




FEAST *with* JESUS

ADVENT DEVOTIONAL 2025
CORAL RIDGE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



Between Thanksgiving and Christmas, our calendars and our tables fill with feasts. We gather to eat with the people we love, heaping plates with turkey and dressing, deviled eggs, and pecan pie. The hours pass joyfully as we fill our stomachs with good food and our hearts with conversation and fellowship.

It is fitting that our Advent reflections center on meals, for Scripture itself is a story told from table to table. The Bible begins with an invitation to eat in Eden and ends with the wedding supper of the Lamb. Along the way, God reveals his grace through shared bread and poured wine, through ordinary repasts and grand banquets, and ultimately through the hospitality of Christ.

Jesus himself declared, “The Son of Man came eating and drinking”—a tangible demonstration of the joy and abundance of his ministry. He turned water into wine, multiplied loaves and fish, welcomed sinners to his table, established a memorial meal on the night he was betrayed, and served a lakeside breakfast after his resurrection. Even now he stands at the door and knocks, promising, “If anyone opens, I will come in and eat with him and he with me.”

This Advent, we invite you to slow down and feast, not on bread alone, but on the Word of God. Each day we will read and reflect on a different meal in the Bible, discovering in them the gospel’s aroma and the joy of fellowship with our Savior.

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November 30

ABRAHAM SERVED GOD A MEAL

Imagine the scene, thousands of years ago: the desert sun was relentless when Abraham, resting at the entrance of his tent at Mamre, looked up to see three men standing before him. Curious, hurried to greet them. He bowed low, as was the tradition, and urged them to rest in the shade while he went to ask his wife, Sarah, to prepare a meal for the guests.

Together, Abraham and Sarah prepared a meal. Fresh-baked, tender steak from a freshly-slain calf, curds (similar to yogurt), and milk, it was a feast fit for a king. Granted, Abraham didn't know exactly what was happening, but his intuition told him this was no ordinary visit.

As the three travelers feasted, Abraham realized somehow that he was hosting the Lord himself. God! The God who had called him out of Ur, who had promised a son and a future, had come to dinner. This visitation from God was not a vision in the sky or a distant voice in a dream. This was the living God, seated under a tree, sharing food prepared by human hands.

For a moment, consider this scene from Abraham's perspective. It is nothing short of astonishing. The Creator of heaven and earth had stepped into the dust of creation and was sharing a meal with his creature.

Now consider the scene from our perspective, thousands of years later. In this humble gesture of fellowship, we see a glimpse of what God would one day do in full. The Lord who appeared at Abraham's table would later take on flesh and dwell among us (John 1:14). He would again sit at human tables full of tax collectors, sinners, and friends, breaking bread and revealing the grace of God. In other words, the meal at Mamre foreshadows the miracle of the Incarnation: the God who comes near not to judge from afar, but to share our life and redeem it.

But not only does this story point us to the incarnation, Abraham's table also foreshadows the Lord's Table. As we take the bread and wine of communion, we are reminded that God not only visits his people temporarily but ultimately, he indwells us permanently. In Christ, we have fellowship with the living God, an intimate, personal, and nourishing relationship—the ultimate of friendships. What Abraham experienced for a moment, believers now experience forever: God with us, the Lord Jesus Christ, sitting at the table of grace.

We may sometimes be tempted to think of God as distant, as far removed from our daily lives and uninterested in our ordinary routines—but Genesis 18 tells a different story. The Lord delights to draw near. He sits where we sit. He eats what we offer. And He transforms a simple meal into a meeting place of divine grace.

So, let's remember Abraham's example whenever we open our home, welcome a guest, or share a meal. Hospitality is a holy calling because it reflects the heart of a God who loves to commune with his people. And when we approach the Lord's Table on Sunday mornings, let's remember: the same God who once sat under the oaks of Mamre now invites you to feast on his mercy.

Lord Jesus, thank you for drawing near to us. You left heaven's glory to share our humanity, to sit at our tables, to invite us to yours, and reflect your heart. Teach us to see your presence in the ordinary and to offer our lives in joyful fellowship with you. May every meal remind us of your grace until we feast with you face to face. Amen.

December 1

A TABLE OF RECONCILIATION

Around this time last year, headlines and social media were full of a strange kind of holiday advice: *“How to Survive Thanksgiving with Your Family.”* Major newspapers ran articles about grown children refusing to visit parents who supported the “wrong” candidate, or siblings who wouldn’t sit at the same table because of political differences. Some even joked that Thanksgiving should come with a trigger warning.

This is what sin does. Ever since that first forbidden meal in Eden, human feasts have been shadowed by suspicion, jealousy, and pride. But God is in the business of reconciliation. From the first pages of Scripture, he has been turning tables into places of grace. That is exactly what we see in Genesis 43, when Joseph invites his guilty brothers to feast in his house.

When the brothers first traveled to Egypt for food, they could not have imagined that the powerful official before them was their own brother, the one they had sold into slavery decades before. On their second journey, they returned with Benjamin, the youngest and most beloved. Joseph recognized him immediately but hid his identity. Then he ordered that they all dine together.

The brothers were terrified. Their guilty consciences made them think this must be a trap. But Joseph’s steward greeted them with kindness: “Your God, the God of your father, has given you treasure in your sacks.” Of course, Joseph himself had arranged that gift. But the steward’s words were true in a deeper way. God was giving them grace.

At Joseph’s table, the family that once betrayed and hated began to heal. Years earlier, favoritism and envy had torn them apart. Joseph had been the favored son and his brothers could not even speak to him in peace. Now Joseph recreates the scene, giving Benjamin five times as much food as the others. Would they resent it again?

This time, they do not. “They drank and were merry with him.” It is the first time in the narrative that these brothers share true fellowship. Grace did what guilt and fear could not, it brought the beginning of reconciliation.

Joseph continued to present himself to his brothers outwardly as the stern Egyptian ruler. But inside he was deeply moved with love for them. He left to weep in private, washing his face before he came back in. His actions remind us of the words in the old hymn: “Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face.” Joseph’s hidden plan mirrors God’s own providence working through the twists of our lives, unseen but unfailing, leading his people toward repentance and reconciliation.

At another table long afterward, Jesus Christ, the greater Joseph, would gather his own unworthy brothers and serve them bread and wine. He knew that shortly after that meal Judas would betray him, Peter would deny him, and his disciples would abandon him. But he loved them anyway. Through his cross, he invites us to feast in peace with God and with one another. He is not ashamed to call us brothers.

This Advent, when we sit around our own tables, perhaps beside people with whom we disagree or have grown distant, may we remember the table of Joseph and the greater table of Christ. The One who reconciled heaven and earth can reconcile divided families too. And one day, in the kingdom of God, all who trust in him will sit together at a table where no resentment remains and every tear has been wiped away.

December 2

EAT IT IN HASTE

Exodus 12:1-13
Rev. Caleb Koornneef

I was homeschooled my entire childhood (preschool-12th grade), which meant I could eat breakfast every morning in my pajamas and begin schoolwork without the pressure of getting out the door at a certain time. Growing up in Colorado, I remember multiple snowy mornings where I'd come downstairs, look out our kitchen window across the open greenbelt, and see shivering kids waiting on the corner for the school bus. Any time I got lax or lazy with schoolwork, my parents would comment, "That could be you." It worked like a charm.

Regardless of our schooling experience, most of us busy Americans understand all too well what it is to scarf down breakfast and get out the door in a hurry. During the first Passover meal, the Israelites would learn to "eat in haste" as well – but with a deeper significance than just making it to their appointments on time.

The Passover in Exodus 12 marks one of the greatest redemptive moments in the Old Testament, when God delivered His covenant people from slavery in Egypt. As Israel multiplied in Egypt, they became enslaved and Pharaoh ordered the death of every Hebrew baby boy to control their numbers. It's horrible to think about such a mass tragedy, but even in the face of such evil, God was there working out His good purposes.

