



Life Happens at the Table

Acts 2:42-37

July 8, 2018

Re. Diane Christopher

Exactly a month ago on June 8, Anthony Bourdain took his own life. At the time of his death, Bourdain had a TV show on CNN called "Parts Unknown." I turned to CNN on that night, and watched as Bourdain's colleagues remembered and grieved for him. I was amazed as they gave the news, and at the same time, grieved and processed in front of millions of viewers. It was brave, compassionate, done with class.

They spoke about Anthony's love of people and food. How he would visit different cultures and meet these cultures through their food. Most of the pictures and videos of him were sitting at table with people, sharing their food and learning more about these other cultures.

One of the announcers on CNN, I think it was Anderson Cooper, said Anthony taught us that life happens at the table. I've been thinking about that statement. Life happens at the table. As a single person, I eat most of my meals alone. I know many of you who live alone eat most of your meals alone.

When I think back on my life, many of my fond memories are of eating at the table with good friends and family, and just sitting and talking, not hurrying but enjoying the company. I love it when we begin our meals by holding hands and praying together reminding us of our bond in Christ.

Life happens at the table.

Can you think back and remember good times of eating together with others?

Last month, we had a Father's Day worship service on Wednesday night. After the worship, 8 of us went out for dinner. We got there at 6 p.m. and by 7, we had finished eating. But we kept on talking and laughing and enjoying each other's company. We finally closed the place down and left sometime after 8 p.m.

Life happens at the table.

Several years ago, I attended a conference in San Antonio. Our hotel was right on the River Walk. The hard part for me at this conference was mealtime for we were on our own for meals. I don't like sitting alone at a restaurant. But here I was at our first lunch break, walking alone the river walk looking for a place to eat.

As I was walking, I stopped to look at a menu of a particular restaurant. I heard a voice call out to me. It was a fellow conference attendee (we had name tags) sitting alone at that restaurant on their outside patio. He invited me to join him having recognized my name tag. He was a fellow pastor and alone at the conference like me.

We agreed to meet for dinner. I met up with him at our agreed location that evening, and he had some other conference attendees with him. We found a beautiful outdoor patio at a great restaurant overlooking the River Walk. I still remember so vividly sitting there with these people, talking about what we learned that day, talking about our faith....eating great food for hours on this patio. They were strangers, but I still remember that time with great fondness. It meant a lot to me as a single person who eats her meals alone.

Life happens at the table.

Why so much importance around meals together?

The experts say eating together has health benefits. There is the prospect of the eating experience being delicious and enjoyable. At the table, we share stories, build upon relationships, learn from each other's mistakes and triumphs, and creating bonds that define us. In fact, this time benefits every aspect of our

wellbeing — emotionally, physically, socially, occupationally, spiritually, intellectually and mentally. This is what the experts say.

But Bible has something to say about meals, too.

Our scripture passage today was a description of the first church. They met together on a regular basis. They devoted themselves to the teachings of the Apostles. They prayed together. They shared their belongings with each other and those in need. They worshipped together. And...they ate together: “They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God....”

I think it is amazing that eating together was mentioned as part of the early church. Eating together was right up there with worship, learning, meeting needs.

Throughout the Bible, God has a way of showing up at table. The Jews tell the story of their rescue from Egypt over a meal, a really long meal called a Passover Seder. They do this together with family in their homes or they meet together at the synagogue, remembering how God works in the world and demonstrates God’s love for us.

Life happens at the table.

I think of Jesus – a lot of things happened around meals with Jesus. He spent time with the “sinners” of his day over a meal. They would invite him into their homes. In fact, he did this so often that he was known as a “glutton and a drunkard.” (Matt 11:18-19) But over those meals, Jesus taught the religious leaders of the day that God loves the sinner, too.

A woman anointed Jesus with perfume at a meal. The men at the meal protested. How dare a woman interrupt their dinner. But Jesus held her up, and she was preparing him for his burial.

Jesus did one of his greatest miracles around a meal when he fed 5000 from 5 loaves of bread and 2 fish. It was not technically at a table, but Jesus had the disciples arrange the crowd in small groups in order to eat together. Can you imagine the conversation in those groups as they ate and discussed in awe over how Jesus did that? And discovering in the midst of it that here was Someone special...all during a meal.

Life happens at the table.

After Jesus' resurrection, Jesus must have looked different because people didn't recognize him right away. They recognized him when he ate with them. When he met the two men on the Road to Emmaus and had a long discussion with them as they walked, they didn't recognize him until they invited him to dinner.

When Jesus met the rest of the disciples a bit later, he proved he wasn't a ghost by eating with them. And then that meal on the beach. Jesus cooks a fish breakfast for his disciples and gives them a new ministry....over a meal.

Life happens at the table.

We need to recover the art of a slow meal around a table with people we care about. "Table fellowship" doesn't often make the list of the classical spiritual disciplines of fasting or prayer or study or worship or confession. Perhaps it should.

I encourage you to eat together. If you are single like me and live alone, say "yes" to as many opportunities as you can to eat with someone else. Those of you who live in places like LaPosada or Silver Springs or The Peaks, your meals together are built in. Eat often with others because life happens at the table.

Today, we are giving you an opportunity to eat together – our annual 4th of July party. Right after worship. We will eat at table. Life happens at the table.

I conclude with two important tables.

There is a table that is at the very center of our spiritual lives as Christians. It is this table (point of communion table). Every church has one.

When Jesus had his last meal with his disciples before he is arrested, He tells his disciples to eat in remembrance of him. Of all the things he could've chose to be done "in remembrance" of him, Jesus chose a meal. He could have asked his followers to do something impressive – climb a mountain or fast for forty days, – but instead he picks the most ordinary of acts to be present to his people – the act of eating.

And at that meal, Jesus didn't offer his theories of the atonement or recite a creed or explain precisely how his death would accomplish salvation. Instead, he just said do this: share a meal in remembrance of me.

Life happens at this table.

One final table: when we gather with our brothers and sisters in Christ around a meal or we take communion together, we catch a glimpse of the banquet we will experience in the kingdom to come.

The Prophets in the Old Testament would speak of the day when God would reign. They depicted it as a great feast. Hear it from the prophet Isaiah (25:6): "On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines."

In that day when all that is wrong is made right and all that is broken is made whole, there's going to be one extravagant meal.

Life happens at the table.

Oh, and one last thought: perhaps before we invite people to Jesus or invite them to church, we should invite them to dinner.

