



GRACE CHURCH

Fed By Jesus

Luke 9:10-17

Grace Waco | 3.17.24

As we have journeyed through the gospel of Luke, one theme we have encountered several times already is that of *feasting with Jesus*. This is one of Jesus' primary identifiers of himself in Luke: he has come to seek and save the lost, not to be served but to serve, and *eating and drinking*. You can rightly track the whole story of the gospel of Luke by just examining all the times Jesus eats a meal—nearly 10 times in this book.

Right after Christmas we examined the first meal, where Jesus eats in Matthews house with all the sinners and tax-collectors. It's here that he gets his reputation as consorting with undesirables. To eat and drink with someone was to have what was called "table fellowship", a way to identify with another as a friend. So Jesus truly is the friend of sinners, and in Luke 5 in Matthew's house we see Jesus' new disciple calling all of his sinful friends to hear and see and interact with Jesus as the great physician. It's a feast of repentance, an invitation to turn from sin and follow Jesus, like Matthew did.

The next great meal we covered in Luke 7, the meal at Simon the Pharisee's house. If you remember, Simon was curious about Jesus, but there was a sinful woman there, some kind of sexual sinner, who was desperate for Jesus. Simon provided no water for Jesus' feet, no kiss of welcome, no anointing, but this woman gives everything to weep at Jesus' feet, anoint them with perfume, and kiss them. In the end Simon is rebuked, but this woman is forgiven. So this is a feast of redemption, reminding us of Jesus' great love and compassion for sinners.

Today we come to the third feast of Luke. Of course, you are likely familiar with the feeding of the five thousand—it's the only miracle recorded in every gospel. But if you aren't reading closely, you won't see that many similarities between those two stories and ours today. These other stories happened in homes, this one in the outskirts of a city. The other stories had several guests around a table, this one has several thousand guests broken up into what appears to be 100 different picnics of 50 people each. But it's easy to focus on the differences and forget the main similarity—Jesus Christ, who is truly God become flesh—shares a meal, shares "table fellowship". This should be enough to give us pause and perhaps stop us and wonder for a moment.



As we have said before, the gospel of Jesus Christ is that he died and was risen from the dead not just so you could be forgiven of your sin, but the gospel of Jesus Christ is that he died and was risen from the dead so that you could eat and drink with God. It is not just for salvation that Christ came, and not just for sacrifice—he also came for communion. To bring the great feast of God’s kingdom.

And so the most important difference between this meal-time story and the ones that have come before is that in the other stories, Jesus was the guest. In this story, he is the host.

You can learn a lot about someone if you invite them over for dinner. But the best way to get to know someone is to *be* invited over for dinner. In this passage, then, we learn three things about Jesus: 1) What his invitation is like; 2) What his provision is like; and 3) how do we receive his invitation and provision?

What his Invitation is like

Another familiar story of Jesus that eventually we will get to in Luke 19 is when Jesus gets incredibly angry, makes a whip, and clears out the money changers from the temple. I used to think that was a lesson about materialism and church—like not to sell goods and services in the lobby after worship. And that may be true—but Jesus actually says what he is mad about in that story: “My house shall be a house of prayer for all peoples, but you have made it a den of robbers.” The point is that the temple, Jesus’ house, where the spirit of God dwelt, was a place for *all people*. By selling sacrifices at exuberant prices to foreigners in town for passover, the merchants in the temple weren’t just turning the place into a farmers market: they were robbing the nations of the chance to worship. It was prejudice, not capitalism, that was their sin. It was not just a lack of reverence for the house of God that made Jesus so angry, it was the lack of welcome.

The story in our text today teaches the same lesson. If this is an example of Jesus “inviting us over for dinner”, then what is his house like? Well, it’s a dwelling place for all people, all nations.

The disciples, now called “apostles” in **verse 10**, since they have been sent out by Jesus, return from their short term mission trip, and are quite exhausted. Remember in **verse 3**, they didn’t bring any *bread*. They have been living completely off the hospitality of others—and the assumption is that some of that hospitality wasn’t great—that for every time they were welcomed, they also had to shake the dust off their feet from an unwelcoming place. In **verse 10**, we read that they “withdrew” for some R&R after their mission. In Mark’s gospel, it says that “many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat.” A little bit of foreshadowing there.