As a Hebrew baby boy, Moses' life was preserved and, rather ironically, he was raised in Pharaoh's own household. Just as he was delivered from death, he would eventually become the instrument of deliverance for the entire nation of Israel. When Pharaoh refused to let the Hebrew people go, the Lord sent ten plagues, culminating in the death of Egypt's firstborn.

This final plague and judgment that fell on Egypt did not fall on Israel because God mercifully instructed each Israelite household to mark their doorposts with the blood of a spotless lamb. That night, the Lord "passed over" every home covered by the blood, sparing them from death (Ex. 12:13). This is why it's called Passover. Ultimately, this meal points to Jesus as the true Passover Lamb (1 Cor. 5:7). Christ's blood secures our everlasting freedom, and His body is the Bread of Life, sustaining us for the journey ahead.

But what's the deal with having to 'eat in haste?' The one-word answer is: readiness. Eating with belt fastened, sandals on, and staff in hand (v 11) is a visible picture of what it looks like to be 'ready.' By this, we can learn that Believers should respond to God's Word in faith, evidenced by readiness.

To eat in haste does not mean we should intentionally try to make meals, family devotions, or church gatherings rushed or chaotic. Instead, it's a call to live as obedient followers of Jesus – with eagerness of will, alertness of mind, and expectancy for how the Lord provides.

In Luke 12:35-36, Jesus tells his followers to 'stay dressed for action... and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home.' Consider your life in light of the Gospel, your response to God's Word, or your posture in between Christ's two Advents. Are you ready? Let's pray that the Holy Spirit would enable us to be.

December 3

THEY SAW GOD, THEY ATE AND DRANK

Exodus 24:9-11 comes within the broader context of God's people confirming their covenant at Mount Sinai after the exodus from Egypt (Exod. 20:2; 24:1-8). While the entire community had agreed to obey the Lord, only the representative leadership were invited up the mountain to enjoy a meal in his presence.

It is remarkable that these men were privileged to see the God of Israel. But what did they see? They saw a pavement of sapphire underneath his feet. In other words, they were given a glimpse of the heavenly tabernacle and the beautiful feet of the One who would bring the good news of salvation many centuries later.

And so, as progressive revelation unfolds, Isaiah the prophet would also be given a vision of the Lord. But this time the vision would expand beyond the feet to include "the train of His robe filling the temple" (Isa. 6:1; see also, Ezek. 1:26 where Ezekiel sees one like a man sitting on the throne).

Later, the apostle John would tell us that Isaiah had seen a vision of the glory of the Lord Jesus (John 12:41). Indeed, to Isaiah was revealed the glory that the preincarnate Son enjoyed with his Father before the world began (John 17:5).

Beloved, Jesus is "the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father" (John 1:18). And he descended from the heavenly mount not only to reveal the Triune God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but also to bring us up that we may be restored to intimate fellowship with God. While Jesus was on earth, he ate and drank with sinners, such as us. Think about it. They saw they ate and they drank in the immediate presence of the One who is the Son of God incarnate. And each fellowship meal would bring Jesus closer to the final meal, when he would institute the Lord's supper in anticipation of his death as a new and better covenant through his sacrifice on the cross (cf. Matt. 26:17-30).

Theologian W. J. Dumbrell observes that Exodus 24:9-11 "sets the goal to which the Bible looks in fellowship relationships. This meal on the mountain becomes the focus of later [Old Testament] projection (cf. Isa. 25:6-8; Rev. 19:7-9), indicating final fellowship in the kingdom of God."

As we enjoy table fellowship this Advent season, let us be reminded of the very present but unseen guest. For we are feasting in the presence of the Triune God through the mediation of the Holy Spirit. We are enjoying table fellowship with loved ones anticipating, not only the celebration of our Lord's incarnation which we commemorate every year, but also anticipating his second coming when he consummates his kingdom. At that time, all who have trusted in Jesus for salvation will be invited to sit down in his presence, and we will see and we will eat and we will drink—*Soli Deo Gloria!*

December 4

EATING IN CHURCH

Leviticus 7:11-15
Rev. Andrew
Siegenthaler

When Saladin defeated the Crusaders at the Battle of Hattin, he captured two Christian knights—Guy of Lusignan and Raynald de Chatillon. Saladin admired Guy but he hated Raynald. When they were brought before him, Saladin gave Guy food and drink. Guy in turn passed some to Raynald. But when Saladin saw this gesture, he said loudly to everyone present that he had only given hospitality to Guy, not to Raynald. This was an ominous comment, because it meant Saladin planned to execute Raynald, which he swiftly did.

Giving a person food and drink, and especially eating with him, has enormous significance in the Near East. It means you are at peace, that wrongs have been forgotten. It means you are under your host's protection. When you read about eating and drinking in the Bible, it's important to keep these Near Eastern values in mind.

The book of Leviticus was a worship manual for the Israelites. It told them how the Lord expected them to do church. Old Testament worship was filled with sacrifices. God used sacrifices to teach Israel about his grace and to prepare them for the Messiah.

In the ordinary rhythm of Old Testament worship there were three great sacrifices that are detailed in Leviticus—the sin offering, the burnt offering, and the peace or fellowship offering. Each involved the same basic actions of slaughtering an animal and placing it on the altar. Yet each sacrifice had a different emphasis to teach a distinct truth about God's grace.

The sin offering dealt with guilt. It reminded Israel that sin separates all people from God and that forgiveness requires the shedding of blood. The burnt offering was a total sacrifice. Everything was consumed by fire, symbolizing full consecration of the worshiper's life to God.

But the fellowship/peace offering was different. It was not eaten entirely by God through fire, nor entirely by the priest. It was shared. Part was burned on the altar, part was given to the priests, and the rest was returned to the worshiper and his family. Alongside the meat came loaves of bread, and the entire meal was to be eaten in the presence of the Lord.

Picture this moment in the worship service. The smoke from the altar rises heavenward as God's portion. The priest eats his portion. And then, gathered near the sanctuary, you and your family share the remaining meat and bread. The Almighty God, the mediating priest, and forgiven sinners are all joined in one act of table fellowship. If God is eating with you, then you must truly be at peace with him. You must be welcomed, accepted, and loved.

In that sacrificial meal the gospel was foretold centuries before the birth of Christ. The peace offering did not create peace, it celebrated it. It did not purchase reconciliation, it enjoyed it. The blood had already been shed, the sin already atoned for. What remained was joy, communion, gratitude, and feasting in the presence of grace.

This Advent, every time you pray before a meal to ask for God's presence and blessing, remember that he is at peace with you through his Son Jesus. You are no longer an outsider or an enemy. You are God's friend—more than a friend, a beloved son at his Father's table.

December 5

BREAD FOR THE OUTSIDER

Have you ever wondered at the marvelous event that is a **feast**? Think about this fact: a feast never occurs with one person, nor can it ever occur with multiple copies of the same person (except for a yearly family reunion of the odd sextuplets). No, a feast can only occur under this context: different people, with different styles and savorings, coming around a table to enjoy a meal together.

Have you ever wondered about who belongs at a feast? No, of course not. It's obviously family, or friends, or a sweet combination of the two (especially in church, where family and friends are synonymous in Christ). And we all know who doesn't normally attend a feast: outsiders.

Strangers are usually never invited.

