



Nov/Dec 2022

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

*Wonders*  
OF THE  
*Incarnation*

ALSO: THE JESUS-MEAL

Friends:

On the night before he died for us, Jesus took bread, broke it, and gave pieces to his disciples. Then he passed around a cup of wine for everyone to share. With this “last meal,” Jesus established a reminder and assurance that all who share this communion meal in memory of him belong to him and to each other.



During November, Pastor Kristopher Walhof, who trains pastors in rural Kenya, leads us in exploring the Lord's Supper. We discover in these meditations the hidden depths of Jesus' sacrifice for us. They remind us that when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, Jesus comforts and challenges us to be his body in this world.

And, fittingly, as we celebrate Christmas in December, Pastor Bob Arbogast explores with us the meaning of the *incarnation*. This unusual word refers to Jesus, the Son of God, coming to live among us “in the flesh.” Jesus became one of us, a human being, and he was like us in every way. He needed food and sleep. He had muscle aches and headaches. He also experienced joy, sorrow, frustration, and anger—and yet he did not sin. Jesus was both fully God *and* fully human, and he is the only one who can save us from sin and death. Celebrating Jesus in this way, we can fully experience the joy of Christmas.

May you be refreshed, refocused, and renewed in God's Word!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kurt Selles". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kurt Selles

# Today

Nov/Dec 2022

refresh, refocus, renew



**“The Jesus-Meal”  
Kristopher Walhof**



**“Wonders of the  
Incarnation”  
Bob Arbogast**

**Managing Editor:** Jeff Bulthuis  
**Executive Editor:** Kurt Selles

TODAY (USPS 185-140), Volume 72, Number 6, published bimonthly by ReFrame Ministries, formerly Back to God Ministries International, at 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407. Periodicals postage paid at Grand Rapids, Michigan, and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to Today, 1700 28th Street SE, Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407.

Copyright © 2022, Reframe Ministries. Printed in U.S.A.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations in this publication are from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

Cover photo: Lightstock



**ReFrame  
Ministries**

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

# november

## The Jesus-Meal

**Kristopher Walhof**

Jesus' Passover meal with his disciples took a surprising turn when he spoke some cryptic words over the bread and wine. Taking the bread, he said, "This is my body." And then, taking the wine, he said, "This is my blood."

Most of what Jesus meant by these words was revealed to his disciples the next day as he went willingly to die a horrible death on a cross. But that is not the end of the story. His dead body was placed in a tomb, and on the third day he came out of the tomb, alive!

Over the past two thousand years, more words have been spoken and more ink has been spilled (along with blood, Lord forgive us) about the Lord's Supper than about almost any other topic in church history. This meal is dense with meaning and rich in significance. And a careful reading of this story along with the rest of Scripture can show us the power of this seemingly simple meal.

During November let's *begin* to explore this meal Jesus gave us and why it matters so much for each of us, for the church, and for the whole world.

*Kristopher Walhof is a minister in the Christian Reformed Church who lives with his wife and seven-year-old son in rural Kenya. He teaches Bible and theology courses to theological students seeking ordination in the Africa Inland Church (AIC) denomination.*

## QUESTIONS AND CURIOSITY

*"When your children ask you, 'What does this ceremony mean to you?' then tell them, 'It is the Passover sacrifice to the LORD. . . .'"*  
—Exodus 12:26-27

A few years ago at a Good Friday worship service, my wife and I enjoyed the whispers we overheard as the pastor broke a loaf of bread and poured juice from a pitcher into a cup.

A little girl stood on her seat near us, peeking over the heads of the people in front of her. Suddenly she turned to her mom and asked, "What is that?" as the juice was poured out. She was told, "That is Jesus' blood. It helps us remember that Jesus died for us." The little girl paused to consider this, and then, perhaps not entirely satisfied with the answer, she turned to her dad and asked the same question. This time she was told, "It is some grape juice." She then turned back to her mom and said, "It's just juice!"

Little did this young child realize that she was stepping

into a complex and intense conversation that has been going on for thousands of years.

I loved hearing her questions and seeing her curiosity. I hope we all can engage with questions and curiosity this month as we think about this beautiful, mysterious meal that Jesus gave us to remember him by. I like to call it "the Jesus-meal."

What do you think? Is it really "just juice" and "just bread" that we take in at the Lord's Supper (communion)? Or is there more to this simple meal than meets the eye?

Heavenly Father, whether we are very young or very old, we are all your children. Stir in us a deep curiosity about all that you want to teach us. In Jesus, Amen.

## SIMPLE BUT SACRED

*"This [bread] is my body, which is for you. . . . This cup is the new covenant in my blood. . . ." —1 Corinthians 11:24-25*

If you have seen or participated in the Lord's Supper (communion) in a church service, you'll probably remember the pastor breaking bread and pouring wine or juice into a cup.

Take a moment to reflect on these images.

Some of the holiday meals we enjoy, or grand celebrations—such as weddings or anniversaries—might have different courses and many kinds of food. But the Lord's Supper, the Jesus-meal, looks quite simple in comparison. Even if this meal takes place in a great cathedral, it has only two parts—bread (or wafers) and wine (or juice).

