

Table Talk
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I grew up in a household where supper at the table was a nightly routine. The menu was a solid rotation of a variety of meat, potato, canned vegetables, and sliced bread and butter. There was an occasional lasagna thrown in, recipe from the North Dakota Campfire Girl Cook Book, so you know it was authentic Italian. The food was stick to your ribs hearty, but it was simply a meal. Utilitarian. No sharing of “what two good things happened to you today at school talk.” No, our table talk was sparse and sometimes tense, due to my step-father’s membership in the Clean Plate Club because of his survival the Depression.

However, Luther League Bible Camp meals were a different thing~~rowdy with silly songs and chattering with friends. Suppertime was fun! Table talk was mischievous!

When I was first on my own and actually earning a paycheck, my friends and I loved to go out to dinner, and spent the evening enjoying a long meal of deep conversation and stories, ending with coffee and a shared decadent dessert. Our table talk was sustaining and supportive.

As a youth minister, I took high school students to a “frontier” camp, where we made all of our food from scratch on a wood burning stove, and our evenings were spent over burned biscuits and undercooked pasta and water from the spring, while we took turns telling our life stories each night by candlelight in the mountains. Our table talk was relational and full of grace.

These were meals that nourished our bodies, our souls, our spirits. An alchemy of food, community, story and spirit. They were sacramental. Communion. Visible experiences of invisible grace.

Communion is one of the two sacraments we celebrate in our Protestant heritage. Many of us who grew up in churches had different experiences of communion. Sometimes called the Eucharist. The Lord’s Supper. The word communion comes from the Greek word “koinania” which means partnership, or community. Eucharist is a greek word, eucharista, which means thanksgiving. (Did I miss any names? I am not going to get into why it is called all three of these and who thinks which is best—because you can read all about it on the internet.)

In my Lutheran Church, I didn’t get to take my first communion until I the day I was confirmed, when I was 15. We had so much instruction on what it was and what it wasn’t—because you know, Protestant views and Catholic views and everything in between. The pastors made it sound like it was such a big deal, and as a little church nerd, I was hyped up for an amazing transformative experience when that styrofoam-y wafer hit my tongue.

It was not.

I honestly thought I would taste the presence of Christ. Like maybe it would feel sparkly going down my throat, and the wine would fill my veins with love. Why else would the pastors spend so much time talking about it if wasn't something out of the world special?

I count my first communion as one of the most disappointing spiritual experiences of my youth.

I don't know what you think or believe about communion, or how important it is to you or what your experiences have been. Some of you come from Catholicism, where the Eucharist is an essential part of Mass. Some of you come from Episcopalian or Lutheran lives where the Lord's Supper is integral part of worship. My Baptist friends hardly ever had communion or cared about it.

Celebrating the sacrament of communion is something our church does every month. It is the one time we share table talk in the context of worshipping together as one. And I imagine it ranges in importance among you.

For me, the essence of breaking bread together is not about the kind of food and drink we share—in seminary we ranged from good wine and freshly baked challah to milk and cookies. I am glad today we are leaving the plastic communion-to-go kits in the cupboard and breaking out the good dishes. They are laden with chunks of tasty gluten free bread (seriously it's good) and 100% Grape Juice that is thick with body.

The essence of communion for me is the journey we share, full of table talk stories of our life together—the pain and sorrow, ideas and questions, celebrations and mundane happenings. What we bring to the table is so beautiful and brutal (brutiful! thank you Glennon Doyle) they need to be marked and honored over a simple ritual that helps us remember how the thread of the holy moves through us and in us and around us as we share community. This is mirrored in the story of the two disciples walking on the road to Emmaus, where they meet a stranger, and walking together, they share stories. The conversation is rich and engaging, and they invite their new friend to spend the night with them. In the blessing and the breaking of bread, their eyes are opened, to the wondrous mystery that it has been Christ with them all along. They remembered how their hearts burned as they delighted in conversation. Their table talk was alchemy, a mystery revealed, a marvel deepening in their souls—sacramental. Communion.

I love how Episcopalian priest, Tracey Lind confronts the unusualness of this mystery of Eucharist. In a sermon based on a passage in the Gospel of John, where Jesus says "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them."

Lind explains: "Attempts to intellectually or literally comprehend {these words} fail."

This teaching of Jesus was scandalous, sinful, and heretical for first century Jews listening to it. “According to Jewish teaching, the nephesh or “life principle” of any living creature is found in the blood. It is a sin for a human being, filled with nephesh – that is, blood – to consume the nephesh or blood of beasts, much less another human being. To set clear boundaries, Jewish law forbids consuming any blood whatsoever; and whoever violates this law “will be cut off” from the community (Lev 17:14-15, Dt 12:23)....to this day, Kosher butchering involves ritually eliminating the blood from the meat before it is consumed.” (Lind)

In John, Jesus was not speaking literally...but rather “inviting us to gather and share a symbolic meal of bread and wine, and in the sharing, we would absorb the “nephesh” the life force of Christ.”

We take into our being the life of Christ,
the life of the Holy One,
we become one with the Ground of Being,
and with one another.

Lind writes, “Think about it this way – each and every time we come to this table, we are fed and nourished with the life force of the source of all creation. It is truly a mystery beyond reason.....In some ways, the Eucharist is similar to a Labyrinth.”

The labyrinth is an exploration of a deep journey into the wisdom of God, with our bodies. We enter into Divine Wisdom...walking with others into the deepest places of our Self, of the Holy.”

The poet Luci Shaw writes:

“Often we taste the granular body of wheat...
And swallow together the grape’s warm bitter blood...
Knowing ourselves a part of you as you took part of us...”

When we come to the table with all of who we are, all of who we are not, and all of who we hope to be, we are invited to give ourselves “over to the mystery, to allow ourselves to be emptied and filled with a ‘nephesh’ beyond reason....” Which, I might add, you may or may not feel in the moment, like a 15 year old experiencing communion for first time.

No matter how deeply or lightly we take it, I think there is alchemy in our table-talk here today. By praying together, by singing, in silence, and sealing it all by sharing bread and cup, Love takes us into Love’s very being, making us One. That’s it.

It also gives us the strength to take this One-ness, into the world helping us know we are one with our neighbor. Lind says it beautifully “When we stand at God’s table, we demonstrate with our very bodies that we have the God-given capacity to overcome all that seeks to tear us and keep us apart.”

Breaking bread together has the power to break our hearts open, and then, as Bishop Stephanie Spellers says, “take the pieces—our lives, our goods, our love, and our privileges—and share it all like a broken loaf of communion bread.”

Friends, we are invited today, with all of who are, and all of who we aren't, to break bread together.

Come, let us gather at the table of mystery.

Whether its just for a bite of tasty bread and good juice,

a remembrance of all of who Jesus was and did;

a sacred moment of koinonia and eucharista for you,

it doesn't matter what you believe or don't,

for just by showing up

partaking together at this table,

it is alchemy.

it is mystery.

it is holy and sacramental. Amen.

Rev.Tracy Lind, Eucharist: The Mystery of Christ Proper 15B, <https://www.stjameschapelwellfleet.org/august-15-2021/>

Luci Shaw, “The Partaking”

Stephanie Spellers, **The Church Cracked Open: Disruption, Decline, and New Hope for Beloved Community** (New York: Church Publishing, 2021)