In the second chapter of the book of Ruth, we find this unique type of feast modeled for us. After committing to her new life in service of her mother-in-law's God, Ruth meets a man, Boaz, who will foretell of Christ's coming in three beautiful ways. Interestingly enough, Boaz lives in Bethlehem. First, he previews Christ in his **mercy**: he accepts Ruth (a foreigner) as one of his "own young women" (vs. 8). These women were already a part of his group, well protected (vs. 9), and she is immediately brought in. Second, Boaz foretells of Christ in his **humility**: see, he had heard Ruth's story already (vs. 11), and he immediately praises God for the blessing that Ruth has received from Him, "under whose wings" she has found shelter (vs. 12). Finally, Boaz gives us a preview of Christ's own **love**: he opens up his own table, offering bread and wine to an outsider. Imagine that on your first day at a new job, the CEO invited you to lunch, and sat you close enough to himself that he could pass you the bread directly (vs. 14)!

When Ruth returns and gives the great report to her mother-in-law, Naomi reminds her of two things: one, she has met a "redeemer" (vs. 20); and two, it's a good thing she has, because the world they live in is a broken place (vs. 22).

That's what Christmas is all about, isn't it? This world is absolutely broken. It's full of darkness, despair, and even danger. But a Redeemer has come. Jesus came in mercy, to welcome the outsider who is not invited, and also to welcome the ones cast out because of their own sin. Jesus came in humility, obeying His Father and giving Him the glory. And He came to pour out His love on the cross, so that we might all join in the feast with our heavenly Father. He did all of that for us, who were outsiders, even enemies of God - and He gives us Himself, the Eternal Bread of Life.

In our weekly rhythm as the body of Christ, we constantly enjoy each other's fellowship in word and table, in praise and preaching - and we continually preview with each other that heavenly feast that will one day be ours forever. This Christmas season, take a moment at whatever feast you find yourself at, and thank God for the preview of His love as we gather together to celebrate our Savior who came to open up the table for us.

December 6

MERCY AT THE KING'S TABLE

Herod the Great became King of Judea in 37 B.C., overthrowing the Hasmonean dynasty which had ruled for 100 years. As soon as Herod consolidated power, he began to kill every male with Hasmonean blood to eliminate possible rivals. He even executed three of his own sons who were Hasmonean on their mother's side! Although Herod is an extreme example of paranoia, it's commonplace in history for a new man on the throne to look with grave suspicion on the sons and grandsons of the old king he has deposed. This impulse is not limited to monarchs, it's the selfish drive in each of us to attack anyone who threatens our little kingdom.

King David could not be more different. As soon as his throne was secure, he asked, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" Remember, Saul was the king David replaced. Both King Saul and his son Jonathan had died in battle against the Philistines. But David wanted to know if there was anyone left so he could show them kindness.

This word translated "kindness" in English is important theologically. It's the Hebrew word *hesed* which has covenantal connotations. This was not kindness out of emotionalism or sentimentality, it was kindness motivated by David's promises, friendship, and love for Jonathan—the covenant they had made with one another.

The scene which unfolds is deeply moving. Jonathan's son Mephibosheth is identified and located. He's crippled and since the death of his father and grandfather, he's apparently been hiding from the new regime in a barren place called Lo-Debar. Lo-Debar means "no pasture." When he's summoned, he's certain it's for revenge. Trembling, he falls on his face, prepared for the worst.

Instead, he hears the Gospel! King David says his name, "Mephibosheth!" Then these wonderful words, "Do not fear, for I will show you kindness. I will restore to you all the lands of your father. And you shall eat at my table always."

King David foreshadows Christ. Mephibosheth, ashamed and lame, represents us. Like him, we are spiritually crippled by the sin we inherited and the sins we have committed. We live in our own Lo-Debar, dry places of fear, self-protection, and hiding, assuming God's summons can only mean exposure and punishment. But the King's kindness comes "for the sake of another." David's love is for Jonathan's sake. God's love for us is for Jesus' sake. Because of the covenant sealed in Christ's blood, the Father seeks us, speaks peace to us, restores what sin has stripped away, and seats us at his Table.

Application is simple and searching:

Come as you are. You are lame spiritually. Mephibosheth even refers to himself as a dead dog! Bring your need to God, not your resume.

Take your place at the Lord's Table with confidence and gratitude. In Christ you are not merely tolerated. You are welcomed, addressed by name, and given a permanent place in the family of God.

Show the King's kindness. David asked, "To whom can I show God's kindness?" Make a deliberate effort to do the same this Advent. There are people in your life who are lonely, overlooked, and fearful. Ask the Lord to give you a warm and generous Christ-like heart toward them.

December 7

BOTTOMLESS BUFFET

Before my voice changed in late middle school-early high school, I was recruited to sing a boy soprano solo in Felix Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah*. My church put on a dramatized version of the great 19th-century masterpiece, and I was given the part of "the Youth," also known as the widow's son.

While the oratorio doesn't deal with the exact scenes of the widow's jar, it does provide a majestic re-telling of God's power and providence, along with His grace and gratitude, which is so evident in the Old Testament narratives of Scripture.

Imagine being the widow or the widow's son. What would it be like to have only enough flour and oil for one last meal before you would die of starvation?

Most of us simply can't imagine it because we have no shortage of food in our lives. We have virtually unlimited access to any type of food, in whatever quantity we demand, whenever we desire it. This abundance we enjoy each day can breed an attitude of greed or gratitude.

On the one hand, the more we have, the more we want. Trying to satisfy our insatiable hearts with worldly things will always leave us less than full. In fact, based on biblical truth and the numerous examples of celebrities who seemingly "have it all" the opposite is true – the more we try to attain a life of plenty, the emptier we feel. Funny how that works. It was the early church father, Augustine, who prayed, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it rests in You."

Another potential response to the many material blessings we experience is gratitude. Gratitude is more than just thinking positively about your circumstances or trying to choose happiness – it's the outworking of faith. That's exactly what we see in Elijah's encounter with the widow on her last meal.

This Gentile woman believed the Word of the Lord through the prophet Elijah, even though it meant giving up what little she had. Her faith wasn't theoretical head knowledge, it was embodied in sacrifice and trust. And God met her there, not with excess, but with enough. Enough to sustain. Enough to remind her that He sees, He provides, and He is faithful.

There are many times we're invited into that same kind of trust. While our pantries and refrigerators may be full, our hearts can be empty. You may not see the outcome, but there is a gospel-clarity that comes with obedience. In those moments, the question isn't whether we have enough, but whether we believe the One who promises to be enough.

December 8

BREAD FOR THE WEARY

We often recite the Lord's Prayer as part of worship. In part, "... give us this day our *daily bread* ..." This is the promise of God's provision. Yet, all too often, we seek to provide for ourselves and we want more than daily bread, we want as much as possible. This is a reflection of the fallen human condition. Dependence, on the other hand, is a characteristic of the mature believer. Dependence on God and the work of Jesus is the foundation of the Gospel. Dependence on it is not in our nature.

Recall the provision of manna in the wilderness. In spite of God's explicit instruction to the contrary, initially the people sought to gather as much manna as they could carry only to find that overnight it spoiled. Likewise, Jesus, at the *Sermon on the Mount*, tells his disciples, "Do not store up earthly treasures ..." Instead let us reflect that Jesus is referred to both as the "bread of life" and "living water." He is our provision.

The account recorded in I Kings 17, highlights the significance of God's provision both for Elijah the prophet's sanctification and ours. God's grace is incredibly evident in these verse as He prepares Elijah for the great confrontation on Mount Carmel just a little bit later and as He disciplines Israel for their idolatry which ultimately leads to repentance (see I Kings 18-19).

The passage opens with a declaration from Elijah to King Ahab of an absence of rain for years, only to be restored at Elijah's word. The pronouncement comes as a result of Ahab's sin as "Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him" (I Kings 16:30) and demonstrates that an earthly king stands at the mercy of God. Rain was integral to an agrarian economy and society. Ahab led Israel in the worship of both Baal and Asherah – gods of fertility. In other words, Ahab was not interested in God's provision of daily bread, he would look to other means.

Elijah, too, was being prepared for God has instore for him to do. God not only prepares work in advance for us to do, He prepares us for that work. He gives daily bread.

