

FEAST ON THIS

TABLE TALK FOR FAMILIES



Heather Roth Johnson, editor

Welcome to Lent! We all love food and feasting around the table as a family. So while you do, use this Lenten Devotional, *Feast on This: Table Talk for Families* starting Ash Wednesday, March 6, through Easter Monday, April 22. It's simple to do – read the daily devotional, ask the question, and then pray. You can use this devotional while you eat dinner together, ride in the car, or before bed. The point is time – make time together as a family to remember who God is in your life. Happy Lent!

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Hand

*At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked,
“Who, then, is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”*

MATTHEW 18:1

Take a look at your hands. What are they like? Are they big or small? Smooth or rough? Smudged with dirt or sparkly clean?

This time of year, my hands get really dry. My skin gets cracked and scaly, similar to a lizard’s! Like the rest of me, my hands are not perfect. They can do a lot of cool things, like bake a cake, write a letter, or give a high-five. My hands can fold in prayer, open to give a gift, or pat someone on the back. But my hands can also make mistakes. They drop stuff on the floor, get distracted scrolling through my phone, or forget to pick up the house. Sometimes, I get so angry that my hands want to hurt other people, even though I know it is wrong.

The good news is that God loves us exactly how we are, even if we are scaly or covered in dirt. When we make mistakes, we can turn to God and say we are sorry— and God will forgive us! God promises to love us no matter what. Every time we apologize and are forgiven, we can remember that God gave us our hands, our hearts, and our whole bodies to serve God and other people in our lives. Big or small, adult or child, all of our hands are important in the kingdom of God! What do you use your hands for? How can you use them to help someone today?

Dear God, we are sorry for the mistakes we have made today (*optional: share*). Forgive us and help us to use our hands to love and help others. Amen.

MARCH 7

Oil

*The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail,
according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.*

1 KINGS 16:16

Once a month a small group of people in our community gather to prepare a meal together. The group is diverse: old and young, male and female, white, brown, black and tan, and representing many cultures and nationalities. One of our regular dishes is sambusas, which are triangular shaped pastries filled with meat and spices that are fried in oil. They are delicious! The Somali women make the sambusas. With patience and precision, they roll out the flour shell into perfect triangles; they stuff the shells with their meaty-filling, and they place them in the vat of oil. The rest of us wait to feast on them. One evening, I was invited to learn how to make sambusas. I was nervous. I like to cook, but I am not very good with dough or with a rolling pin. But patient Ifra showed me what to do. Her voice was filled with kindness, and her smile glowed as over and over again I would make small mistakes. It was obvious which sambusas I made and which ones were made by Ifra. After about a half an hour, I got the hang of it. I had this tremendous sense of pride as they applauded my efforts and complimented my work. When we ate our sambusas together that evening, they tasted even better than usual, not because I had made them, but because of the friendship and care that had happened as we prepared this meal together. Elijah, from the Bible verse, knew this friendship. The widow made bread for him from the little bit of oil she had. At first, she refused because there was not enough. But God promised that there would be enough oil. The widow trusted God and together she and Elijah feasted on bread and were sustained by the oil that did not run out. The true gift, besides that of the bread, is that God created a new friendship between Elijah and the widow. Who is your best friend?

Loving God, thank you for oil, for bread, for friendship, and for your love that brings us all together and give us life. Amen

MARCH 8

Dates

Then [David] gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women.

And all the people went to their homes.

2 SAMUEL 6:19

This is from the story when David brings the Ark of the Lord back to the people of Israel. And he does the things they did in worship: made sacrifices, danced, and praised God. Then David blessed the people and gave them food to take home and enjoy. Each person – young and old – got a cake of dates and a cake of raisins. These kinds of cakes remind me not of Easter but fruitcake from Christmas! But whatever season, there is always special foods, cakes, and sweets. As we prepare our souls for the resurrected Christ, pray and eat. Rejoice together for his coming is near. What kinds of food do you eat when you are celebrating God or God's grace?

Loving God, thank you for all the ways you give us to celebrate you, including sweet food to enjoy. Amen.

MARCH 9

Acorn

*Our hope is that, as your faith increases,
our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged.*

2 CORINTHIANS 10:15

The only oak tree in our mountain town was located in our front yard. Legend has it that the tree had been planted years earlier from a young but mature sapling. But the town where we lived was over a mile high in elevation and the climate in the Northern Rockies does not allow for a very long growing season. As a result the oak in our front yard dropped its acorns in early August, long before they had matured into fully ripe seed pods. The acorns that littered our ground were tiny, bitter, and hard nuggets. Even the squirrels

took no interest in them and no new sapling ever sprouted up under its branches.