Even so, probably more ink has been used to explain this meal than almost any other topic in church history. And there is good reason for that. There are important questions worth ask-

ing—and perhaps answering, if we are able.

What did Jesus really mean when he said, "This [bread] is my body," and, "This cup is . . . my blood"? How might Jesus be present with us when we eat this meal? Why did Jesus tell his followers to celebrate this meal regularly? Why does this meal matter at all?

You see, this meal is truly special. In the church we even call it "sacred." Spend some time reflecting and talking with others about some of these questions.

Lord Jesus, your disciples were often puzzled by your words and actions. And, if we are honest, we are sometimes puzzled too. Still, we thank you for this sacred meal. In your name we pray. Amen.

## A MEAL WITH MANY NAMES

*After taking the cup, he gave thanks. . . . And he took bread, [and] gave thanks. . . .*  
—Luke 22:17-19

The simple but sacred meal that we call the Lord's Supper has several different names.

Many people simply call this meal the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:20). We do this because Jesus, our Lord, our God and King, gave us this meal. Many followers of Christ also call this meal "communion" because in this celebration they commune with the Lord and with each other, united in love, faith, and hope in Christ and all of God's promises.

Many Christians also call this meal "the Eucharist," which basically means "thanksgiving." When Jesus celebrated this meal with his disciples, he gave thanks to God for it. And ever since then, the church has given thanks to God for providing this meal.

Early Christians had another name for this meal too, call-

ing it the "love feast" or "agape feast" (see Jude 12). In some cases this may have included a larger fellowship meal along with the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Why did they call it this? Because it showed that Jesus loved his followers so much that he was willing to die to defeat sin and death for them.

At this meal we have the opportunity to say that we love God too. And as we pass the food and drink to each other, we acknowledge that we love (or are trying to love) the people in our church family too.

Lord, we thank you for this meal by which you not only remind us of your love but also call us to experience your love and share it with others. We love you too. Amen.

## A HOLIDAY MEAL

*"The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you."*

—Exodus 12:13

One of the fun things about celebrating holidays is that we often enjoy special foods that we might not have at other times of the year.

What are some foods or drinks that you enjoy on special days?

When Jesus first gave his disciples the special meal that we call the Lord's Supper, they were actually already celebrating a holiday called Passover.

Hundreds of years earlier the Israelites had been slaves in Egypt. But the Lord rescued them through a number of powerful acts. On the day that God led them out of Egypt, the Israelites prepared a lamb as a sacrifice, and they spread the lamb's blood on the doorframes of their houses as God had told them to. Then God allowed a plague of death to pass through Egypt, taking the first-born of every household, but

the plague "passed over" all the homes where the doorframes were covered with blood, and the firstborn in those families were spared.

Every year after that, God's people celebrated a special Passover meal, and Jesus and his friends did the same. But on this particular Passover, things were different. God was again rescuing his people, and this time he was preparing Jesus to rescue them from sin, death, and evil. On this Passover, Jesus took the place of the lamb, once and for all, and he was the only first-born who died. And today we, his followers, are marked by his blood so that we can escape death and have life in him.

Lord, thank you for rescuing us from sin, death, and evil. Help us to live for you. Amen.

## WAYBREAD

*The dough was without yeast because they had been driven out of Egypt and did not have time to prepare food for themselves.*

—Exodus 12:39

Perhaps you have read or heard of *The Lord of the Rings* stories by J.R.R. Tolkien. Maybe you have also seen the movies. In these stories, a group of friends takes a long journey to destroy a magic ring that is packed with evil power. Their journey is difficult and dangerous.

To sustain them on their journey, the friends are given a special food called *lembas*, also described as “waybread.” It is simple and compact, and it supplies more energy than the travelers would expect.

When the Israelites were about to leave Egypt, God told them to make *unleavened* bread. This bread was made without yeast so that the people would not have to wait for it to rise. It was flat and compact, and it would give them energy for their long journey ahead. The uniqueness

of this bread would continue to remind the people that God would take care of them.

These stories remind me of the Lord’s Supper. The food and drink are very simple, but they remind us of God’s power, which is far greater than we might expect. Jesus told us to eat this meal in memory of him because we need spiritual sustenance for the journey of the Christian life, which can be difficult and dangerous. This meal strengthens us spiritually, reminding us that God is near and will see us through.

Lord, you know that our life journey can be dangerous. Thank you for drawing near to us and sustaining us. Amen.

## THE TRINITY MEAL

*The LORD appeared to Abraham. . . . Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. . . .* —Genesis 18:1-2

Some stories in the Bible include mysterious details. For example, in Genesis 18 the narrator says that the Lord appeared to Abraham, and then when Abraham looked, he saw three men. Hmm, did these three men *represent* the Lord? We know that God does not have a body, let alone three bodies, for he is spirit. But apparently God could appear in the form of a person. And were the other two angels, or were they maybe some other heavenly beings?

We do not have definite answers to these questions. But Abraham recognized these visitors as important, bowing down to them. And he and his wife Sarah prepared a meal for them. At that meal God announced that Abraham and Sarah would have a child.