A prophet delivering bad news is not a popular guy in the king's court. So God sends Elijah away to a hiding place. Elijah was not immune from the consequences of drought, nor did he escape the stress of persecution. He, like us, was not promised a path without difficulty. However, God's promises are sure, for Elijah and each of us. God provides for Elijah by sending ravens (unclean birds), morning and night, to bring him meat and bread. Eventually, when the brook supplying his water dries up, God sends Elijah to Zarephath in Sidon – a gentile nation. In that city, God uses a poor widow to provide daily bread. His provision is always ample.

God's ways are not always ours, but they are always sure. This reality is wonderfully on display at Christmas. God's ultimate provision for us – the coming of The Christ and the gift of His righteousness to us as our record – that is what we celebrate at Christmas. From the opening words of John's Gospel – "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us." He is daily bread and living water.

Thanks be to God.

December 9

EAT THE FAT, DRINK SWEET WINE

Nehemiah's place in redemptive history is one of the last narratives of the Old Testament. God's people have returned from Babylonian captivity and are rebuilding Jerusalem. It had been nearly ninety years since King Cyrus of Persia issued a decree permitting the Jews to return to Judah and rebuild the temple. Ezra the priest, Nehemiah the skilled administrator, and the Levites who assisted the priesthood assembled the covenant community to recall God's provision, renew their dependence on Him, and recommit to live under the authority of His Word.

The people gathered to give thanks to the Lord for his provision to rebuild the wall in 52 days. With thankful hearts they asked Ezra to read from the book of Moses—the scrolls of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Scripture tells us that for six hours, the scriptures were read aloud, translated from Hebrew to Aramaic, and carefully explained to “those whose ears were attentive” (Nehemiah 8:3). Perhaps they reflected on the promised seed of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15. They recalled Abraham's obedience and sacrificial love foreshadowed when offering his son Isaac. Their hearts could have been turned to hear God's mighty deliverance from Egypt celebrated at another feast with the paschal lamb. And surely, they remembered the call in Deuteronomy to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and might.

As they listened to God's steadfast love, they were cut deeply, exposed to all the ways they hadn't kept the law. Confronted by their sin, the people responded “Amen” with tears of conviction and worshipful hearts. Nehemiah told the people to dry their tears. “Go your way. Eat the fat and drink sweet wine and send your portions to anyone that has nothing ready, for this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10).

The tragedy of the curse and its impact on humanity were laid bare through the reading of scripture—but so was God's amazing grace. In Nehemiah's declaration, “the joy of the Lord is your strength,” the contrite community heard and assurance of pardon. There had been little joy among them as they rebuilt the wall. When Nehemiah returned to begin his reconstruction, the ruined city was surrounded by poverty. Witnessing God's provision brought joyful renewal.

Fatness of meat and sweet wine spoke to this abundant provision, a foretaste of the new creation. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, the fat of the animal was considered the choicest offering made as an aroma to the Lord. Culinary enthusiasts suggest that richness of meat, when paired with the sweetness of grape, enhances the overall flavor, making a meal more satisfying. But this was not simply a self-indulgent feast; rather this was a generous table extended to those in need, redirecting their hearts toward the One who truly satisfies. After hearing the scriptures, they responded with joyful obedience, returning home to prepare their families to celebrate the neglected Feast of Tabernacle. This was a recommitment to God's ways for his glory.

As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Christ, the Word made flesh, may our ears be attentive to the scripture, our hearts devoted to God's ways, and may the joy of the Lord be our strength. The feasting in Nehemiah 8 points us forward to a greater feast yet to come—when God's covenant people will weep no more, but rejoice together, feasting in joy and fullness under the Word of God.

December 10

JESUS SAVES THE PARTY

John 2:1-11
Dr. Sam Lamerson

My father (a minister) once told me, “Never turn down a funeral but turn down as many weddings as you want.” As I began to do weddings, I came to realize what he meant. For many there is nothing more narcissistic as a bride on her wedding day (not everyone, please calm down). I have had brides break into sobs because it was raining and say, “How can God let it rain on my wedding day?” Once a literal fight broke out over who was going to walk the bride down the aisle. Weddings are a powder keg just waiting for a spark.

Weddings at the time of Jesus were different in some ways and the same in others. The middle east was, in the first century, a very shame and honor-based culture. A wedding was a feast and time of fellowship for the entire town and often for others outside the town. To run out of wine was to risk not just a weeping bride but the bringing of shame upon the entire family.

It is in this context that we find Jesus’ mother asking him to help with the catering disaster. At first glance it is possible to think that Jesus is being unkind to his mother. Many scholars believe that Mary is not asking for a miracle, but for Jesus’ and his disciples to fulfill their obligations as guests. In other words, to put some money in the hat. I’m not sure about this interpretation and think that Mary probably knows that Jesus can solve the problem by himself.

Jesus, in his graciousness, does solve the problem and prevents the wedding family from facing the shame of running out of wine. The question is, what are we to learn from what Jesus did? Does this passage teach that we should always have enough wine at weddings or is there something bigger?

Jesus uses the term “my hour” to foreshadow the time of his death. Even here, at one of the happiest times of life, he is thinking of his death. You see Jesus came not primarily to save the party but to save his people.

From the very birth of the Messiah, he is called “Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins.” Everything that we read in the gospels points us to the grand mission of redemption from sin and shame. Our shame was much worse than just not having enough wine at a wedding. Our shame was because of our sin against God, a result of cosmic treason.

Yet Jesus steps in in his graciousness and offers us salvation. He promises us entrance into a people of the kingdom, entrance into the adopted family of God, and entrance into the greatest banquet in the world. None of us deserve such entrance, but God is good and loves us much more than we can imagine.

“The Lord who commands armies will hold a banquet for all the nations on this mountain. At this banquet there will be plenty of meat and aged wine—tender meat and choicest wine.”
Isaiah 25:6

December 11

FEASTING WITH SINNERS

A theologian once asked his class of seminary students: What would a town look like if it were completely controlled by the devil? They began to describe a town filled with decay, weeds and garbage, pimps and thieves, corruption, violence, and despair. Then the professor spoke: "I think a town completely controlled by the devil would be an orderly town, clean and neat, with lots of rules and law-abiding citizens. And every Sunday churches would be full of well-dressed people listening to sermons in which Christ is never preached."

What was his point? Maybe this story will make it clear. When Jesus passed Levi's tax booth, he saw a man who had sold his integrity for wealth and comfort, who was despised by his neighbors and likely ashamed of himself. He could not make himself clean. Yet when Jesus said, "Follow me," something in that call awakened hope. The voice of grace reached the one place Levi thought beyond healing.

In that moment, he got up, left everything, and followed Jesus. Then he threw a feast. His house filled with people like him—tax collectors, outcasts, and sinners—and at the head of the table sat Jesus, eating and rejoicing with them.

The Pharisees were scandalized. They stood outside the door, arms crossed, asking, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" To them, holiness meant separation, and the idea that a rabbi would share a meal with such people seemed unthinkable. But Jesus answered them with a sentence that captures the very heart of his mission:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

That brief saying divides humanity into two kinds of people, though not in the way we might expect. There are those who think they are righteous, and those who know they are not. There are those who believe they are spiritually healthy, and those who have come to realize they are sick. The tragedy is that the first group often looks clean and respectable. Their lives appear orderly and moral. But beneath the surface, they are just as needy as the sinners they despise—perhaps more so, because they are blind to their condition.

Self-righteousness is a subtle and deadly disease. It convinces us that because our lives are tidy, our beliefs sound, and our habits respectable, we must be fine with God. Jesus' words pierce that illusion. To claim that we have no great need of him is to shut ourselves off from the very grace he came to give. The Pharisees' problem was not that they were too sinful, but that they were too good in their own eyes. They did not want a doctor, and so they never received the cure.