So the plan is for the disciples to have a nice little supper together, hosted by Jesus. A welcome back and well done dinner. But then the “crowds” hear about it, **verse 11**. You can almost hear the disciples sigh... evidenced by their desire in **verse 12** to “send the crowd away”. But what is Jesus’ disposition? He “welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.” Unlike the vendors at the temple, the crowd, the nations, have come to



him—and they are welcome—as Isaiah 55 says, to “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.” so Jesus’ invitation is for all kinds of people.

The next thing about Jesus’ invitation is that it is for hungry people. In **verse 12**, there is a curious expression: “when the day began to wear away.” What it literally means is that it was getting late and dark. But it also has the feel that the day has been long, and wearisome. It’s time for a good meal and a good sleep.

When you get home after a long day, what would true welcome feel like? I think it feels like this: being spoken to about things that are good and true, an environment of healing. The hospitality of Jesus is never put out by your limitations—his welcome is utterly unending. He meets us in that place of weariness, at the end of the day. He understands our need, feels our need, anticipates our need. His hospitality always has dinner on the stove.

The other interesting thing about Jesus’ meal is the location. The disciples say that there is no way the crowd can be fed, because they are, **verse 12**, “in a desolate place”. This word “desolate place” is linked to all sorts of Biblical imagery. When the Israelites wandered towards the promised land, they did so in the wilderness, the “desolate place”. It was in that place where they were fed manna, sweet bread, from heaven. When Jesus fasted from bread to live on the very words of God and resist the greatest temptation Satan could dish out, he did so in “the desolate place”.

The desolate place is the place of the crowds, the place of the sick, the place of the poor, the place of need. It’s not the city or the marketplace or the vineyard or the granary. But the desolate place is where God invites us into. Jesus leaves the paradise of God’s presence for the wilderness of earth, and he sets up his banqueting table in the place of your need. The gospel is not that you have to put on your best black tie to get past the bouncer at the king’s feast—it’s that the king brings his feast to you in the slums. And his very presence, his welcome, turns the slums into the castle.

So Jesus’ invitation is for the nations, all kinds of people, is also for those who are hungry and weary at the end of the day, and finally it is for those who are in the wilderness, the place of need.

This is good news for us who long to have communion with God in Christ. But we also must ask the question, what is the provision of Jesus? What kind of food does he serve at his feast?

What his Provision is like

Just this semester, our college students have been studying about generosity and hospitality. I had the privilege to share with them a few weeks back. One of the markers of hospitality that we went over was that hospitality is a dialogue, not a monologue. When you go to the taco truck, you may get amazing tacos, but they are served on a paper plate with no dialogue. You pay for a service, you leave. You are satisfied, but you are not changed. But when you dine with a friend who knows you,



listens to you, welcomes you into not just good food but good food made for you, anticipating and meeting your needs, suddenly there is a conversation, a dialogue.

The example I gave is of Gregg Poppovich, coach of the San Antonio Spurs, who tells a story of going to a restaurant on a trip with his team, opening up the menu, and to his shock finding 120 of his most favorite and rare wines in the world. Apparently the restaurant owner had heard Pop was coming, just hours earlier, and made calls all around the country to find his favorite wines. Pop is a huge wine connoisseur and famous for his hospitality when his teams take trips. That night Pop bought over \$25k worth of wine, all on his tab, for everyone to enjoy. True welcome requires intentionality, a gesture that says: “I know you. I’ve done my homework. I’ve put in the time. I’ve made the calls. I’m ready for you.”

What I love about Jesus’ hospitality is that he understands that it is not about a service he can provide but an invitation to an experience with him. The disciples worry about the expenses of feeding all these people. They see the impossibility of it all, the cost of it all. But Jesus is not transactional. His welcome is not to come get a little healing and some preaching for a good price and leave. Otherwise he would close up shop when the working hours are over and send everyone away. His invitation is not to the fish and the loaves, but to his very heart.

It’s extremely personal, what Jesus is doing. In John’s gospel he expounds upon what Jesus said during the teaching portion of his miracle, telling the crowds that he “is the bread of life”. When he says “life”, he doesn’t mean physical sustenance or being, but true life. We all know there is a big difference between being alive and being *alive*. It’s the difference between zombies and healthy humans, between surviving and thriving, between watching someone hit a game winning shot on television out of the corner of your eye and hitting the game winning shot yourself.

