

Friendship United Church, Demorestville, ON
World Communion Sunday
October 4, 2009
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The table seems like such a simple thing. Tables come in all shapes and sizes; they're made from all kinds of materials. Some are large and some are small. Some can be opened and expanded others remain one size. The table is used to put things on, create things on, eat off of, to do homework at, to cut materials from patterns, to play cards and games, to have meetings and take notes; there are as many uses for tables as there are makes and models.

It would be unlikely that we would go into any of our homes and find no table. It seems to be standard in all households at least in North America and our churches are not exempt from this. Churches are full of tables and our scripture has numerous references to tables. Sacrifices were made on tables in the Temple; the tables were overturned in the Temple by a very angry Jesus. Jesus met with community people and his disciples for meals and to teach. He went to the house of Zacheus to eat together; he went to the home of the mother-in-law of the soldier and immediately after being healed she got up and served him. Jesus performed his first miracle in the presence of the gathered community for a wedding banquet.

Our image of Jesus at Table is most recognised by the image of the Last Supper as portrayed in paintings and drawings throughout history. Take a minute and picture that event now. We know the story very well but we envision the image of Jesus and his followers gathered at a long table with chairs; Jesus in the middle and the disciples on either side of him. This is the image that comes to mind but is not an accurate image of how people ate in ancient times; particularly at such an important meal. People in Jesus time did not sit on chairs at tables.

People of high standing would have dining rooms with "couches" beside them. These couches were not what we think of as today's living room couches, they were more like mats and the guests lay on their sides leaning on their left elbow, eating with their right hand. The table was a round table in the middle of the couches.

(Show picture)

Poorer people lay on straw mats and children sat on stools.

Today, for most of us to think of Table we think of shared meals usually with our family and sometimes with friends. In Jesus time you were to offer food and shelter for any stranger that knocked on your door. This was the Law of Hospitality and it was serious; there were great repercussions if you did not extend yourself and share what you had regardless of how little you may have. Imagine today someone travelling through the area, knocking at your door and expecting to be fed and a bed for the night for free.

Today when family and friends gather the sharing of a meal is almost understood, most of our gatherings include some time of sharing food, or as it is sometimes called Table. We invite people to join us for meals. We gather in our dining rooms and kitchens on special occasions and share a special meal complete with dessert. We may even grace our meal with a prayer; but I would suggest that this kind of meal is no longer the norm for a lot of families. Some of you, no doubt rarely share your mealtime with all your family present.

I can remember mealtime at my house growing up was a family event. We all sat down together to eat; we ate the one meal that had been prepared. Although we had no hard and fast rules at my house around having to eat vegetables even if we didn't like them; but we were encouraged to just try them before we said we didn't like it. There was no TV on during meals until my brother became a reporter for the CBC and then we had the news on just in case Richard had a story airing. But NEVER on Sunday when our main meal was served in the "big" dining room usually with the good dishes and at least one set of grandparents in attendance. Sometimes Sunday dinner was held right after church which meant that Sunday evening was left-overs (usually sandwiches) which could be eaten while watching Walt Disney before going to bed IF all your homework was done. Yes, Sunday's were special days!

Today, many families are so busy running hither and yon that mealtime is rarely eaten together and often includes a drive-thru or some other form of "fast food". Very few families today sit at a table together; very few conversations go on or any sharing of each other's day; and with this researchers have wondered if we have not created some kind of disconnect because of this.

Here are some of the things they found:

- research has continually confirmed that eating meals as a family affects nearly every area of a child's life. Kids who eat regular family meals get better school grades, are better off psychologically, receive better nutrition, don't smoke as much or do drugs, and are less sexually active as teens. A 1996 Harvard study showed that family dinners were more important than play, story time and other family events in language development.
- adults and children who enjoy more frequent family meals have fewer weight problems.
- a quarter (25%) says that they eat alone at least three nights a week, and a quarter (23%) agrees that sometimes it feels like their family is a disconnected group of individuals living under one roof. They want more and better family connections.
- They found that it's not only the quantity of family meals that contributes to their life satisfaction, but also the quality of meals. For years, experts on family meals have preached turning off the TV -- but now texting, iPhones, and game players also compete with family dinner. Seven in 10 people (69%) say that some other activity is happening at the same time as the typical family dinner, with watching

television topping the list, and six in 10 (58%) point to some type of technology or entertainment-related distraction.

- President Obama told Time magazine that seeing his kids every day and having dinner with them every night is "the thing that sustains me."

The importance of coming together at Table is upheld in our churches as well. In the United Church we do not do communion as often as some other denominations but it is still central to our understanding of who we are and what we believe. Jesus told us he was the bread of life, a bread that sustains us in good times and in bad. The bread that will not just fill us physically but spiritually as well.

When we gather to share bread in this way we are acknowledging that we are all invited, we are all a part of something bigger than ourselves. This table is open to anyone who comes to it with an open heart.

I asked Diane one day if our house was burning what would she save. To my surprise her answer was our table. I said, "that is weird why on earth would you save the table?" and she said "because I have so many wonderful memories around it." I hadn't thought of that before, memories are made and held around our tables.

Today we have the chance to make a memory around this table as we join with the World in celebrating this bread of life.

Amen