Levi's story, on the other hand, shows the transforming power of grace. That feast in his house became a picture of salvation itself. Jesus did not dine with sinners to excuse their sin, but to redeem them from it. Around that table sat men and women who knew their need, who had found in Jesus both forgiveness and friendship. The scandal of grace is that God's mercy is not earned by moral achievement but received by humble trust.

December 12

DINNER PARTY CRASHER

We say it a lot at Coral Ridge because we need a lot of reminders about how good the Gospel of Jesus really is: “Cheer up! You’re a worse sinner than you ever dared imagine, and you’re more loved than you ever dared hope” (Jack Miller). Understanding the depths of our sin is what makes the beauty of God’s grace so amazing.

This is exactly what we see in the story of the woman who washed Jesus’ feet in Luke 7. While the dinner host, Simon the Pharisee, had omitted the usual courtesies made available to guests, this woman, a notorious sinner, showered Jesus with affection and honor. Simon saw it as offensive, thinking that great men don’t mingle with such horrible people. Plus, he was clearly grouchy about the fact that she crashed his dinner party. But Jesus isn’t upset, because He came to save sinners.

In fact, Jesus uses her extravagant act of love to teach Simon, and us, something profound about grace. He tells a parable about two debtors, one who owed a little and one who owed a lot. Both debts were forgiven, but Jesus asks, “Which of them will love him more?” Simon answers, “The one who had the bigger debt forgiven.” Jesus affirms his answer and then turns the spotlight on the woman: “Therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven – for she loved much.” (Luke 7:47).

Jesus is not grading people on religious performance or social status. He’s revealing that the depth of our love is directly tied to our awareness of how much we’ve been forgiven. The woman’s tears, her costly perfume, her humble posture—they’re not attempts to earn grace. They’re the overflow of a forgiven heart.

Simon, on the other hand, is polite but distant. He doesn’t see himself as needing much forgiveness, so he doesn’t offer much love. That’s the danger of self-righteousness—it blinds us to our need and shrinks our gratitude.

This story reminds us that the gospel is not for those who think they’re good enough, but for those who know they’re not. When we grasp that, two things happen. First, we stop pretending to be better than we are and start repenting. Second, we stop trying to perform our way into God’s favor and start thanking Him for inviting us into His glorious grace.

Jesus is still welcoming sinners to His table. It’s why He came at Christmas! Run to Him by repenting of your sin and taking hold His free gift of grace. When He comes again, ‘the Forgiven’ will feast with Him forever!

December 13

FIVE LOAVES, TWO FISH

Ask any woman the hardest meal of the week to put on the table, Sunday lunch.

Even in today's casual lifestyle, when no one expects a tender chuck roast and caramelized onions on the china platter, everyone is still starved and tired and talked-out when they walk in the door from church. In that cold, empty kitchen, at 1:00 on a Sunday afternoon, a miracle is needed.

The twelve apostles had just completed a daunting assignment. Jesus had called the men together, given them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases. He sent them out to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them not to pack supplies, but to trust God for provision. And they obeyed Him, traveling throughout the surrounding area.

Luke says that when they returned, Jesus led them away to a private place out in the wilderness near Bethsaida, a small town near the Sea of Galilee. There the apostles could tell Jesus all that happened on their mission trip and share fresh fish over an open fire, lentil stew, olives, dates and figs, yogurt and honey, in peace and quiet.

But the sensation-seeking crowd found Jesus' private oasis meant for respite. And the crowd was hungry too, physically and spiritually. Luke says that Jesus 'received them,' and continued working, teaching them about God's kingdom and healing their bodies. All day He did this, and the apostles must have worked alongside Him.

As the daylight faded, and night fell on this wilderness area, five thousand hungry, restless men plus their families, and twelve tired, hungry apostles were equally out of ideas.

When Jesus turned to the apostles and said, 'You give them something to eat,' they must have felt as depleted as that mother standing in her cold, empty kitchen at 1:00 on Sunday.

Jesus wasn't being unkind. He was mercifully getting them to see the truth that every single one of these people was hungry. Right now. The apostles did not have what was needed, nor any way to get it.

That was Jesus' point. The apostles would be tasked with taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. They needed to see how empty their own hands were. As He took the five loaves and two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the multitude.

Jesus' blessing, breaking, and giving would have reminded the men of Passover feasts since the Exodus and of Moses bringing manna in the wilderness. His actions would also have prepared the apostles for the Passover of the next year in which Jesus would say to them as He broke the bread in the Upper Room, 'This is My body, broken for you.'

How hard it must have been for the apostles to tell everyone to sit down and get ready to eat when there was nothing but desert scrub and night sky around them. But Jesus proceeded to prepare a table in the wilderness and to show those watching with eyes of faith that He gives Himself as the offering.

December 14

I AM THE BREAD OF LIFE

You go out to dinner at a great restaurant and eat entirely too much—appetizers, entree, dessert, wine, coffee. You pig out. You chow down. You eat like a horse. You cannot stuff another morsel down the gullet. But you wake up the next morning with your stomach growling.

Our daily hunger reminds us that no meal can finally satisfy. The best food fills only for a moment. In John 6, Jesus uses that common experience to reveal a truth about our souls.

The crowd had followed him because he fed them with bread in the wilderness. They wanted the miracle again. They wanted more loaves. But they had missed the sign. Jesus tells them, “Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life.” They respond by asking what works they must perform. Jesus answers, “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.” The only work that truly matters is faith. Faith is not one task among many. It is the means by which we receive Christ himself.

Then Jesus declares, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.” Believing in Christ is pictured here in three ways. To believe is to come to Christ. To believe is to look to Christ. To believe is to eat Christ.

To **come** to Christ is to turn toward him and away from self-reliance. It means approaching him as the One who can save you from your sin and give you life. To **look** to Christ is to direct the eyes of your heart to his cross, his resurrection, and his promises. It means fixing your hope on him. And to **eat** Christ is to take him in as your life’s nourishment. It means receiving him as your righteousness and your strength. Bishop J.C. Ryle once wrote that faith is like the mouth of the soul. Through faith we feed on Christ.

Some read this passage and think first of the Lord’s Supper. Christian readers naturally hear echoes of Communion here. Yet Jesus spoke these words to people who knew nothing of that meal. His meaning was plain. To eat his flesh and drink his blood is to receive him by faith. The Lord’s Supper later seals and confirms what Jesus teaches in John 6. The feast is faith itself. The Table proclaims that Christ alone gives life.

Faith is not easy. We sometimes speak as if faith were the simple part of the Christian life. But faith requires us to trust what we cannot see. It calls us to live as if Christ’s promises are certain even when our circumstances feel uncertain. Faith binds our lives to Christ’s life. It joins our future to his resurrection. It places our death in his hands and our hope in his return. Faith is the most demanding work of the soul.

Yet here is our comfort. Jesus says, “Whoever comes to me I will never cast out.” The one who looks to him will live. The one who feeds on him will never hunger again. Your salvation rests not on how strong your faith feels, but on Christ himself who never fails.

December 15

FRAGRANCE AT THE FEAST

John 12:1-8
Rev. Andrew
Siegenthaler

According to ChatGPT, the three most expensive perfumes in the world are *Le Monde Sur Mesure*, \$1.5 million, *Sumukh*, \$1.29 million, and *DKNY Golden Delicious*, \$1 million. The perfume Mary poured on Jesus was worth 300 denarii. One denarius was the standard day wage for a laborer. So, Mary's perfume cost considerably less than these top three. Nevertheless, it was an extravagant gesture that may have been her full life savings.

This story is about worship. Worship is when we assign ultimate worth to something and give our lives to it. Everyone worships something. That's because God has made human beings worshipping creatures. We have an insatiable drive to serve something greater than ourselves that promises to fill the deepest longings of the heart.

