

## Comments on the Dedication of the Kitchen

Let them thank the Lord for his steadfast love, for all his wonderful works. He satisfies those who are thirsty, and the hungry he fills with good things. Some sat in darkness, some wandered in the wilderness, and some, with hearts bowed down: they cried to the Lord and he delivered them from distress. Let them thank the Lord for his wondrous works, he has raised the needy out of affliction; let the righteous see it and be glad and praise the Lord in the congregation of the people.

From Psalm 107

We come here today to offer thanks to God for our newly renovated kitchen, and to dedicate its use to his service. Now, to some folks it may seem to be a small thing—it's just a kitchen, we haven't built a new education wing or funded a third-world mission. Except that it is a big deal, and not just because we are a little church, but because the elders and the church board understood when we began the process that this church exists to serve others, and one way we serve is in serving food; hospitality, an appropriate word to describe the work of this church. I felt it the first Sunday I was here; you have felt it, too. Hospitality is much more than just being nice to someone new, but rather is one way we express God's love for others; it is how we can demonstrate God's mercy and care for us, as we share food and friendship. And that's what we do at every event in the fellowship hall. The new kitchen makes us better able to do it. And so we give praise to God who

makes all things possible, and who abides in the hearts of his people as they go about the work of his Kingdom.

So, we should say a big “thank you” to those who were the hands of the Lord, who worked so hard using manly tools, but also to those who shopped and those who came up with fresh ideas: thanks to Max, Tony, Blake, Darren, and Mattie Wesson, Charlene Tapman, and Kathy Jordan, and especially to Elder Tom Tapman, chief instigator of all that has been done.

And we are grateful to you who contributed to the effort. I know you have received a note of thanks; you have heard “thank you” in the weeks past from the pulpit, and from Tom. But I say thanks to you today, not just for your money, but thanks because you have seen what needed to be done and gave your hearts to it; you have seen that what we do in this place is God’s work and you wished to be part of it; and thanks, because we have completed this task as a united and purposeful and hopeful congregation.

And so, let the gospel of Jesus Christ be proclaimed in this community of brothers and sisters who sing and pray and study and laugh and weep and play and eat as one, giving thanks to the Lord who has called his people together in this place.

There are so many passages in the Bible about food and eating, but I chose this one for this particular day of dedication because in it we readily see that the Bible's primary understanding of food is that God provides it. And I think one purpose of fellowship in the church is to maintain the concept of God's provision, whether we come together here in the sanctuary for formal worship and communion, or eating and celebrating in the fellowship hall; God provides, and our part is to receive and to share God's goodness with gratitude.

I want to start with a question: what is your favorite food? Last Sunday I had the pleasure of eating lunch with Charline and Terry Spears at the Chinese restaurant, Dynasty, and after a very enjoyable meal, we went back in line for dessert. They have a soft-serve machine there, so I got a small bowl of ice cream and a couple of macaroons, and returned to the table; and when I placed my dessert beside my drink, a Dr Pepper, I suddenly realized that side by side by side were perhaps my three favorite foods in the world. And for a moment I felt like the two dogs in the Far Side cartoon must have felt, who look up, with great anticipation, at the woman pouring a can of their food onto the plate, and the one canine says to

the other, “Oh, boy, it’s *dog food* again!” I hope you get that excited about the new kitchen and our fellowship meals.

Maybe the question I should ask is “what is your favorite meal, or most memorable meal?” Perhaps it was a dinner party you attended, or the buffet on a cruise; it could be the meal at a 5-star restaurant or hotel, or you may have been surprised by the cuisine at some little, out of the way joint. But there is one thing I know for certain: you didn’t eat your favorite meal alone. The best meals are not made up of great food only, they are experienced, they are shared, and the place and occasion and the companionship play equal parts in the enjoyment of food. Sharing a meal is more than meeting the nutritional requirements of our bodies, it also feeds our souls or spirits, our psyches, or our emotions. What do you want when you are ill or depressed? Comfort food. Because it isn’t just the food itself; it is what smell and taste evoke, of a time when you were happy or healthy or protected or connected.

Now, we most likely wouldn’t find our favorite foods in this story. Our passage mentions plants and trees, so we should think fruits and vegetables and nuts and grains, but not animal products. It is a garden after all, and there may be vanilla beans or strawberries, but no ice cream; perhaps coconut, but no

macaroons; prunes, but no Dr Pepper; jalapenos, but no nachos; corn, but no Fritos; potatoes, but no steak. The first two humans were vegetarians. In fact, all the beasts and birds were vegetarians according to our scripture. The writer is making a theological point, that there could not be meat-eating because there was no death.

Just to get this out of the way, I am not promoting a vegetarian lifestyle in this sermon. I am only saying this: that there was harmony in the Garden, a relationship between God and the humans, in which God speaks to them and blesses them and gives them the job of gardening; and there is harmony between the humans and the beasts- the animals also were given every plant for food as well, verse 30, the animals were blessed by God, verse 22. And in verse 31, God looked upon everything at the end of the sixth day and saw that it was “very good.” It was life, it was blessed, it was harmonious, and God was pleased.

But even if we might not find our favorite foods in the Garden, we still could experience our favorite meals there, because the great meals are shared. This story of creation shows us that God created humans in relationship; these verses insist that the human was brought into being as a community, a man and a woman. And that is the connection to us today, that the church is the place where humans find

the path to true community: where we are brought back into the proper relationship with God and with one another through faith in Jesus Christ; where we may recover God's original purpose for the human race and for all creation; and where we can join together to share the feast of the Kingdom of God. What we eat may or may not be important, but it is vitally important that we share the meal, as God had planned for us from the beginning, and that we eat together in God's presence, giving thanks that God has supplied every good thing for our needs and for our pleasure.

Perhaps what strikes us most vividly in our passage is the statement God makes, "Let us make the human in our image." Looking closely at our scripture, we can see that "in God's image" must mean several things: that humans are created for speech- God spoke the universe into existence, but spoke to only the humans, so there must be unique talents given to us that connect us to God, an ability and a desire to communicate, and to reason; "in God's image" in that we were given the task of ruling over creation, just as God reigns over the world as Creator. But I think, mainly this: that "in God's image" is yet another way we know we are made for relationship. God says, "let *us*," and "in *our* image." *God himself exists in*

*relationship*- God is One, but exists as Father and Son and Holy Spirit, and just as God exists in relationship, so has God created us in relationship, created us as community- “male and female he created them,” created us for fellowship; and we are most like God when we live together in unity. And when we meet to break bread together and to share the joy of the Lord; when we welcome others with the love of Jesus Christ, God looks down and sees that it is very good.