

## **“Moveable Feast”**

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Text: Acts 2:42-47

A friend asked me recently if I’m working on my COVID 15. They were referring to the 15 pounds that I will ultimately gain due to all the stress eating and junk food. I’ve been pretty good about staying away from the junk food, but I do think that some weight gain might be inevitable.

My daughter has become an amazing cook during these last few weeks. I mean, she was always good, but now with regular practice, a little more time, and less options for eating out, she really concentrates on the best combination of ingredients and spices. She explores more recipes. And, I know that I’ve been enjoying food more.

I have a complicated relationship with food. I grew up on the beaches of Florida, where people don’t wear a lot of clothes and there is a difficult standard for bodies. At least it was hard for a teenager like me, who enjoyed sedentary hobbies like painting and reading. As I grew up, I felt intensely guilty with each bite of food I consumed. I developed a mild eating disorder and really couldn’t enjoy food.

As I got older, eating became more utilitarian. When I began to understand how my body reacted to food, I regulated it with kale or beans, or just the right nutrients to get it to do what I needed it to do.

But right now, as we shelter in place, I’m not gulping down a handful of nuts, as I stand at the kitchen island just so I can get some protein into my system before I run out of the house for another meeting. I sit and taste and appreciate it all a bit more.

I chew my food instead of letting it slide down my throat whole. In these last weeks, food is no longer a means to an end for me as it has been during much of my work life. It has become much more enjoyable. I’m learning to delight in it. I am tasting each bite, because I don’t have to run off to somewhere. I’m eating it, as I talk with my daughter.

You know, scientist tell us that we have five basic tastes—salty, sweet, bitter, sour, and umami. Umami is the taste of mushrooms and soy sauce. It’s the taste that makes us crave MSG. And all of these tastes become orchestrated in our brains, along with environmental factors, like smell and how much we want to please the person who made the food. It all works together so that we can enjoy what we eat.

And people who study this think that we have even more basic tastes. For instance, they think that we might taste fat as well. Think about that for a minute. We have this tiny muscle in our bodies, our tongue, and it is designed so that each tiny part of it can make us happy. And what's happening on this tongue is so complex that the greatest minds in our world have not even figured out the basic tastes. It's stunning when you think about it.

Food is doing some heavy lifting at our house. It's our main source of enjoyment and entertainment, and I think that's good.

So much of the New Testament centers around food. We see that as we get a peek behind the closed doors of the early church this morning. We find out how all of Christianity started. And what do we see? We see friends who devote themselves to teaching, hanging out, eating, and praying. They paid attention to the miracles that happened around them. They shared what they had. They went to the temple, then they ate together some more. And they were happy and generous.

Basically, we can look at what our faith has become, with all of its institutions and cathedrals, with all of its political influence and science denials, with all of the wars and rumors of wars, with all of the hospitals and homeless shelters, with everything that religion has become, the good and the bad—and we know that it started with a group of friends, hanging out and eating with one another.

So much was happening around those tables. In the early church, you have landowners worshiping with slaves. Men worshiping with widows and orphans. While the society and the temple were often segregated into separate sections based on class and gender, the early disciples were trying to figure out how to break down the rules, how to live together, and so they did it largely through eating with one another.

And then they talked about how they were supposed to create this new table together. They learned how to restructure all of society around those tables. When you look at the letters that they wrote to one another, they discussed some odd things. Like they say that women are not supposed to braid their hair. But when you look at the hairstyles of the time, you realize that they weren't talking about Little House on the Prairie braids, they were talking about status symbols. Complex hairstyles clearly delineated those who owned slaves and those who did not.



They had to make sure that everyone ate at the same time, because the rich people were eating before the slaves. They had to learn all new rules of hospitality and civility around the table.

The table became this place where every person had value. All the food was given to each person equally. The portions were the same. They shared what they had.

Of course, I'm not saying that you will not find sexism and slavery if you read those early letters. Because you will. But what I am saying is that they were struggling with their society in important ways. They were trying to figure out what it means that in Jesus Christ, there is no Jew or Greek, male or female, slave or free. And the table was the beating heart of those struggles and of the liberation.

The table is a good place for those things to occur. There is something about a meal though that gets inside of us. Ernest Hemingway says it well in his book *The Movable Feast*. He says, "if you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast."

I think that Hemingway is on to something here. But it doesn't just have to do with Paris. It has to do with gathering around your grandmother's table for Thanksgiving dinner, and the memories of how she made her potatoes. It's the meal that you first shared with your spouse when you realized that you were falling deeply in love. It's the spaghetti sauce that ends up all over our child's face when he or she is learning to eat as a toddler. It is the spoonful of broth that we feed our parents when they're too sick to eat anything else. We forge our deepest

relationships around our tables. We figure out how to care for one another, to share what we have. We learn how to be civil and to be kind. We learn hospitality. We learn that can reorder all of society around tables.

I served a congregation in Washington, D.C., and the church was given a grant from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance to clean up after a storm. And they noted that there were a lot of people without homes in the neighborhood, whose lives had been disrupted and the people didn't have any food. So, they began to get up early in the morning to flip some pancakes and serve them in the church basement.

But then as the years went on, the church wanted to do more. They hired a five-star chef to cook for them. And the chef worked to make each meal affordable as well as delicious and beautiful. He wanted to be sure that if a person only had one meal, it would be a meal that would provide them with enough nutrition for the whole day.

And then the church began to do more. They painted the basement and put tablecloths on the tables. They took the flowers from Sunday morning worship and made arrangements for each table. The guests began to take painting classes, and started to have "outsider art, inside the beltway" shows there. They began to care for one another in deeper ways, making sure that they had haircuts. A podiatrist would volunteer and look at their feet. Then, they realized that they could not simply stick a band-aid on the issue of homelessness. In our city, a minimum wage job could not buy a person a parking space, much less a home. So they began to work on the larger systemic issues of advocacy.

And the work that they did, grew and grew, until it began to affect our city in enormous ways. And it all started around the table.

As we shelter in place, may we become more aware of our tables. May we have a new appreciation for the food that we eat. May we enjoy each salty, sweet, bitter bite that we consume. May we forge deeper relationships with one another. When all of this is over, may we always be aware of how we can change society through our tables. Most of all, when we gather for communion, may we know God's presence, surrounding each of our tables.

Through God our Creator, God our Liberator, and God our Sustainer. Amen.