Judas worshipped money. It was his idol. That's why he reacted so negatively to Mary's action. Money is a very common idol. Lots of people worship it, although they do so for different reasons. Some people worship money because it buys approval. It makes them look good in the eyes of the people who matter. For others it's because money makes their lives comfortable and enables them to have the pleasures and experiences they crave. Other people worship money because it gives them power. Money can be used as a threat or a reward to get people to do what they want. Then there are those who love money because it gives them a sense of control over the contingencies of life.

Other people worship achievement or beauty or romance or politics or having followers on TikTok. John Calvin famously said that the human heart is an idol-making factory. But the end results of all idol worship are disappointment and destruction. Idols deliver for a while. Money works for a time. But it cannot make you a better person and it cannot add one hour to your life. Look at Judas. His love for money eventually sent him to hell. He chose 30 pieces of silver over Christ's friendship and forgiveness.

And now Mary. She poured out the most precious thing she owned upon the feet of Christ. This was worship in its purest form: a response of love to the One who is infinitely worthy. By kneeling at his feet, wiping them with her hair, and filling the house with fragrance, Mary showed that nothing in this world—neither reputation nor wealth—was as valuable to her as Jesus.

Mary's devotion was directed toward the Savior who would soon give his life for her. She, perhaps more than any disciple, sensed that Jesus' death was near and believed his words about it. The money Judas loved perished with him (as will every idol), but Christ by dying conquered death and secured eternal life for Mary and for everyone like her.

It's become commonplace to say that Christmas is consumeristic, that you shouldn't forget "the reason for the season," etc. But behind those clichés is a stark reality. We are all worshippers and we will worship something, either created things that ultimately fail, or the Creator who took on human nature so he could become our Savior. This Advent reaffirm your commitment to worship him.

Is He worthy? Is He worthy?
Of all blessing and honor and glory?
Is He worthy of this? He is!

December 16

INSTRUCTIONS FOR GUESTS AND HOSTS

Proper etiquette at a dinner party is important and takes practice. After all there are rules governing such events. One needs to know which fork to use for the first course, what to do with the napkin, and how to honor the host. Fortunately, there are books and courses for these things. This account in Luke, however, is not one of those sources. Rather than etiquette, Jesus tended to have more eternal things in mind when invited to such social events.

In this particular encounter, Jesus is invited to a sabbath dinner at the house of a prominent Pharisee. That He accepted the invitation is interesting since Jesus and the Pharisees weren't exactly on the same page but Jesus never seems to miss an opportunity. Sometimes one invites a prominent person to a dinner party to boast social standing, but we get a hint of the reason behind the invitation in the first verse "... he was being carefully watched."

Generally speaking, proper etiquette dictates polite conversation, and discourages causing a scene. It doesn't seem like Jesus cared much for either. First, He causes a scene by healing a man and then asks if such an action was lawful. Met with silence, He forged ahead by actually citing an example in the law to illustrate his point. Not yet prompting a response, Jesus pushed on and went from "preaching to meddling," as folks in my native Kentucky sometimes say, to make the point.

Instead of a simple dinner party, Jesus cited the wedding feast and how guests are seated. You may recall that such an event was the scene of His first public miracle. It ought not be lost on us that Jesus is called the bride of Christ and that in the final days there is a great celebration described in Revelation 19 – the wedding feast of the lamb. In our culture, weddings are a big deal, but in the ancient near east they meant even more.

Setting the seating arrangements at our two daughters' weddings was a task. I recall the stress of matching up tables and balancing the needs of both families as we sought to honor and recognize people important to us. After looking at how the guests were seated at this particular dinner, Jesus took issue with those vying for the seats of honor. Instead, He tells them to take the least seat and trust the host to make necessary changes. Not only that, He tells them to invite the least of society to the dinner as an expression of grace.

Jesus always challenges our pride and self-reliance. He presses against our comfort and norms. In their place, He offers himself. Jesus says that He came to save the sick and the lost. At His dinner party, the wedding feast of the Lamb, will be those sick, lame, and blind that He has made well.

Jesus came to make a place at the table for us. This is Christmas. Let us be reminded that Jesus exchanged the highest place of honor – seated at the right hand of God the Father, for a cross. He took the lowest place for us.

Thanks be to God.

December 17

JESUS INVITES HIMSELF TO SUPPER

I think that Zacchaeus was a dwarf. I have argued this in an academic paper written years ago and won't go into my reasons here. However, one of the interesting things is that many in the ancient world thought that one's physical deformity showed personality. In this case, shortness meant stinginess or an ungenerous spirit.

It is against this sort of backdrop that we see the story of the "chief tax collector" (this is the one place in the New Testament where this word is used). Zacchaeus seems to have been not just a tax collector, but one of those whom Rome had put in charge of other tax collectors.

Remember that the tax collectors were hated by the people of Israel. They were traitors and thieves. How much more would Zacchaeus have been hated? But this hated little man hears about someone coming along whom he really wants to see.

Note that Zacchaeus is so short that he cannot just look over the crowd. He dares not push his way through the crowd for fear of a knife in the back, as had happened for more than one tax collector.

So, Zacchaeus does two things that are shocking: he runs and he climbs a tree. At this time in Israel men did not run (compare the running father to the prodigal earlier in Luke). Add that to the fact that he was wearing a robe and you can begin to imagine how Zacchaeus looked.

In the first century, dwarf slaves sold for more than able bodied men. The reason was primarily for entertainment. Kings and leaders would cause the dwarves to be drunk and then have them dance for the dinner party to the shame of the dancer and the delight of the crowd.

Zacchaeus runs although it was undignified at best and shameful at worst. Then he climbs a tree. As if to underline the fact that he was too short to see, he makes a spectacle of himself even after running. Then, this man he wanted to see so badly stopped and called out the little man. Amid all of this embarrassment, Jesus draws attention to the man in the tree and invites himself to dinner.

From that day forward, Zacchaeus life is changed. He is not the "small stingy tax collector" that had been known before he met Jesus. He is a member of the Kingdom of Heaven; salvation had come to his house.

Why Zacchaeus? There were lots of people there whom Jesus could have eaten with, why choose a tax collector? While we don't know the why behind the decisions that God makes, there is at least one reason. Zacchaeus gave up on himself. He stopped trying to fool others into thinking that everything was right in his life. He stopped trying to be the well-mannered rich man. He realized that the only way he could see Jesus is to let go of his own attempts to control his own life. When the little man ran and climbed up a tree, he had decided that he needed something else in his life, even if it cost him his dignity.

Zacchaeus got over the crowd (literally) and took Jesus home. Zacchaeus says, "Because you love me, I want to change." That's the gospel.

December 18

THE LAST SUPPER

On Easter Sunday when I was twelve years old I met with the Session before the worship service. The elders heard my profession of faith in Christ and received me into church membership. During the service I stood before the congregation and affirmed the membership vows. And then, for the first time, I took Communion. It was a wonderful day I've never forgotten and I've loved the Lord's Supper ever since.

On the night before his crucifixion Jesus gathered with his disciples in an upper room to celebrate the Passover. At that meal, Jesus did something astonishing. Taking the bread, he said, "This is my body." Lifting the cup, he declared, "This is my blood of the covenant, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." In doing so he claimed that the central meal of Israel's redemption was about him! He was the true Lamb of God slain to deliver sinners from death.

At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper—a meal for all future believers. Though Jesus was about to depart, he assured his disciples that their fellowship with him was not ending. He would send the Holy Spirit who would abide with them forever. And he gave them this sacred meal so that, through eating and drinking, they might continue to enjoy communion with him.

