

Join the Feast

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A semi-chronological summary of the Gospel of Luke: Mary laid Jesus in a *feeding trough* for animals. Jesus invited *fishermen* to be his first disciples. He preached about putting new *wine* in new *wineskins* instead of old ones. Pharisees thought to themselves, “this man is a *glutton* and a *drunkard*. John the Baptist’s disciples fast and pray, while Jesus’ disciples *eat* and *drink*.” Nevertheless, Jesus taught about good trees that bear good *fruit*, and bad trees that bear bad *fruit*. He described a sower sowing *seeds*. Jesus ate at *banquets* put on by tax collectors and he *feasted* with sinners. The Gospel of the Lord.

The book of Luke is overflowing with images, events, conversations, and people that revolve around food. Food was central to Jesus’ ministry. It seems basic, doesn’t it? Of course Jesus talked about food – everyone needs food to survive, so we obviously have to talk about it. But it goes deeper than that. Jesus’ ministry of peace is inseparable from the topic of food. What does this tell us about how we should live our lives? Laura Hartman draws on pastor, theologian, and eater extraordinaire L. Shannon Jung, who declares that embodying Christ means feasting openly and joyfully just as Jesus did, “savoring all that the earth provides and sharing it with those in need.”¹

So what is feasting? When I lived in Burkina Faso, I began to view the sharing of food differently. One morning, my family and I were walking down the red sandy streets to the marketplace when a local man called out to us from the side of the road. We went over to where he was eating his midday meal outside his courtyard. We greeted the man and entered into playful banter with him, a conversational skill that comes naturally to so many people in Burkina Faso. Then he said to us, “Vous êtes invités”. You are invited. This man was inviting us to share

¹ Laura M. Hartman, “Consuming Christ: The Role of Jesus in Christian Food Ethics.” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 30, no. 1 (2010): 51, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=rft&AN=ATLA0001784013&site=ehost-live>; L. Shannon Jung, *Food for Life: The Spirituality and Ethics of Eating* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 29.

the rice and sauce on his plate. He was offering the little food he had to us – foreigners with more than enough money to buy our own lunch.

This is not an uncommon occurrence in Burkina Faso. If you have food and someone else doesn't, it is socially appropriate that you offer to share what you have. The mentality is very much: "I am hungry, but you are also hungry, so let us eat together." This is an attitude that seems to be less prevalent in North America, where we are sometimes more likely to say, "I bought this food with my own money, so I get to eat it, even if I'm not hungry". The man who offered us his rice and sauce was living with an attitude of abundance. He had faith that his plate of rice would be sufficient for the five of us to share. He had faith that tomorrow, if he was hungry and had no food, someone might share with him. That's feasting. You are invited. An offering of peace.

Food has the capacity to be a peacemaker for two main reasons. The first is that it fills a basic need. It reminds us that we are all vulnerable, thin-skinned human beings who all succumb to pang of hunger and – if it goes on for long enough – death. The fact that people of every age, race, nationality, gender, and sexuality rely so heavily on this one source of pleasure and sustenance means that we are all connected. We are united in our weakness and dependence on God for the gift of survival and, better yet, *life*.

We all know the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand. It is a story of abundance, wonder, and – yes – peace. A restless crowd getting hungry and impatient. Frantic disciples coming to Jesus. Jesus giving the disciples a simple solution: give them something to eat. Fill their basic needs. Feed them. It is a common theme in global politics that if basic needs are not being met, violence in various forms arises. This strong correlation between food insecurity and

violence rates means that if a community goes hungry, disorder will be more likely to break out.² Positive peace means that basic needs are being met. Because the bread and fish were shared among the hungry crowd, shalom was restored.

The second main reason that food can be a peacemaker? Food is sacred. Think about the last thing you ate. Let's say it was a salad. Can you trace back the process of that lettuce's growth? Every leaf of lettuce was only an appendage of the larger head, which would have sprouted gently and deliberately from rich, dark soil. Soil is a culmination of years' worth of mineral particles and organic materials interacting slowly yet constantly with living organisms and manure which, when mixed with the perfect ratio of sun and water, give the plant the nutrients it needs. A living thing burgeons from what would have otherwise been only a seed full of energetic potential. It is a wonder that those pieces of lettuce even made it to your mouth.

