

## *Tasting God*

Psalm 34:1-10 and John 2:1-11

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Donna Claycomb Sokol

Mount Vernon Place UMC, Washington

I will never forget the first time I went to her home to share a meal. I walked into the side door that leads into the kitchen as I had done before, taking note of the myriad of pots and pans in the sink and on the stove. I then followed her lead into the dining room where my eyes beheld a table covered with a dozen different dishes—macaroni and cheese and mashed potatoes, cold slaw and carrots, green beans and giant yeast rolls, and plenty of fried chicken.

“Mary Elizabeth! Who all is coming for dinner?” I asked. “Just my pastor,” she said with a tender giggle I deeply miss.

We sat down at the table, and I soon learned how fried chicken was one of Mary Elizabeth’s love languages. It was something she enjoyed eating, and something she adored sharing with others.

When we gather for our annual Easter Potluck four weeks from today, I will not only seek to find the plumpest piece of white meat remaining, sinking my teeth into and tasting its juicy goodness, I will also give thanks for this extraordinary saint who died two years ago. In fact, I cannot taste fried chicken without thinking of Mary Elizabeth and the extraordinary, tangible ways she loved me.

Gretchen Rubin writes how “Sharing food is an ancient, universal, and revered human custom and is one of the most important expressions of community. Eating together is a way to strengthen relationships, and offering food is an essential ingredient of hospitality. In fact, we often eat foods we don’t enjoy, or eat more or less than we’d like, out of respect or affection; for many people, sharing food means love.”<sup>1</sup>

How have you experienced love through food?

In this morning’s Lenten devotional, Katharine reminisces about going to her grandparents’ home in Connecticut where her grandmother prepared what she describes as “the best hot dogs”—treats that came from a real live butcher that would split open when boiled before being served with baked beans. Katharine describes how the hot dogs tasted better in her grandparent’s kitchen on Friday nights than anywhere else she ate a hot dog. She then adds, “I don’t think my grandparents really enjoyed those boiled hot dogs, but they knew we did, and that meal was an expression of love we could count on.”

How have you experienced love through food?

What foods awaken your memories as they transport you to a particular place or person?

After treating himself to a cup of tea and slice of cake, French novelist Marcel Proust observed:

When from a long-distant path nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered...the smell and taste of things remain poised a long

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<sup>1</sup> Gretchen Rubin, *Life in Five Senses* (New York: Crown, 2023), 130.

time, like souls, ready to remind us, waiting and hoping for their moment, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unfaltering, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection.<sup>2</sup>

After those we love have died, after their things are broken and scattered, the smell and taste of things can remain present for a long time.

While Jesus seemingly knew this reality to be true, he did not want his disciples to forget it when he gathered alongside of them in an upper room where he reportedly took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to those gathered around the table. “This is my body,” he said as he offered them a taste of the bread. “This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many,” he told them as the vessel of wine was passed and shared.

The words, “Do this in remembrance of me,” might not have sunk in on that night. But I suspect none of the disciples were able to gather for another Passover meal without hearing Jesus’ voice when the unleavened bread was broken, and the wine was shared. The taste of bread would easily transport them to that space where Jesus sought to convey deep, sacrificial love.

How have you experienced love through food?

We are not sure how many people attended the wedding in Cana of Galilee that features one of the most well-known miracles in scripture. But I can imagine any of the wedding guests who was given the opportunity to taste a very good vintage long after the vats of something akin to Two Buck Chuck had run dry was prone to bring up the memory whenever they were at a party when the festivities outlasted the supply. “Come on, can’t you turn water into wine like Jesus did in Cana?”

If plentiful wine and lavish food are signs of God’s love and grace in accounts recorded in scripture, then the wedding guests received a wondrous taste of Cana Grace.

What about us?

How have you experienced love through the sharing of food and drink?

Have you ever tasted God’s presence, God’s faithfulness, God’s abundance in a way that makes you hunger for more?

When our Wednesday morning small group gathered this week to read and reflect upon Psalm 34, one person recalled the meal he once shared with his partner at the Inn at Little Washington. Patrick O’Connell’s restaurant has garnered three Michelin stars while attracting guests from around the world who pay \$386 for a divinely prepared assortment of tastes that contribute to an unforgettable experience. The current menu featured on the inn’s website includes “a tin of sin” which is caviar, crab and cucumbers, a carpaccio of Big-Eye Tuna with Wasabi Sorbet and Puffed Wild Rice, and Szechuan Pepper-Crusted Venison Tenderloin with Lingonberries.

These selections are the ones I was confident I could properly pronounce in a sermon. I’ll allow you to decide if you want to look at the rest of the menu.

While I have never been to the Inn at Little Washington, I suspect every taste leaves a guest filled with anticipation for what is to come—that every bite builds the suspense for

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<sup>2</sup> Rubin, 136.

something even more succulent or savory to be placed before you next until the climax is reached when dessert is served.

I can also imagine that any person who treats you to a meal at the Inn at Little Washington wants you to know that you are worth the investment!

How have you experienced love through food?

When have you been filled with anticipation for what is to come?

Have you experienced a foretaste of God's goodness in a way that makes you hunger and thirst for more while refusing to be satisfied with inferior substitutes?

David, the one who is believed to have penned Psalm 34, has tasted God's goodness and longs for others to experience what God has given to him. The Lord has heard David's voice, answered his cries, delivered him from all his fears, saved him from trouble, removed his fear, and satisfied his deepest longings.

"Will you also fear the Lord?" David wants to know.

David is not suggesting that a person be afraid of God, but, rather, "Will you enjoy the Lord's protection and provision?"

Will you try depending on God to satisfy your deepest longings?

Will you experiment with faith—with what it might look like for you to believe God is with you and can deliver you your fear or from all that prevents you from being the fullness of who God has created you to be?

Will you attempt to believe and then never forget how much God loves you?

And if you're struggling to remember, will you come to this table which resembles the one Jesus shared with his disciples before saying, "Do this in remembrance of me?"

The words exchanged at this table are not beautiful prose but rather heartfelt words. "God, I am truly sorry for the ways I have not followed your teaching, for anything I have done to hurt a neighbor, sibling, or friend, for failing to be the person you want me to be." Jesus then responds, "My child, I love you. I forgive you. I set you free from sorrow and shame."

The food offered at this table is nothing fancy—like a grandmother's hot dogs and baked beans. But the taste and the memories it evokes are intended to reveal to you the depths of God's love.

Unlike other tables, there is more than enough food at this table for everyone. In fact, the communion table is one of the few places in our city where all are welcome and no one is turned away, and where every person eats the same amount and is satisfied.

It might seem like just a taste—but it is a foretaste of all that is to come in our eternal home where hunger will be no more because there is more than enough food for everyone, where loneliness and isolation will be no more because real community is created wherever food is shared, where sickness and shame are no more because all are healed and released, where all guests are not only welcomed but cherished by the host who embodies a love that knows no boundaries, one who says, "Come, taste and see what I have been preparing for you."