At the Lord's Table we remember Christ's death. His sacrifice was not a metaphor or an idea. It happened in real history. Jesus died on a Roman cross. By taking the Communion elements in our hands, seeing them, holding them, and then eating and drinking them, we receive a tangible reminder of the reality, the historicity of Christ's death for our redemption.

We not only remember, we also receive. Just as a feast does no good to a starving person unless eaten, so it is not enough merely to know that Christ died. He must be embraced by faith—taken into our hearts. In Communion, Christ nourishes us spiritually. His Spirit presses his grace, his forgiveness, his love deeper into our souls.

The Lord's Supper is also communion. Scripture calls it a participation in the body and blood of Christ. Christ is spiritually present with his people as we partake. He strengthens weak faith, comforts troubled consciences, convicts cold hearts, binds his people together, and assures us that we belong to him.

And finally, the Supper is a foretaste of a greater meal. Jesus said, "I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Every Communion is a rehearsal dinner for the wedding feast of the Lamb. We look back to the cross and forward to the day when faith becomes sight, when Jesus himself will seat us at his table, wipe every tear, and say, "Welcome home. Dinner is served."

This Advent season, as we gather at tables filled with good food and beloved company, let us remember the table Christ has given us. Here we feast upon grace. Here we encounter the living Christ by His Spirit. Here our hunger is met, not just for bread, but for mercy, love, forgiveness, and hope.

December 19

TOOK BREAD, GAVE THANKS, BROKE IT

Rehearsal dinners, family reunions, Christmas Day overflowing tables. Feasts like these delight all our senses and stir our hearts deeply.

Occasionally, though, an ordinary cheese-and-crackers picnic becomes a family memory of profound joy. Andrew and I once shared a lunch of smoked whitefish on saltines and a thermos of coffee on the chilly shores of Lake Superior, and it lives in our memory as a banquet.

The two disciples walking from Jerusalem to Emmaus on that first resurrection Sunday were probably not anticipating anything more than basic fare that evening, filling the belly after a seven-mile walk and the sad and shocking events of the last few days.

As they walked, these disciples were rehashing with each other all their dashed hopes, and Luke simply says that Jesus joined them on the road. He came up and walked along with them. They were kept from recognizing Him until later, at the perfect moment through the perfect means. But, the very person they were talking about, the one they thought they had lost, was standing right beside them, and they couldn't see Him yet.

They couldn't see Him, but He was already changing their hearts, preparing the feast. As they poured out their confusion and pain to this stranger, He opened up God's Word and chided them back into their right minds. 'Look at the Word,' He seemed to say. Everything these disciples were mourning about the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, the one they had hoped would redeem Israel, had been foretold in the whole of Scripture - from Moses through the Prophets. Not just that these events would happen, but that they had to happen, that the Christ would suffer and then enter His glory. The disciple's hearts began to burn within them at the Truth they were being shown.

And then, dinner.

Having convinced the traveler to stay with them for the night, the disciples sat down to what they assumed would be unremarkable daily bread. Jesus, the guest at the table, knowing the time to be right, claimed the position of host.

He took, blessed, broke, and gave the dinner loaf, and in that act He opened their eyes to who He was. His words at this table echoed those He spoke a mere few nights ago in the Upper Room. There, He had taken the bread and said, '*This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*' Bread, simple bread, in His hands, became a feast; it turned their mourning to dancing, explaining the cross, the empty tomb, and the identity of the Person at their table.

I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. This bread is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world. John 6: 51.

December 20

THE LAST PICNIC

John 21:1-14
Tim Sansbury

Three things stand out in this text that are worthy of our attention and reflection, (besides, of course, the realization that fishing is the sport of the apostles...).

First, notice that Jesus brings them together over a meal. It's implied here, but overt in Luke 24, that Jesus ate with his disciples after the resurrection. Why is this important? Very often we make the kingdom of God and therefore the Christian walk here too spiritual. Jesus, resurrected Jesus, was concerned with food and actually ate. The perfected Christ remained physical and cared for the physical needs of his believers. When we make Christianity too spiritual, when heaven is "in the clouds," we can get disconnected from the physical world and the needs that exist here for ourselves and others. Don't miss the opportunity here on Earth for physical feeding of the hungry and needy, as well as the ways we can care for each other and ourselves physically. God made us physical beings, and in heaven we will have new, physical bodies. Be careful of the urge to so spiritualize the Kingdom of God that you think that head/soul activities like worship and learning are the most important parts of the Christian walk.

The second thing to notice is that Jesus already has fish on the fire. I don't want to make it sound like a miracle here... for all we know he bought a couple on the way to the beach when he picked up the charcoal. But Jesus already has what is needed for their meal, and yet he asks them to bring fish from their bounty as well. This parallels a reality of our Christian walk: God has immeasurable, infinite wealth, and needs nothing from us. And yet, he asks us to bring fish to the fire, and makes use of what we bring. And even that, we only do by his power. The apostles had labored fruitlessly until Christ told them where to cast their nets. Even though God could do all things himself, he nevertheless chooses to use us, empowers us to serve fruitfully, and makes our broken efforts to accomplish his purposes.

Finally, notice that the believers did not know it was Jesus. This might be understandable at the beginning. We learn that Jesus was 100 yards away. Presumably he was a distant figure. He likely had to yell to be heard. Yet even when they get to shore, it sounds like they could not simply tell by sight that it was Jesus. But what is worth reflecting on for ourselves and our church is how they knew him. John figures it out first, not by sight or sound, but by fruit. Jesus tells them where to fish, and when his words work, John declares, "It is the Lord." When they all sit by the fire and are served by Jesus, no one asks who he is. "They knew it was the Lord." How? By his actions. And this should be true today as well. One way Jesus should be known today is through us and through his church by how we live. Our fruit, our actions, should reveal Christ to the world.

As you reflect today, ask Jesus to remind you of the call to care for this world he has made, that he has called you to actions that really matter, and that when you act out your faith, Jesus can become visible to those who can't see him.

December 21

EATING WITH CHURCH FRIENDS

Consider this incredible truth: the God of the Universe, who within the Triune Godhead displays perfect unity and community, created us human beings in His image, to reflect that same unity and community.

And notice what He gives us as a primary tool of exercising that reflection of His image: food around a table! Many things have changed in the 2,000 years since Jesus came and founded His Church on earth...but not eating! Have you ever been a part of a big church potluck? (That's kind of old-school, and somewhat missed by the generations of today) Or maybe part of a big after-church gathering at a friend's house, or a big CHRISTMAS party with your loved ones! Imagine the many families, with adults and kids, all mixed together. Some lounge on couches, discussing news or parenting tricks—others run around as much as they possibly can, making sure that the clothes parents once picked out so proudly now become filthy testimonies of fun and play - everyone is engaged in their leisure of choice, until the hosts call out “food is ready!” Then everything comes to a crashing halt, and all gather around the table to partake of a delicious meal together.

This is exactly what the early church was doing, seemingly on a daily basis. They were gathering together to break bread, which became a part of their regular rhythm of staying dedicated to the teaching of the Apostles. They dug into the Word together, and they dug into food together.

The results of this communal rhythm were extensive: there was unity throughout the brothers and sisters; there was an excess of resources that could be shared with any who needed; they were filled with gladness and generosity (not just the happiness due to circumstances, but also the proper response of thankfulness for those circumstances); they worshipped God, and were seen well by others; and most importantly, such joy and feasting and community was contagious, as the Lord “added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”

In this wonderful season of Christmas celebration let us not forget that this little child who was born of a Virgin in a barn came in poverty, to give hope to the poor. This little tiny human who was God Himself entering into humanity once and forever came in humility, to restore the broken. This Jesus Christ who was God with us came as a fussy and hungry little child, to give the Bread of Life to all those who believe in Him.