Should we not look at this process and see a greater reality at play? The growth of that head of lettuce is a miracle. It is out of our hands. The process of growth was generated all the way back in Genesis when the Creator caused the earth to put forth the miracle of vegetation and called it "good" (Genesis 1:12). Food is a gift of life.³ This should propel us to share food with others in community. In eating and sharing food with gratitude and a spirit of generosity, you are playing your part in the larger cycle of abundance.⁴

So, food is an excellent peacemaker because it fills a basic need and because it is sacred. However, it is for those two very same reasons that food has the capacity to be an extraordinary

² Jackson, Dylan B., Kellie R. Lynch, Jesse J. Helton, and Michael G. Vaughn. "Food Insecurity and Violence in the Home: Investigating Exposure to Violence and Victimization Among Preschool-Aged Children." *Health Education & Behavior* 45, no. 5 (2018): 756–63. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48615175>.

³ Seed Change, *Food Sovereignty* (Ontario, 2022), <https://weseedchange.org/food-sovereignty/#:~:text=La%20Via%20Campesina%20defines%20food,own%20food%20and%20agriculture%20systems.%E2%80%9D>.

⁴ Queensland Government, *How Soils Form* (Queensland, 2016), <https://www.qld.gov.au/environment/land/management/soil/soil-explained/forms#:~:text=Soil%20is%20the%20thin%20layer,which%20interact%20slowly%20yet%20constantly>.

tool for exclusion. We see this occurring in the Jewish purity laws of Jesus' time. And we also see it played out in our society today. If Jesus' example tells us to feast with people of all classes and races, why do we find ourselves in a society where millions of Indigenous peoples are being refused food sovereignty – a community's right to shape its own food systems?⁵ We are denying human beings access to healthy and culturally appropriate foods. We are refusing them control over the production of their own sustenance. As Winona LaDuke puts it, giant black metal snakes – pipelines – are running through the wild rice fields, central to Anishinaabe culture.⁶ I just cannot reconcile the example of Jesus, the hospitable Jesus, the Jesus that fed the five thousand, with the violence that is being committed in our very nation.⁷ People are being excluded from the feast.

We must remember food's capacity to be a peacebuilder. The question I leave you with is this: Are you willing to join the feast? Think about the last time you were properly hungry before eating a meal. What did the first bite feel like to you? I did a 24-hour fast several months ago, and I have seldom had food that tasted as good as the first spoonful of soup I ate after that fast. Think about the last time that warm, homemade bread melted in your mouth. What did that taste like? What did that *feel* like? Think about the last time you made food to give to someone. What did it feel like to put energy and labour into something that would soon be consumed? Was the effort worth it, for the result of feasting with another human being?

⁵ Seed Change, *Food Sovereignty*, <https://weseedchange.org/food-sovereignty/#:~:text=La%20Via%20Campesina%20defines%20food,own%20food%20and%20agriculture%20systems.%E2%80%9D>

⁶ Winona LaDuke, *To Be a Water Protector*, (Black Point: Fernwood Publishers, 2020), 81.

⁷ Martin William Mittelstadt, "Eat, drink, and be merry: a theology of hospitality in Luke-Acts," *Word & World* 34, no. 2 (2014), <https://web.p.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail/detail?vid=2&sid=bed2a265-98d4-400f-a437-ab5132184858%40redis&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtG1ZlZQ%3d%3d#AN=ATLA0001980094&db=rft>.

Jesus portrayed in Luke was someone who was moved by food and drink. We must remember that Jesus feasted. He was called a glutton and a drunkard, eating with anyone from any social class. The kingdom of God he preached about was one of banquets. It is a kingdom that starts with faith the size of a *mustard seed* and grows like *yeast* mixed with *flour*. You are invited. Come and join the feast (Lk. 14:17).

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