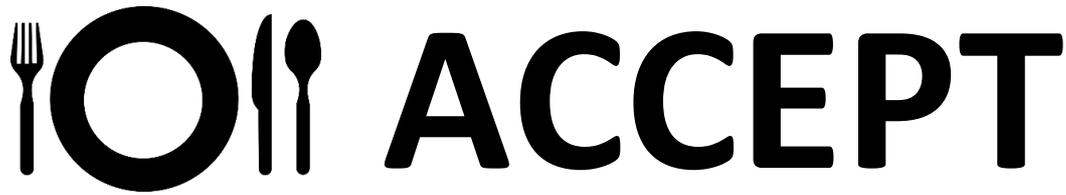


Grace Table Discussion 3



Gather: invite someone, make a stranger a friend, break isolation.

Relate: turn off the TV, sit together, face each other, listen.

Accept: let the table be a place of acceptance and not judgement.

Consecrate: thank God, don't be ashamed to acknowledge the Giver.

Eat: shared meals grow trust, unite enemies, and define us.

HOT GOAT'S CHEESE WITH DATES AND OLIVES! AND A NATURAL ACCOMPANIMENT WOULD BE?

This is a pretty obvious Middle-Eastern meal and truly captures the flavours of ancient Israel. In Christ's time both sheep and goat cheese were used. You can't get this one too wrong!

- Goat's Cheese
 - o I found excellent goat's cheese at Aldi (right near Immanuel Church) but of course we're not promoting any particular supermarket chain – just as long as it is kosher!!! Whatever kind you get, it should be soft and creamy or runny.
- Dates
 - o Dates are in supermarkets at the moment, or substitute them for figs. Figs may be on sale at Wise's Farm, through Palmyra Court right near Immanuel Church.
- Olives
 - o These are a staple food in Israel.
- Flat bread
 - o Broken before eating (or sliced in wedges if you are pedantic about presentation).
- Olive oil
 - o In a bowl for dipping the bread in. This is how it was done.

If you are game you can attempt to carefully heat up the goat's cheese first in the oven. It's easier in the microwave but not as authentic. Then place it in the centre of the platter. It would be more authentic if your cheese is heated. Be careful with the heating – it's easy to overdo it!

SOME DISCUSSION STARTERS

What is the strangest meal you have had?

Who have you eaten with that was really memorable?

Would you invite a stranger to eat in your house? When? How? Why?

LUKE 19:1-10 – DWELLING IN THE WORD

This week try “Dwelling In The Word”. This can be very challenging at first, but it’s worth trying. Make sure everyone understands the process before trying it.

- 1. Start with a prayer inviting the Holy Spirit to guide you.**
- 2. Read the Bible out loud.**
- 3. All sit quietly with it for at least five minutes.**
 - Just relax and read it over a few times
 - Don’t stress about finding anything in it – it’s not a performance
 - When you find something that strikes you, repeat it a bit in your head, sit with it
- 4. Get into pairs and share one thing you noticed in the Word.**
 - If you have nothing that is fine – it’s easier for your partner
 - It doesn’t have to be profound, it could just be some words you liked or a question
 - Your partner may like to take notes if they feel they will have trouble remembering
- 5. Now back in the large group – each share one thing *your partner* said.**
 - Please don’t judge your partner’s ability to remember what you said
 - Let them use their own words and please don’t correct them

Luke 19:1-10

He entered Jericho and was passing through. ² And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. ³ And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. ⁴ So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. ⁵ And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, hurry down, for I must stay at your house today.” ⁶ So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. ⁷ And when they saw it, they all grumbled, “He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.” ⁸ And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, “Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” ⁹ And Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. ¹⁰ For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”

FOOD RULES?

For human beings eating is often not just about getting energy into our bodies. It's a powerful act when people eat together and it means something. That is why throughout history, human beings have developed rules about eating.

Can you think of some different rules people have about how to eat?

Have you eaten overseas or where the unspoken rules were different? What was it like?

In Christ's day they had all sorts of obsessive rules about eating. But Jesus broke many. Early Christians broke them too. Jesus is not obsessive about these sorts of rules. He is more interested in people. People are more important than rules.

What rules does Jesus break in the following meals?

Mark 2:23

One Sabbath he was going through the grain fields, and as they made their way, his disciples began to pluck heads of grain.

Luke 5:27-29

After this he went out and saw a tax collector named Levi, sitting at the tax booth. And he said to him, "Follow me." And leaving everything, he rose and followed him. And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.

Luke 7:36-39

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's house and reclined at table. And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner."

Mark 14:22-24

And as they were eating [the Passover], he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

That last one is especially amazing – there Jesus doesn't so much 'break' as 'reframe' something. He takes a 1400 year old ritual and changes its meaning entirely. He makes it about himself. He is the fulfilment of that ancient Passover meal – it truly always was about him.

What rule did Jesus break in the story of Zacchaeus? Why?

WHO WILL WE EAT WITH?

What can it mean to eat with someone?

Can you name some meals that have a special meaning?

This week I asked our church leaders to “Dwell In The Word” with the Zacchaeus story. One said:

“This is a story of the power of acceptance. Jesus accepts Zacchaeus for who he is. And that changes everything. One moment of acceptance from Jesus changes Zacchaeus’ whole life. At our work we try to practice that too. We make our work a place of acceptance – for each person to go away knowing they were accepted. The other day we had someone who was saying negative things like “how can you believe in God with all the suffering in the world?” We just prayed and accepted him for who he is - and he turned around. Another regular is mentally ill and disturbed, but that person knows that at our place she will be accepted. The acceptance Jesus gave us we share in the workplace – and we love it!”

My favourite Christian psychologist writes:

“People nurture our growth by being accepting - by offering us what Carl Rogers called “unconditional positive regard”. This is an attitude of grace, an attitude that values us even knowing our failings. It is a profound relief to drop our pretences, confess our worst feelings, and discover that we are still accepted. In a good marriage, a close family, or an intimate friendship, we are free to be spontaneous without fearing the loss of others’ esteem.”

- David G Myers, *Psychology, 9th Edition.*

How does acceptance change lives?

How has acceptance changed your life?

How can our ‘tables’ become places of acceptance?

AN OLD CELTIC TABLE PRAYER

*God in our waking, God in our speaking,
God in our cooking, God in our eating,
God in our playing, God in our digesting,
God in our working, God in our Resting.
When many are hungry, may we eat with humble hearts;
When many are lonely, may we share with joyful hearts.*