Through the centuries, some Christians have suggested

that perhaps the appearance of three visitors to Abraham and Sarah was meant to point forward to a revelation that is made clearer in the New Testament: that God is three persons, the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

This story in Genesis, mysterious as it is, also provides a lesson to remember when we come to the Lord's table. At the Lord's Supper, God comes *especially* close. The Holy Spirit unites us with Jesus and the Father. And at this meal God promises again and again to give us life—abundant life with him that begins now and continues forever.

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, thank you for drawing us close and promising the gift of life as we eat at your table. Amen.

## A WEDDING SUPPER

*The master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He . . . said, “. . . You have saved the best [wine] till now.”*  
—John 2:9-10

Things seemed to be going fine at the wedding party until someone noticed there was no more wine. When Jesus' mother found out, she urged him to help. Had she perhaps seen him do some extraordinary things before? Or did she somehow know that Jesus was about to reveal who he was?

We can imagine Jesus looking around and seeing some large jars that were used for ceremonial washing. Each of those jars held about 20-30 gallons (75-113 liters). So he had the jars filled with water, and quietly, by his power, Jesus transformed that water into wine.

Why did Jesus do this? It likely had something to do with keeping the celebration going. But there is more. In the writings of the Old Testament prophets, a sign of the coming of God's kingdom (when God

would make things right in the world) was an abundance of fine wine. (For example, see Isaiah 25:6-8.)

And when Jesus ate his final supper with his disciples, he suggested that whenever they had bread and wine in memory of him, that would be a *foretaste* of the great banquet at the end of time (see Matthew 26:28-29; Luke 22:30). That banquet will also be a kind of marriage feast in which heaven and earth are joined, as are Christ and his church (Revelation 19:9). And they will never be parted.

Lord, we look forward to the day when you will bring heaven and earth together and make all things right. Amen.

## THE SACRAMENTS: GIFTS OF GRACE

*He got up and was baptized, and after taking some food, he regained his strength.*  
—Acts 9:19

In the Protestant Christian church, we have two “sacraments” (and if you are Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox, you have a few more). What is a “sacrament”? The word *sacrament* refers to something that is “sacred” and set apart in a way that somehow connects us to God.

The two sacraments celebrated in Protestant churches are baptism and the Lord’s Supper. These are two practices that Jesus specifically told his followers to continue. And by these two sacraments God communicates his grace to believers. It is often said that sacraments are a “visible sign of God’s invisible grace.” And baptism and the Lord’s Supper communicate different aspects of God’s grace.

Baptism points to the washing away of sin. And when a believer goes down into the

water and emerges, that person is following a path like Jesus, going down into death and rising up to a new, indestructible life. This is God’s way of bringing sinful humans into his covenant family, the church, and marking them as his own.

And through the Lord’s Supper, God gives us spiritual food to strengthen us in faith and sustain us in the Christian life. The Lord’s Supper reminds us of the promises that God and the church make to us in our baptism.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for the sacraments, by which you invite us into your family and then feed us at your table so that we can serve you in the world by the power of your love. Amen.

## NOW, AND NOT YET

*"Now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him. . . ."*

—1 John 3:2

When God led his people out of slavery in Egypt, he instructed them to make bread without yeast. God was coming soon to rescue them, he said, and there wouldn't be time to wait around for the bread to rise. Further, they needed simple, compact bread for the journey. Today some churches use unleavened bread at the Lord's Supper to symbolize that they too are people on a journey as they follow God to serve him in this world.

On the other hand, some churches choose to emphasize hope in God's coming kingdom, in which we are promised an abundance of good things, symbolized by the richest of foods and the finest of wines (Isaiah 25:6-9). So they use bread made with yeast, risen and baked just right, to reflect that even in our broken world today we can experi-

ence and even taste a bit of the new world that Christ will bring when he comes again.

Theologians sometimes talk about living in the "now, and not yet." Christ has come to defeat sin, death, and evil once for all. And yet we wait for him to complete the job. So whether we use leavened or unleavened bread—both can help us reflect on our place in God's great plans for the world.

Lord, living in the time between your first and second comings can be uncomfortable. We rejoice in your victory, but we long for you to fulfill it completely. Till then, we thank you for food to sustain us. Amen.

## GOOD THINGS

*In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.*  
—Genesis 2:9

In the beginning, as God developed his new world, he formed a garden in which he could live in loving partnership with human beings. God wanted humans to flourish, and he wanted creation to flourish through their care for it. In the Garden of Eden human beings lived together in harmony with the rest of creation, serving and communing with God.

There humans were free to eat from any tree they wanted—except one called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Maybe you know how this story goes—humans disobeyed God and ate the forbidden fruit, bringing chaos into God's good world (Genesis 3).

Why did they eat the fruit when they were told not to? Well, it all began with temptation and desire. They were tempted to think that the fruit

would make them like God, knowing good and evil, and they began desiring what was forbidden. They were tempted to think that God was keeping good things from them.

