Genesis 1: 26-31

Mark 14: 22-25

*Table Rituals*

October 7, 2018

Rev. Susan Wisseman

Rituals are important. I’m sure many of us have certain rituals we practice for a variety of occasions – the first day of school, or summer, for holidays, or vacations, birthdays, or other life events. I’m also guessing many of us have rituals around meals, as well. Just as those table rituals bind our families together, they bind us together when we gather at Christ’s table. On this day, World Communion Sunday, it connects us with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world as we share this meal that Jesus has prepared for us.

Food, in general is always important – it provides nourishment, energy, and sustains us. It makes a number of us more pleasant to be around – that “hangry” thing is for real! But often times, the rituals around a meal are just as, if not *more* important than what we are eating. Well, a holiday meal may be the exception. Just *try* making a change to a traditional holiday menu! These food rituals are part of family identity, just as sharing Communion is a part of our Christian identity.

Food has significance in scripture.

According to the online version of *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible[[1]](#footnote-2)*, there are:

230 verses that include the word “food”.

472 verses that include the word “eat”.

88 verses that include the word “table”.

50 verses that reference “eating”.

This does not include references to specific foods – such manna, fish, lamb, bread, and wine.

In the story of creation, God ensures that there is a variety of food for the new world all of which is theirs to eat, well, except for one, the fruit from that little tree of the knowledge of good and evil…we know that ended.

In the Exodus, when the Israelites are complaining for lack of food, God provides enough for each day, with extra on the sixth day, so that they do not have to collect food on the Sabbath. Jesus fed a multitude with five loaves of bread and two fish[[2]](#footnote-3). Jesus broke rules – choosing to dine with people like Zacheus the tax collector, and ask for water from the Samaritan women. [[3]](#footnote-4) And, of course, with the disciples at the Last Supper; where Jesus tells them to continue to have this meal in remembrance of him.

God continues to provide…even to the water of life, and trees of life in the book of Revelation.

But statistics tell us that food insecurity is a significant problem.

According to the Food Aid Foundation, 795 million people do not have enough food – that’s 1in 9 people on earth. 12.9% of people in developing countries are undernourished.

China is the largest producer, importer, and consumer of food.

In terms of calorie count, India is the second most productive, but its value drops to fourth place as its production is less than half of China’s.

In 2017, an estimated 1 in 8 Americans were food insecure (meaning they lack consistent access to a sufficient amount food for an active, healthy lifestyle) equating to 40 million people, including 12 million children.[[4]](#footnote-5)

The United States is the most efficient producer of food.[[5]](#footnote-6) And yet, 15.7% of our households are food insecure. (For adults only in a household with children, it’s 8%, and 7.7% of children). The rates are higher for African American families.

USAID is working to help reduce hunger by aiding smaller farmers with help and support to be more successful by:

* Creating partnerships and teaching to help them have better outcomes.
* Providing education on nutrition, hygiene, and clean water to help mitigate illness – and keep children healthier, and farmers working.
* Empowering women.
* How to better manage their resources.
* How to prepare for natural disasters.
* Working to meet immediate needs.[[6]](#footnote-7)

Jesus eats his way through the gospels – making a statement in who it is he associates with –

 often breaking boundaries along the way. Social boundaries when he eats with those who are ritually unclean, and when he breaks Purity laws, eating foods that are unclean or forbidden. And let’s not forget his dining with the Pharisees. As a result, because he *chooses* to be with those who are deemed to be outcasts, they seek to be with *him*, because they are accepted *as they are*. It was a radical concept then…and in many ways it’s *still* a radical concept. Don’t we *all* want to be seen and accepted for who *we* are?

At the Last Supper – Jesus gathers the disciples for the Passover meal – the meal that commemorates the freedom of the Israelites from slavery. In the blessing of, then the breaking and sharing of the bread and the cup with each person, the meaning of the action is that each one who eats is a recipient of that blessing.[[7]](#footnote-8)

When we come to *this* table – all who trust in Christ are welcome. Regardless of gender, gender identity, level of income, level of education, age, who they love, the color of their skin, or their nationality. It is a table of welcome, not exclusion. A table where *all* who trust in the Lord are welcome, receive a blessing, and no one leaves with hunger pangs in their soul, or thirst in their hearts.

Truly, this day, people will come from east and west, north and south, to be at table with our Lord. We will speak different languages, and eat of different types of bread, perhaps have some differences in theology, but *together* we gather in gratitude for all that God has provided. Thanks be to God. Amen.

1. https://www.biblestudytools.com/search/?s=references&q=food [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Mark 6:30-41 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Revelation 22: 1-2 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. <https://hungerandhealth.feedingamerica.org/understand-food-insecurity/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/100615/4-countries-produce-most-food.asp> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. <https://medium.com/usaid-2030/5-ways-usaid-is-helping-to-end-world-hunger-ae3a5e7c9a4a> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Meyers, Ched. *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus*. Orbis: Maryknoll , NY. P. 362 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)