believe in the sharing of stories through communal living.

Throughout my own narrative of joy, longing, loss, and healing the triune God is present. My educational experiences includes a master's degree in Community Counseling as well as my current work on my doctoral degree in Semiotics and Future Studies, I have found that each of life's experiences have guided my desire to make meaning in the world that exposes the healing, reconciliation, and mercy of the triune God.

After moving to six different states to work at a number of universities, it is a joy to return to Middle America and establish my home in Indiana. I am able to live, work, and cultivate communal living at a Christian University. I enjoy sharing my experiences in order to foster growth with others as image bearers of the triune God. It is my prayer that stories may be told, heard, and shared around the table to expose the love of the triune God.