Creating something beautiful takes

time and requires patience.

Thankfully, God

has been patiently nurturing you like the mother oak tree: keeping you connected to the church and giving you the time to grow in your faith. The day will come that you will be needed out in the world, but trust that God has given you all that you will need to become fruitful and share your new beauty with the world.

Creator God, keep me connected to your church. Give me the patience to grow in my faith each day, and when the time comes help me spread your love and beauty out in the world. Amen.

ACORN COOKIES

12 ounces Hershey's Dark Chocolate Kisses
72 mini Nilla Wafers
3 tablespoons peanut butter chips
1/4 cup peanut butter

Directions:

1. Scoop peanut butter into a Ziploc bag; seal it; cut a tiny bit of one bottom corner off.

2. Pipe a small dot of peanut butter onto the wafer bottom, top with a chocolate kiss. Pipe peanut butter onto a peanut butter chip and adhere to the other side of the wafer. Repeat with remaining ingredients.

<http://talesofarantginger.com/2014/09/acorn-cookies-fall.html>

MARCH 10

Earth

Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

MATTHEW 18:19

Agreeing “on earth” seems to be an increasingly difficult proposition. How can we seek to be united with those we profess and confess (in our better moments) are our brothers and sisters, children of the same God, when they seem so foreign to us in thought, practice, and presentation? It seems that the “narrow way” described by Jesus has to transcend the lines in the sand we so easily draw. We must seek reconciliation at all times, as we are continually being reconciled. In this way, when we look beyond our own ideological fiefdoms, we may find the fertile soil in which disparate persons planted by God may grow into a vivid representation of God’s Kingdom. In this kingdom, we seek agreement and reconciliation because we know that the needs of others must come before or, at the very least, alongside our own. How can we learn to put the needs of the other above our own in seeking the good of the kingdom?

Most Gracious God, in your mercy, may we seek reconciliation by putting others above ourselves until all know of your love. Amen.

MARCH 11

Table

*“They spoke against God, saying,
“Can God spread a table in the wilderness?”*

PSALM 78:19

The Bible is full of stories about how God provides for God’s people. God fed Adam and Eve in the Garden. God fed Elijah when he was hiding from Ahab and Jezebel. God fed the people manna and quail in the wilderness, even when they were questioning if God could. The Son of God fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and feeds the world with the body-bread and blood-wine that he gives and sheds for all. This is who God is. Ours is a God who feeds people, who sets the table and invites everyone to “Come and dine!” Has there ever been a time in your life when you found yourself in a place where you thought, “God cannot help me here?” What helped you through that time?

Lord God, you prepare every table that is set before us. Give us a faith so great that we can trust that to be true, and as always “Give us this day our daily bread.” Amen.

MARCH 12

Hungry

*. . . for I was hungry and you gave me food,
I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink,
I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*

MATTHEW 25:35

Most of us want to change the world for the better. It is hard to know where to start or who to help or what to do especially with so many hungry people in the world! It just seems to be too big of a job. When Jesus said these words, his listeners were confused. They wondered when they had ever done these things for Jesus. Jesus went on to say that when you do any of these things, it is as if you are doing them for Jesus. There are many ways we could help someone else - just begin with one person. Food and clothing are ways to change the world for the better. There are also kind words and actions. Some people may get involved in organizations that house or feed others or they may donate to a good cause. The point is that we are called to make a difference ever and to be a blessing to others. Who could you be a blessing to this week?

Dear Jesus, place the person on my heart that I could help this day. Amen.

MARCH 13

Bread

*Then they told what had happened on the road,
and how he was known to them
in the breaking of the bread.*

LUKE 24:25

My son, Elijah, loves to bake. He likes to try different things and feel the sense of accomplishment when he has created something that he can share with our family. Recently he decided to make pizza dough. The recipe indicated that he was to follow a bread recipe, but after the first rise, follow the pizza instructions. This was somewhat confusing because he had to refer to another page in the cookbook; it was not straightforward or step by step. It was a little more complicated than he was expecting! He wanted it to be clear and concise with no exceptions, complications, or deviations. He was so frustrated! After a bit of a cool down, we talked. “First of all,” I said, “Life can be complicated. The beautiful thing about making bread is that you can make it, make a mistake, eat it or not eat it, and then learn from it and start all over tomorrow.”

Why Bread? Yes it's a common everyday food of sustenance. But it can also be complicated, if the yeast is not right or the water is too hot. It can also go bad, stale, or moldy quickly especially when it does not have any preservatives. What kind of bread do you like to eat?