In the Lord's Supper, God is saying, essentially, "No, I am not keeping good things from you. See, just as I did long ago, I give you good things to eat, to heal you and to nourish you. By this gift from my hand, may you realize that you cannot flourish apart from my love."

Father, thank you for your plans for us—not to harm us but to allow us to grow and flourish in your good world. For Jesus' sake, Amen.

## REVERSING THE CURSE

*“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.” —Genesis 3:17*

As we noted yesterday, God placed human beings in a garden sanctuary where God could live and work with them to bring about the flourishing of his world.

But through the deceit of the serpent, humans were tempted to disobey God and eat the forbidden fruit. They desired to be “like God, knowing good and evil.” But the hidden reality was that, unlike God, human beings could only know good and evil by becoming a mingled mess of good and evil. As they ingested the fruit, brokenness moved into every part of their being.

Genesis describes the brokenness that followed as a “curse,” especially in relationships. Humans’ relationships with themselves, with one another, with nature, and with God became damaged. At the same time, though, God pro-

nounced that someday the serpent, along with the curse of sin and death, would be defeated.

And in the finished work of Jesus on the cross and by his resurrection, all of that became true. Now the curse is being undone. And when we eat the Jesus-meal, the Lord’s Supper, our damaged relationships can begin to mend. We receive God’s restoring nourishment in our own lives, and we share the meal with one another. In addition, from the cursed ground we can still grow good food by which God communicates his love and care for us.

Lord Jesus, thank you for the love by which you gave yourself for us, and for the grace that restores all things. Amen.

## TRUST TRAINING

*“At twilight you will eat meat, and in the morning you will be filled with bread. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God.”*  
—Exodus 16:12

After God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, they soon found themselves out in the desert without food and water. And here the people defaulted to complaining and wondering if God wanted anything good for them.

After being away from slavery for just a short while, their memory got distorted: “Remember Egypt, where we had plenty to eat? Those were the good old days!”

God had done amazing miracles to deliver his people from Egypt. But it would take time and many trials for them to learn to trust God to provide for them each day.

God endured their grumbling and graciously rained down food upon them. In the evening they received quail for meat, and in the morning they discovered thin flakes of a mys-

terious “bread from heaven” on the ground.

My African friends—many of whom know what it means to have to trust God for “daily bread”—often say, “God makes a way where there is no way.”

When we come to the Lord’s table, we receive the miraculous gift of grace in the form of bread and wine (or juice). This simple practice can actually train us in the discipline of trusting God.

God takes care of his people.

Lord, trusting you does not come naturally to us. Thank you for enduring our grumbling and impatience and for showing us, again and again, that you will take care of us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

## “WHAT IS IT?” BREAD

*When the Israelites saw it, they said to each other, “What is it?”  
For they did not know what it was. —Exodus 16:15*

The Israelites in the wilderness had little faith in God’s goodness, and they had little imagination for how God might provide for them. But, just as God had promised, they found “thin flakes like frost” on the desert floor. According to Numbers 11:7-8, these flakes were like coriander seed, and cakes of it tasted like they were made with olive oil. The flakes were whitish-yellow like a resin called bdellium. It is worth noting here that bdellium was one of the valuable resources in Eden (Genesis 2:12, RSV). Perhaps the author was pointing out that just as God provided resources in Eden, God was again providing for his people in the desert.

The Israelites’ first reaction to this substance is understandable: “What is it?” Moses replied that it was bread from God. Eventually it became

known as *manna*, which sounds like the Hebrew for “What is it?” The people did not fully understand this food, but they could still receive it and be nourished by it.

Throughout Christian history many scholars have argued about the bread and wine (or juice) given at the Lord’s Supper. What is it, really? How does God use it to give us spiritual nourishment? These are important discussions that can help us reflect on God’s power and love. But it is more important to eat and drink, remembering that Jesus gave himself for the forgiveness of our sins.

Lord, your ways can be mysterious, but we know that your love is more than enough for us, in Jesus. Amen.

## ANGEL FOOD

*Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."*  
—John 6:35

God had rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, and they soon found themselves in a barren desert without food. But God knew what his people needed before they asked him, and God told Moses that "bread from heaven" would rain down for them (Exodus 16:4). Bread *from heaven*? Really?

Psalms 78 is even more descriptive: "[God] opened the doors of the heavens; he rained down manna for the people to eat, he gave them the grain of heaven. Human beings ate the bread of angels. . . ." (vv. 24-25).

In John 6, Jesus compares himself to this heavenly bread. Jesus too came from heaven to earth. He too came to give life to humanity. He even says, "Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life."

Our receiving of Christ into our lives is reflected in our reception of the heavenly food he gives us in the Lord's Supper.

Though we are not "saved" by eating and drinking the Lord's Supper, eating and drinking the Lord's Supper helps us grow ever deeper into the abundant Christ-life that God gives us.

Lord Jesus, each day, and especially when you give us your heavenly food, may we receive you and all your good gifts, that we may have full life forever with you. Amen.

## WHERE IS HEAVEN?

*He was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.*  
—Acts 1:9

Let me ask you a question:  
*Where* is heaven?