What Jesus is providing here is not just a single meal, but rather, as one author puts it, “a throwing forward into the present the first part of a future feast.”¹ In Luke’s gospel, there are plenty of meals, but there are only three meals where Jesus hosts them. There is this meal, the meal at the last supper, and the meal after the resurrection with the disciples on the Emmaus road. Each of these meals have the same elements which we find in **verse 16**. Jesus takes the food, looks to heaven, blesses it, breaks the bread, and gives it to his disciples.

In other words, this is a miraculous meal. It’s foreshadowing the meal where Jesus equates his own broken body with the broken bread. Here in the outskirts of Bethsaida, Jesus is offering himself for the satisfaction and provision of the people.

This must be the case because in every one of these three “broken bread” accounts in Luke, there is a revelation of Jesus’ unique mission as Messiah. At the last Supper Jesus tells of his death, and at the road to Emmaus the disciples’ eyes are opened to see Jesus for who he really is. And here, after this feast, immediately after there is a profession from Peter in **verse 20** that Jesus truly is

¹ G. Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*



the Christ, the anointed one of God.

And notice as well the meal is one of abundance: in **verse 17**, they have 12 baskets of leftovers. Notice too it says “broken pieces”, which means that Jesus broke *all* the bread... It’s still part of the feast! It’s not unused bread. The feast continues.

Jesus is not just showcasing his power of material elements. He is not a vending machine. He is not the provision for our hungry stomachs—he is the provision for our hungry souls. He knows that the cost of provision is high, he knows for the people to eat the bread it must be broken. He is the broken bread, he is the blessed sacrifice, lifted up to God on the cross—he is the satisfaction and the abundance, broken once but continuing forever, he is the bread of life!

So all along we have been asking that question in Luke that Theophilus was asking: how do we *know* and have *certainty*? Here is the answer again... receive the provision of Jesus. He is offering not just to meet our need, but to be the very thing that meets our need. He is offering union with him, communion with him, not a good and a service but a dialogue, a home, a relationship, a true welcome and a true provision.

How do we receive his invitation and provision?

This is actually the most curious thing about this meal. Remember how we said that the meal at Matthew’s (Levi) house was a meal of repentance, and the meal at Simon the Pharisee’s house was a meal of redemption? If so, this meal is a meal of provision—but with a slight bend to it. *How* does Jesus provide for the hungry crowds? How does his food go to the masses, to the nations? It goes *through* the disciples. This is not just a meal of provision, but of *mission*.

Fresh from receiving hospitality from strangers, the disciples are receiving a lesson in giving hospitality. And their main problem is that they see the crowds as a barrier, while Jesus sees them as the whole point! But notice that Jesus doesn’t let them pass the buck so easily. He tells them in **verse 13**: “you give them something to eat”! He asks the impossible, but he never forgoes their responsibility. All along, he includes them in the miracle.

Jesus doesn’t create fish and loaves from thin air—he uses what they have, what they bring to him—and multiplies it. Sort of like the small seed, that put into the soil of faith, grows into hundreds of multitudes of fruit.

And then he has all of them sit down in groups of 50. What is going on here? It’s as if Jesus is creating 100 little dining tables, and then each of his disciples serves about 8 of them. He is making it manageable, in some sense. One author compares it to the mission of God outlined in Acts. Remember what happens when 3000 members are added to the church in Jerusalem? How did they feed everyone, teach everyone, bring Christ to everyone? They gathered in households, committed themselves to the apostles teaching, and *broke bread together*. It’s as if the scene outside



of Bethsaida is a microcosm of the beauty of the church to come—local expressions of the great feast.

And it's not a coincidence that the disciples gather 12 baskets of leftovers afterwards. One for each disciple—a sign that Jesus is soon to give them a personal ministry that is overflowing—broken bread that they continue to distribute and preach and proclaim. How do we receive Jesus' invitation and his provision? We participate in his mission. He calls us not to be passive partakers but active participants. Remember that Jesus came eating and drinking, but he also came “not to be served but to serve”. The great welcome of Jesus is not just that he wants to feast with us, but that he invites us to the best job of the feast: to serve tables like he did.

Friends, to take and eat of Jesus is to take up the mission of Jesus. It's to serve in his kingdom, seeing others come to taste and see that he is good. It's a leftover from Eden, where we worked God's garden in perfect peace, and it's a foretaste of Heaven, where we again will serve God free from jealousy, toil, suffering and sin.

Jesus' invitation is for all who are in the desolate place, his provision is his very self, and the way we come to feast with him is by taking up the service of the feast with him.