Maybe you have many family gatherings ahead of you, or maybe you have the sweet memories of many family gatherings long past. But this truth remains, and we can celebrate it at every gathering we have left: Jesus Christ came into the world to guarantee that all His children will enter into a Feast of perfect joy and love, and into eternal community with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. We look forward to that great Feast, even as we thank God for every little feast we get the opportunity to enjoy here on earth.

December 22

EATING WITH UNCIRCUMCISED MEN

It's hard for us today to remember how hard this would have been for the Jewish believers. Purity laws and purification rituals were a central theme to Jewish life and the Old Testament law. Since God was pure and holy (which means set apart), the Hebrews were to work to be pure and set apart. Any impurities, even normal physical impurities, could be cause for ritual cleansing before the people could be part of community and worship. God could not be with what was impure, so the Jews could not be impure, and so mixing with the unwashed, idolatrous, and deeply impure gentiles was against every impulse of those following Moses' laws. In fact, the biggest sins in the Old Testament occurred when God's people defiled themselves by mixing with the gentiles in worship, marriage, and culture. The messiah was supposed to defeat the gentile kingdoms and set Israel free from their oppression and sin. Jesus had not done that the way that the disciples expected, but surely he would not mix the gentiles into Israel?

Those early believers would have understood that the problem went even deeper than ritual cleanliness. The imagery of purity reflected the nature of God. In his perfect righteousness and justice, he would not sit in the presence of sin. Hebrews knew well that to be in the presence of God was to die, to be consumed by his glory, power, and perfection. They needed to be clean!

And yet, if they had thought for a moment, perhaps they could have figured out that the gentiles should be brought in. By this time, they had realized that Jesus was no mere prophet or priest. He was the living God incarnate and resurrected. And he had eaten with them! Immanuel, God with Us, had walked among them, slept in their homes, eaten their food, touched lepers, talked to Samaritans and tax collectors, and even gone down into death itself and returned. That they, the pure chosen people, should be willing to eat with gentiles should have been no surprise since God himself was willing to eat with them.

And the thing is, this was (and is) because that is how pure God makes us in Christ. Even we, today, unwashed sinners, are given Christ's perfect righteousness, and so can sit and eat with the perfect God himself as people counted worthy because Christ was so worthy for us. Today, as you reflect on Christ's work, reflect on this perfect purity that you have been given despite all your sin and rebellion. God came for you and for me and for those early Jews and gentiles to do for all of us what we could never do for ourselves. And he invites you to a never-ending heavenly feast, where all of us who have been redeemed by Christ will eat together no matter the lives God called us out of.

December 23

EATING IN THE STORM

Some people “stress-eat,” but I tend not to be able to eat at all when I’m stressed. With tasks, to-dos, or something big and important looming in front of me, food can become secondary while I fixate on becoming “unstressed.” I don’t like to wait when it feels like there’s a problem to fix.

Advent is a season of waiting. It’s a time of longing, trusting, and preparing for the arrival of Christ, both in remembrance of His first coming and in anticipation of His return. But not all waiting feels as joyful or exciting as a kid would on the night before Christmas. Sometimes it can feel stressful. Acts 27 drops us into that kind of waiting.

Paul and his shipmates are caught in a violent storm, tossed for days without sun or stars, fearing they’ll be dashed against the rocks. It’s the kind of waiting that feels like despair. And yet, in the middle of the chaos, Paul stands up and invites everyone to eat.

It’s a strange moment. They haven’t eaten in two weeks. Death feels imminent. With calm authority, Paul speaks to those on the ship, “Take some food. For it will give you strength, for not a hair is to perish from the head of any of you.” (v.34). He reminds them of God’s sovereignty, gives thanks, breaks bread, and begins to eat. And suddenly, the whole ship is encouraged. They eat too. The storm hasn’t stopped, but hope has entered the boat.

This is a picture of Advent. Christ came into a storm-tossed world—not to remove all suffering immediately, but to bring real hope in the midst of it. He came to feast with sinners, to offer Himself as the Bread of Life, and to prepare a table in the presence of our enemies. Paul’s meal on the ship echoes the Lord’s Supper, which is a foretaste of the feast to come and a tangible means of experiencing the presence of Christ.

Jesus’ person and work on the cross are what still the deeper storm of sin and judgment. At His first coming, Christ bore the wrath we deserved, removing the power and penalty of sin. At His second coming, He will return in glory to gather His people to the eternal banquet, eradicating the presence of sin and evil.

So take heart this Advent. Christ has come, and Christ will come again. In the waiting, even in moments that seem stressful, feast and find encouragement through Jesus – not necessarily because the storm is over, but because He is with you.

December 24

WEDDING SUPPER OF THE LAMB

In the book of Revelation, we are invited to picture a breathtaking scene, a celebration beyond anything earth has ever known. The heavens resound with joy: “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns!” With this scene, the Bible’s dramatic narrative has reached its final chapter. The struggle with sin, Satan, and death is over. Every tear is wiped away. The Bride of Christ, the Church, stands radiant and pure, clothed in fine linen bright and clean. And at the center of it all stands the Lamb who was slain, now reigning in glory.

John calls this scene the *wedding supper of the Lamb*. It’s the final feast toward which every meal in scripture has pointed. From the first bite of fruit in the Garden of Eden to the bread broken in the Upper Room, the Bible tells a story of hunger and satisfaction—the story of a God who prepares a table for his hungry people and invites them to fellowship with him forever.

This heavenly banquet stands in striking contrast to the feasts of this world. Earthly banquets are often full of noise and glitter, but their joy fades when the music stops. The world throws parties that promise fulfillment but leave us hungrier than before—hungrier for love, for justice, for peace, for God himself. The feast of the Lamb, by contrast, satisfies every longing of the human heart. It is a celebration not of what we’ve achieved but of what Christ has done on our behalf. We come not as high-performing guests who have earned a seat, but as sinners who’ve been made spotless by his grace.

In that sense, the wedding supper of the Lamb is both future and present. On that day that when Christ returns and makes all things new, we will experience it in all its fullness. But even now, we taste it in part each time we gather for worship, each time we take communion, each time our hearts are lifted in praise. The bread and cup, therefore, are not just memorials. They are appetizers of eternity, signs that one day faith will give way to sight, and our Redeemer will host us at his table forever.

Until that day, we live as people preparing for a wedding. The Church is the Bride, called to keep her garments pure and her heart devoted to her Groom. The invitation has already been sent: “Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb” (Rev. 19:9). What remains is for us to respond in a manner worthy of our Lord: to hunger most for Christ, to live as those eagerly awaiting his return, and to rejoice that our place at the table is secured by the blood of the Lamb.

So when you sit down for a meal today, pause for a moment and remember what’s coming. Every table you gather around is a faint echo of that ultimate feast, where joy will never end and love never grows cold. The menu is grace. The host is Jesus. And the celebration will last forever.

Lord Jesus, thank you for inviting us to your table. Forgive us for feasting on the world’s empty promises when you alone can satisfy our souls. Fill our hearts with hope for the day when we will dine with you in glory, clothed in your righteousness and surrounded by your love. Until then, keep us hungry for you. Amen.

YOU CAN HAVE THE HOPE OF HEAVEN THIS CHRISTMAS!

Heaven is a free gift.

The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

We are sinners and cannot save ourselves.

For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Romans 3:23

On the one hand, God is love.

1 John 4:8b

But on the other hand, He does not leave the guilty unpunished.

Exodus 34:7b

God solved this problem by sending His son, Jesus.

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

John 3:16

You receive the gift of heaven by faith.

Believe in the Lord Jesus and you will be saved.

Acts 16:31

If this is what you want, you can pray right now, "Dear Jesus, forgive my sin, and come into my life as my Lord Savior. Thank you for giving me the hope of heaven both now and forever. Amen."

This is the promise of Jesus, He who believes has everlasting life.

John 6:47b

WELCOME TO THE FAMILY OF GOD!

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