This is not an easy question to answer. But perhaps your first reaction is to look *up*, or maybe to point *up* with your finger. This is how the ancients thought about heaven. But we humans today have been to outer space, and we know it stretches farther than we can imagine—and we have not found God’s throne floating around out there.

After his death and resurrection Jesus *ascended* into heaven. He was “taken up” from the ground, and “a cloud hid him” from the sight of his followers. Jesus went *up* and *behind* something to somewhere. So while heaven may be *up*, it is also apparently a dimension that exists behind or beyond our three-dimensional world. Perhaps heaven is actually quite near to us, just beyond

a veil or curtain in our 3-D world.

Even more important, though, we can experience a bit of heaven whenever God draws us close. One of the ways this can happen is when the church gathers for worship. And I think Christ draws us especially close when we take part in the meal he has given us. In the actions of receiving and giving bread and wine (or juice), when Christ tells us that these elements are his body and blood and we are spiritually nourished, heaven and earth intersect, and we are blessed and strengthened.

Christ our Lord, thank you for drawing us close and allowing us to experience a bit of heaven when gather to eat at your table. Amen.

## UP

*Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. . . .* —Philippians 3:20

One of my favorite movies is the animated film *Up*. In this film, an old man named Carl attaches thousands of helium filled balloons to his house, which then takes him and his young friend Russell *up* and *away* to fantastical adventures.

Before eating the Lord's Supper, Christians in some traditions pray these words, "We lift up our hearts to the Lord."

After Jesus died and was raised to life again, he ascended *up* and *away* to heaven. But Jesus is never far away from his people, especially when they worship, hear God's Word, and eat the meal he gave them.

But this leads to a practical question: when we eat this meal together, does Jesus come *down* from heaven to meet with us on earth? John Calvin, a French pastor who lived 500 years ago, answered, "No. Actually,

through the mysterious power of the Holy Spirit, we, the church, are pulled *up* to heaven to meet with Jesus." So even as we sit in worship, somehow our space has been pulled up to overlap with heaven. Some theologians have called this Calvin's "virtual" theory of the Lord's Supper.

Someday, when Jesus comes again, heaven will come *down* to earth with him, and all who believe in him will be able to live with him. Then, with heaven and earth completely overlapping, all creation will be renewed, and we will enjoy full life with the Lord forever (Revelation 21-22).

Lord, may your kingdom fully come on earth as it is in heaven. Till then, draw us *up* to you by your Spirit. Amen.

## FOOD FIT FOR A PRIEST

*You are . . . a royal priesthood . . . that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.*  
—1 Peter 2:9

Here's a question: What was the main job of a priest in the Bible?

The priest's role was to serve as a mediator between God and the people, approaching God on behalf of the people and helping the people to receive God's instruction and blessing.

The priests of God's people were appointed to teach God's law, explaining how to live in relationship with the holy God, turning away from sin and seeking to live God's way. In Exodus 19:6 we read that God called his people to be a whole nation of priests so that they could bring God's blessings to the nations.

In the New Testament, this same mission is given to the church. The church is made up of all people who follow Jesus, who is both our great high priest (Hebrews 4:14-16) and

our Savior from sin (Matthew 1:21). By his death on a cross, he paid the price of our sin to reconcile us with God and to give us new life forever with him.

Through Jesus, God has provided for each one of us the way out of sin to full life.

Heavenly Father, when we eat the Lord's Supper, recognizing Jesus' gift of himself for our sake, may we know your justice and mercy so that we, your priests, may be enlivened to share your good news with the world. Amen.

## WHAT DOES LOVE TASTE LIKE?

*I have calmed and quieted myself, I am like a weaned child with its mother; like a weaned child I am content.* —Psalm 131:2

Here is an unusual question: What does love taste like?

Maybe you associate love with a special food you enjoy on a particular holiday. Or maybe it has to do with a dish that is made “just right” by a family member or a friend.

As human beings, many of us first learn the concept of love not through someone *explaining* it to us but through food that we can taste and enjoy.

When a baby is born, one of the first things it learns to expect regularly is milk or a milk substitute. It tastes good, and it makes them feel satisfied, content, and safe. As the child receives this loving gift again and again, their brain develops. In particular, a region of the brain develops that allows them to trust the giver. And when they trust the giver, they learn to love.

When you and I regularly taste the bread and juice of the Jesus-meal, our whole being can learn how to love the Lord our giver. We can feel satisfied, content, and safe. We grow to trust the Lord, and we learn how to love God, our Creator and sustainer, who always takes care of us.

Lord and God, may we always taste and see that you are good. May we continue to grow in faith, hope, and love for Jesus' sake. Amen.

## YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

*Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?*  
—1 Corinthians 10:16

Have you heard the expression “You are what you eat”? What does that really mean?

When someone says this, they are generally talking about nutrition: if we eat good, nutritious food, our bodies will be healthier than if we eat a lot of non-nutritious junk food.

When he gave us the Lord’s Supper, Jesus taught that this meal was his “body” and his “blood.” So if we follow the logic of becoming what we eat, we might say that we become more like him when we eat the Jesus-bread and drink the Jesus-juice. That’s because when we participate in this meal, we reflect on Jesus’ self-giving sacrifice and we seek to live as he calls us to, showing God’s love everywhere and sharing the good news of salvation through Christ.

