

“Comfort Food”  
Luke 24:36-48

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I count myself as a member of the population of people that considers themselves a foodie. Pair that with my love of travel and I have had some pretty amazing cuisine around the world. I've had crepes in Paris, pretzels in Munich, bison burgers in Wyoming, and grits in Georgia. The most amazing food I've ever tried is not a dish that is internationally renowned. It was not one that you will find five stars next to in your travel guide, and it was not even one that I intentionally sought out. The best food I have ever eaten was the rice pudding served at the Golden Temple in Amritsar, India. Before that, I didn't even like rice pudding, but now, 15 years later, I can still taste the creamy sweetness. It was delicious, but I think a large part of what made it taste so good was eating in the Golden Temple and the way that it was served to me.

The Golden Temple is a four hundred year old Sikh Temple in Northern India and it is the biggest place of pilgrimage for Sikhs around the world. It is officially called the Harmandir Sahib but is better known as the Golden Temple because the gurdwara, the building where worship occurs each day, is made of white marble that is covered with gold leaf. The gurdwara is surrounded by a large pool of water, which reflects the gold walls in all directions. It is gorgeous, and the architecture alone is a reason to make a pilgrimage there. There are other buildings at the temple, and the most popular one is the langar, or the kitchen. This kitchen is free and open to anyone who comes to the Golden Temple. They serve the same menu almost every day: daal lentils, naan flat bread, a vegetable dish, and that delicious rice pudding.

When you first arrive at the kitchen, you stand line to pick up a tray, a cup, and a fork. Then, still in a long line, you are seated on the floor. Servers walk through the lines offering generous portions from that day's menu to each of the guests. If you go, I recommend you take

your time eating, pause to start a conversation with the person next to you or across. When you are done you stand up, deposit your dishes in a large tub, and walk out. There is no cost to the customer and everyone who serves you offers kind smiles and gentle words. It is a very orderly, regimented process and it has to be, because the Golden Temple serves on average about 10,000 meals each day. When there is a special event at the Temple, they can serve up to 100,000 meals out of that one kitchen. It makes volunteering to cook dinner for 50 on Wednesday night's at Edgewood seem simple!

This unique dining experience is an important part of the Sikh religion. At this meal, also served on smaller scales in Sikh temples around the world, everyone is offered the same food and the same service, seated side by side. It started as a way to unite all people regardless of their caste, their job, their gender, or their age and now brings together people of different ethnicities, nationalities, and even religions. Sikhs strive to live out the idea that we are all created equal in the eyes of God, and demonstrate this through a simple meal, available to anyone who is hungry. At the Golden Temple, they don't let the numbers of visitors overwhelm them and they don't worry about the logistics so much that it prevents them from preparing the meal—they just focus on living out their beliefs each day in a meaningful demonstration of their hospitality and love for God.

This idea of bringing people together over a meal in order to experience God's love is a common theme across many of the world's religions. Our Jewish neighbors recently celebrated Passover by gathering with family and friends for a seder feast; each year our Muslim friends break their Ramadan fast with a communal meal. The fact that sitting down with another person and eating together is important to so many different people reinforces that food is about more than sustenance for our body – food has the power to transform our spirits. When I ate at the Golden Temple I did more than enjoy the rice pudding—I learned something about the values

and beauty of the Sikh religion and the people who follow it. That experience of rice pudding served with a side of hospitality made me want to go out and treat others the same caring way that I had been treated.

Our own scriptures demonstrate the power of sharing a meal. When Joseph, of technicolor dream coat fame, reunited with his brothers years after they sold him into slavery, he invited them to share a meal with him. The story goes that they ate, drank, and were merry together, and that while they were doing this, Joseph excused himself from the table. He went off into a private room for a few moments alone and overcome with emotion, he wept. When Joseph returned to the table, their meal continued, and it became the first step towards reconciliation and forgiveness towards the brothers he had long despised.

When the Israelites were in the wilderness and complained about their hunger to Moses and Aaron, God rained manna, similar to bread and honey, from heaven so that through the food they ate they would know that God had not forgotten them.

When Ruth, of Ruth and Naomi fame, gleaned in the fields, Naomi's cousin Boaz was introduced to her, and wanted to show her how much he appreciated the way Ruth had looked after Naomi. Boaz invited Ruth to eat with him, offering bread dipped into vinegar and parched grain and as they ate, Ruth began to see Boaz's gratitude and care for her.

Throughout the Gospels Jesus is constantly sitting down at meals or inviting people to eat with him. It is over food that barriers are broken down and outsiders are first welcomed in. The importance of food is emphasized in today's reading from Luke—it is the last question that Jesus asks the disciples.

Jesus appears to the disciples and they are scared, confused, and uncertain. He soothes them, demonstrating that it is really him, Jesus, in the flesh, and when he is done with his demonstration he asks them, “Have you anything here to eat?” Of all the questions that Jesus

could have left for his all important last question, he asks the same question that every teenager, head already in the refrigerator, has been asking since the beginning of time.

I can imagine the disciples being exasperated by this turn of conversation. They had real questions and confusion about what and who they were seeing, and Jesus is almost casual in his request. “Got anything to eat?” I can imagine his eyes roaming the room, looking for a basket of bread or a bowl of fruit. He is given fish, and as the disciples watch him eat it, they finally believe the unbelievable and understand that Jesus has been resurrected.

Jesus pausing to eat acts as a bridge in the disciple's story. It is only through Jesus eating that the disciples are able to transition from grappling with resurrection to hearing the instructions from Jesus, leading them into the next phase of their ministry as they go out and make more disciples. Jesus is the one eating, but in a way, the disciples are fed as they watch him eat, suddenly able to make sense of his presence and gaining the confidence that they need to carry out their ministry.

That meal was Jesus' last request of the disciples. It is a reminder to us all that when we feed someone else, we are also feeding ourselves. It is a lesson that when we take what we have and invite others to eat it, we are doing God's work. Jesus' final question and act of eating with the disciples is our example that table fellowship, breaking bread, sharing a meal, whatever you want to call it—is not only an important part of our lives, but it is living out God's work in the world—feeding others the way we ourselves have been fed.

We symbolically act this out each month when we share in the bread and cup of communion together, but it does not end there. When we have potlucks or bring refreshments for meetings, we are living our hospitality through shared food. When we spend a day in service and then return to church to eat dinner with our workmates, or when we volunteer at a soup kitchen and then sit down and share the same meal with those you just served, you are a living

representation of God's love. When we share lunch together – whether you're a part of the ROMEOs or a book club, you have the opportunity to get to know other people in a new way over the sandwiches and iced tea.

In my own life, I wonder who I am due to share a meal with. What relationship might be transformed or who might I get to know in a deeper way as we break bread, pass dishes, and talk? I wonder who I might show gratitude to by inviting them to go to lunch or by preparing them a home cooked meal, or even a home cooked pie. Food helps connect us to one another – it can express feelings, hope, and love when words fail us.

Food fills more than our bellies—it makes us feel welcome, it comforts us, it heals old wounds, and it builds relationships. Jesus' asking the disciples for something to eat was about a lot more than just satisfying his appetite. It is a question he asks each one of us, “Do you have anything here to eat? Are you ready to feed people? What food do you have to offer?” There is an invitation for all of us to be ready to feed someone who might be in need of a nourishing meal.

Whenever people come together over food and conversation, good things start to happen. Lives begin to change. I believe in the transformative power of good food, and I believe that if we only ask each other one question, we should be asking each other “Have you anything here to eat?”