Another important aspect of this meal is that we eat it to-

gether, in community as one body. In its basic practice, the Jesus-meal teaches us the basics of how to be a Christian community.

We receive the bread and juice from pastors and elders and perhaps fellow church members. This helps us learn how to receive God’s gift of grace in community. Sharing the food and drink with one another, we learn to share God’s grace with one another. In a real and miraculous sense, then, through this meal we are becoming ever more the body of Christ. We are what we eat.

Lord, by your grace and the power of your Spirit, may we become your feet, hands, mouth, and body to serve the world, that the world may know your love. Amen.

**TABLE MANNERS: DISCERNING THE BODY**

*Those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. —1 Corinthians 11:29*

A major problem the apostle Paul had to deal with in the Corinthian church was this: some members of the church were gorging themselves on the communion bread and getting drunk on the wine, and they were leaving others without any bread or wine to share!

These new believers in Christ needed to learn that this was not what the Lord desired. He wanted them to take the bread and wine with thankfulness and reverence. After all, Jesus called these elements his “body” and his “blood,” and then he offered his life as a sacrifice for his church.

When the Israelites received manna in the desert, they were told to gather not too much or too little, but just what they needed (Exodus 16:16-18). Paul wanted the same for the Corinthian church: receive what you need from God’s

generosity and, in turn, be generous to others.

Otherwise, said Paul, they were not “discerning the body of Christ,” and they were eating and drinking “judgment on themselves.” In other words, when people do not humbly reflect on the meaning of the bread and wine (Christ’s gracious gift of himself to pay for all our sins), they disrespect both the gift and the giver, “sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.”

So when we come to the table, may we humbly acknowledge the gift of Christ our Savior, and may we be thankful.

Lord Christ, help us to reflect on the meaning and beauty of your sacrifice for us. Give us humility and joy. In your name, Amen.

**TABLE MANNERS: THE POOR**

*My brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.*  
—1 Corinthians 11:33

As we noted yesterday, the apostle Paul was dealing with a major problem in the Corinthian church. Some people were gorging themselves on the communion bread and wine and leaving others with none. Paul explained that when people did this, they were not “discerning the body of Christ.”

As believers, we need to reflect well on Jesus’ gift of himself to pay for our sins, and we need to share with one another in thanks for all that the Lord has shared with us.

Another way to look at this may be that Paul was also showing particular concern for poorer members of the church. When those who were wealthy consumed most of the bread and wine, the poor, the most vulnerable, were left without. And Paul was saying that the people who were do-

ing that were not participating in the *Lord’s* Supper. After all, the Lord Jesus always showed concern for the poor—and as followers of Christ, so should we.

So when we come to the Lord’s table, we must recognize that our relationship with God is personal but never private. How we treat the “least of these” (Matthew 25:40) in our church reflects our relationship with God. We must ask, Is everyone in our church being cared for, and built up? If someone is being ignored or overlooked, how can we make things right, for Jesus’ sake?

Lord Jesus, you cared and provided for the poor and built them up. May we, your church, reflect your character. In your name, Amen.

## FOOD FOR THE HUNGRY

*Jesus then took the loaves, gave thanks, and distributed to those who were seated as much as they wanted. He did the same with the fish.*

—John 6:11

In the Bible we learn that God is especially concerned about a few groups of people. That's because these people are often taken advantage of: the poor, orphans, widows, and foreigners. And Jesus, the Son of God, who is fully human and fully God, showed the same concern for these groups.

In particular, Jesus fed the poor in abundant and miraculous ways. One of the marks of God's kingdom is that everyone should have enough, or as John 6:11 says, "as much as they wanted."

When Jesus gave the Lord's Supper to his disciples, he did that to feed them physically and spiritually. And we should know that in the early church, this sacred meal was often celebrated as an actual meal, not just with a small bit of bread and wine (or juice),

as many do in their church services today. Perhaps our churches would do well to pass out ample slices of bread, and full cups of juice so that people could truly experience God's generosity (but I digress).

Because Jesus has been so generous to us, we are empowered and encouraged to be generous to others.

As you receive Christ's gifts in the Lord's Supper, try to hold hungry people in your mind and heart—including people you know in your local community and people you don't know in other parts of the world.

Lord, you clearly love the poor, caring for all who are disadvantaged. Give us the same heart. In your name, Amen.

## BE RECONCILED

*"If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you. . . . First go and be reconciled to them. . . ."* —Matthew 5:23-24

When Jesus was asked, "Which is the greatest commandment . . . ?" he quoted Deuteronomy 6:5, saying we should love the Lord with all our heart, soul, and mind. And he didn't stop there. He also quoted from Leviticus 19:18: "Love your neighbor as yourself," saying that this second commandment is like the first. What did he mean by this?

Jesus knew that we humans cannot love God in an isolated relationship. We cannot love God and despise people created in God's image. In fact, perhaps the clearest way that we can show our love for God is to love other human beings, whom he loves.

And how do we love people well? By coming again and again to God in prayer and in learning from his Word. In the Bible we discover God's char-

acter, and, guided by the Holy Spirit, we can show by our words and actions what we have learned about God's love.

Jesus also explained that if we are worshiping God and seeking to do his will, and we remember there is something broken in our relationship with another person, we should try to find forgiveness or reconciliation with that person. Then we will be in the right space for loving God with all our heart, soul, and mind.

Father in heaven, as I come to you and seek to serve you, by your love and grace guide me to reconcile with others whom I have wronged. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## ENEMIES AT THE TABLE

*Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me."*  
—Matthew 26:23

Jesus reminded us that our relationship with God and our relationships with people are connected. So when we approach the Lord's table, we should be sure to reflect on our relationship with God *and* with the people in our church family—and beyond.

But what if we are in conflict with a brother or sister, despite our efforts to forgive and/or seek forgiveness? The apostle Paul says in Romans 12:18, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." But if a conflict with someone is not resolved and they are not interested in forgiveness or reconciliation, what can you do? Can you still participate in the Lord's Supper with this broken relationship in your life? Generally, I think you can—if you truly have done all you can to try to reconcile with the

person and you have kept the door open to deeper reconciliation (since forgiveness can be a long process).

After all, let us remember who was present at Jesus' final meal. Jesus knew that everyone there would soon abandon him in his hour of greatest need. And one of those disciples would betray him for money. And yet Jesus remained with them, loved them, and served them this sacred meal. The fact that God in Christ loved each of us while we were yet his enemies and sinners (Romans 5:6-11) is very good news for us all.

Lord, we have sinned against you, and yet you forgive us and feed us. Help us to reflect your grace to others. Amen.

## THE FAMILY TABLE

*"All peoples on earth will be blessed through you."*

—Genesis 12:3

Many years ago a man received a message from God, and God basically adopted this man. Later God gave him the name *Abraham*, which means "father of many." And yet Abraham had no children. Then God promised to bless Abraham with many children, and somehow, in some way, through Abraham's family, God would bless all the peoples of the earth.

God stayed true to his promises to bless the world's peoples through Abraham, even though Abraham's descendants were quite dysfunctional. And God surprised everyone by keeping his promises through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, a descendant of Abraham. It turns out that Jesus was the Savior not only for God's adopted people but also for all other peoples as well. And by faith, by trusting

in Jesus, people from all nations, tribes, and languages can be adopted into God's family.

So when we come to the Lord's table, it is a family table. Just as we do not get to choose our families and all our relatives, there may well be people in our church family whom we might not have chosen. But God chose them—and us—to be a part of his family together. So we belong to God but also to each other. And at this family table there is grace.

Father, thank you for accepting us into your family. Just as you have received us in grace, help us do the same for one another. In Jesus' name, Amen.

## AN INTERNATIONAL MEAL

*The nations will walk by [God's glorious] light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into [the city of God].*

—Revelation 21:24

Years ago, my wife and I were a part of a church that had a weekly community meal. Anyone and everyone was invited. The variety of different people who showed up simply because there was good food and good fellowship was amazing. Little babies and gray heads, men and women, people in different income brackets, and people from different countries and ethnic backgrounds. Many of these people brought unique meals to share.

This often reminded me of John's beautiful vision of life in the city of God: people from all nations and languages flood into God's renewed city on earth, each one bringing the best of their culture into it, to praise God and to bless others. And because the Spirit of God gives a foretaste of what Christ will do when he returns, I believe we can experience, even

now, a bit of what John saw in his vision.

When you gather with other believers for a meal—and perhaps even for the Jesus-meal—are there ways you can honor and identify with the cultures of the people in your church family? For example, different kinds of bread or juice might enrich our sense of welcome. In Kenya, where I live, grape juice is not readily available, so sometimes people have used an orange drink for the Lord's Supper! Also, let's remember folks who are not yet a part of God's family. All are invited to join!

Lord, you have gathered many different people into your body, the church. We praise you in Jesus' name. Amen.

## WITH

*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

—John 1:14

One fundamental truth of God's long history with human beings is simply this: God loves to be *with* people.

In the beginning, God walked with humans in the garden (Genesis 3:8). And when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and invited chaos into God's good world, God went to find them when they hid from him.

When God rescued his people from slavery in Egypt, he journeyed with them in cloud and fire, and God literally pitched his tent, the tabernacle, in the center of their community.

When we first hear of the coming Messiah in Isaiah 7:14, we learn that he will be called *Immanuel*, which means "God with us" (Matthew 1:23). And when Jesus entered human history, taking on our flesh and blood, John 1 says he "made his dwelling among us." The

literal wording there is that he "pitched his tent," or "tabernacled," among us. And now the Lord has sent his Spirit to live in us—and to move among us in our dysfunctional churches.

Being together and eating together is a sign of welcome, respect, and a desire for peace. Jesus eats with everyone: religious leaders, tax collectors, prostitutes, the rich, the poor—all kinds of sinners.

At the Lord's table, Jesus invites all kinds of flawed, broken, sinful people to eat with him. God loves to be *with* us.

Lord, thank you for coming to live with us, and for sending your Spirit to live in us, giving us your life. May we live for you. Amen.

## THE FOOTWASHING KING

*"Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet."* —John 13:14

John 13 shows us that during Jesus' final Passover meal with his disciples, he got up and washed their feet. This was ordinarily the job of a slave or a servant. And in that day, people wore sandals and walked along dusty roads with animals. Filthy feet could ruin people's appetites at a holiday meal.

One of my seminary professors encouraged his students to pay attention to the *verbs* describing Jesus' actions in this passage. In these verbs we get a picture of Jesus' mission and purpose. Jesus "*got up* from the meal, *took off* his outer clothing, and *wrapped* a towel around his waist"—and he proceeded to "*wash* his disciples' feet." Then, afterward, "he *put on* his clothes and *returned* to his place."

What is the bigger picture? Jesus *got up* from his heavenly

throne, *took off* his heavenly glory, and *wrapped* himself in our flesh and blood. Through his life, death, and resurrection, he *washed* away his people's sins. Then he ascended to heaven, *put on* his heavenly glory, and *returned* to his place with God on the throne.

Through the power of the Spirit and by following Jesus' example, we too can serve one another at the Jesus-meal and wherever he calls us to go.

Dear Jesus, our King who became a slave for our sake, we praise you for this story that humbles us, inspires us, and empowers us for service in your kingdom. In your name we pray. Amen.

## BROKEN BREAD, OPEN EYES

*When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him. . . . —Luke 24:30-31*

This story in Luke 24 is mysterious. During the previous week, Jesus had eaten his final Passover meal with his disciples and had washed their feet. Then he had been arrested and crucified. But on Sunday morning some women who had gone to visit his tomb had said they had seen Jesus, alive!

Now two of Jesus' followers were walking along the road to another town, and a stranger joined them. They told him of the tragic events of the previous week. The man then shocked them by teaching from the Scriptures that all these things had to happen to the Messiah, the Savior of God's people.

When they reached the town, the two invited the man to stay with them. As they began to eat together, the man "took bread, gave thanks, broke it

and began to give it to them." Then "their eyes were opened and they recognized him"—their Lord Jesus was alive! And then he disappeared.

The two said later that their hearts were "burning within" them as Jesus walked with them and taught them from the Scriptures. But it was not until he broke the bread that he became known to them.

Similarly, our hearts can burn within us as we learn the Scriptures, and we can walk with Jesus in the power of his Spirit. But at the Lord's Supper we can encounter the Lord in a profound, unique way.

Lord Jesus, thank you for revealing yourself in the breaking of bread. Fill us with your life to live for you. In your name, Amen.

## CHRISTIAN CANNIBALS?

*"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day."* —John 6:54

In John 6, Jesus compares himself to the *manna* that the Israelites received in the desert (see Exodus 16). Then he says that if anyone wants eternal life, they must eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Was Jesus proposing that his followers *literally* eat him? No.

But perhaps Jesus wanted his words to be shocking to get people's attention. Eating human flesh in a literal way would have been barbaric. But since Jesus' eternal life was somehow symbolized in his flesh and blood, which he would give as an atoning sacrifice for human sin, his followers needed to be willing to receive his sacrifice into themselves by faith in order to receive eternal life.

After Jesus died and rose from the dead, death had no hold on him anymore. And yet he

surprised his disciples by showing them the marks from the wounds in his hands and side. It was as if Jesus was saying, "This is the cost of human sin." But with his hands outstretched and showing the marks of his crucifixion, he was also saying, "I love you this much."

When we come to the meal Jesus gave us, we receive his body and his blood in a symbolic way and in a spiritual way. The Holy Spirit connects us to the risen, flesh-and-blood Jesus in heaven, and we are connected anew with his once-for-all sacrifice for us.

Lord Jesus, we praise you for your sacrifice, which gives us full, eternal life with you. Help us to live for you each day. Amen.



**A Spirit-led marriage and family ministry and online community.**



Discover encouraging articles, ebooks, supportive social media groups, and live retreats.

**FamilyFire.com**



RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED  
PORT DE RETOUR GARANTI

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew



**ReFrame**  
Ministries

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

3475 Mainway  
Burlington, ON L7M 1A9  
P.O. Box 5070, STN LCD 1  
Burlington, ON L7R 3Y8  
905-336-2920  
[info@todaydevotional.com](mailto:info@todaydevotional.com)  
[www.todaydevotional.com](http://www.todaydevotional.com)  
[facebook.com/todaydevotional](https://facebook.com/todaydevotional)

Periodicals postage paid at  
Grand Rapids, Mich., and at  
additional mailing offices.

# Today

refresh, refocus, renew

---



**ReFrame**  
Ministries

---

is the new name of  
Back to God Ministries International

1700 28th Street SE  
Grand Rapids, MI 49508-1407  
800-626-3060  
[info@todaydevotional.com](mailto:info@todaydevotional.com)  
[www.todaydevotional.com](http://www.todaydevotional.com)  
[facebook.com/todaydevotional](https://facebook.com/todaydevotional)

---