BREAD-PRETZELS

A common origin story of pretzels is that they were created by a monk. The monk baked strips of dough, folded into the shape we know as a pretzel, and thought they looked like a child's arms folded while praying. Check out this recipe from Blue Bowl recipes to make soft pretzels at home. It even uses frozen bread dough!

<https://bluebowlrecipes.com/easiest-soft-pretzels/>

Lord, thank you for the everyday reminders of your grace. Life can be complicated and not what we expect. Remind us to start again each day with you. Amen.

MARCH 14

Fig Leaves

*When the eyes of both were opened,
and they knew that they were naked;
and they sewed fig leaves together
and made loincloths for themselves.*

GENESIS 3:7

God's people have been enjoying creation from the very beginning! When I was a kid, I remember playing at the base of a large pine tree in the corner of our backyard. I would gather sticks and pinecones with my friends and dream up an imaginary world. We would play and play--adding new natural elements like rocks or leaves or dandelions into the story. Now that I have a child of my own, I get to watch as he explores God's creation. My son likes to run on the ice in the winter, splash in puddles in the spring, pick tomatoes off our bushes in the summer, and jump in the leaves in the fall. Adam and Eve made use of God's creation by sewing fig leaves together to fashion clothes for themselves. What about you? How do you play with God's creation?

Life-giving God, thank you for creating the world for us to enjoy. Amen.

MARCH 15

Napkin

*“Have mercy on me, God, according to your faithful love!
Wipe away my wrongdoings according to your great compassion!”*

PSALM 51:1

Napkins are so useful; I rarely eat a meal without one! With a napkin, you can wipe your messy fingers, soak up spilled milk, or disguise the fact that a foreign object has made it into your mouth and needs to be removed. Wiping, blotting, hiding: all good uses for a napkin. When I was a kid, the school cafeteria served a hot meal every day at noon, and the Clean Plate Club was held in high esteem. I was a picky eater so I was often unimpressed by what they served. One day we had chocolate pudding for desert. Most kids thought it was a treat but not me. I took one bite and spent the rest of lunch trying to figure out how to dispose of it without getting caught. Ingeniously, I decided I could drink my milk, spoon the pudding into my cup, and cover it with a napkin; no one would notice when I dumped it in the trash. That day, however, my third grade teacher stood watch over the waste basket, and as I tipped my plate to offload the paper cup and napkin, chocolate pudding came oozing out, and I was busted! It was not fun being caught doing something I knew I should not do. In hindsight, many of us question the wisdom of the Clean Plate Club, but the rule was made in love, and I do not imagine my teacher enjoyed playing “Gotcha!” In the same way, God does not set out to catch us falling short of expectations. Instead, God comes near with love and mercy, acknowledges our imperfect deeds, and then “wipes away our wrongdoing.” Grateful, we breathe a sigh of relief, not because we got away with something, but because we have experienced the freedom that comes with being known *and* forgiven.

Dear God, you know all about us and love us anyway. Help us to show that kind of love to others today, too. Amen.

MARCH 16

Onion

*The rabble among them had a strong craving;
and the Israelites also wept again, and said,*

“If only we had meat to eat!

*We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing,
the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic;*

but now our strength is dried up,

and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at.”

NUMBERS 11:4-6

Have you ever wanted some type of food so badly you could almost taste it? The poor Israelites were wandering in the desert where there were no grocery stores, no restaurants, and no gardens. Even though God was providing manna for them - a food that was nutritious, filling and free, they wanted more variety. They name onions and garlic in particular which are simple vegetables that we do not often eat by themselves, but use in many dishes to add more flavor. They are not bad (after all - they are vegetables!), but they may not add many health benefits to keep our bodies strong. As you think about the food that you eat, what would you describe as “manna” that is good for your mind and body, and what might be “extra,” that you have just for added flavor?

Dear God, remind us to be thankful for the food you make available to us that feeds our bodies and keeps us healthy. Amen.

MARCH 17

Vineyard

For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard.

MATTHEW 20:1

When people choose something to give up for Lent, they often give up a food item. By this point in the Lenten season, they may start to feel the pangs of hunger and cannot wait for Easter when they can taste that food item they have given up. It is during these times of craving that we need to be reminded that spiritual food is what really satisfies and sustains us. Jesus is the vineyard and source of all that sustains us. When we seek Jesus and what only Jesus can offer, we find our cravings replaced by the fullness only he can provide. We need to fill our souls, not our weakest craving of earthly food. We can find the food we need in the vineyard of Jesus. His food will satisfy every type of hunger and not keep us hungry like earthly food. Even when we crave earthly food, this is often a signal to feed our soul. This is the time to pick the best grapes in the vineyard of Jesus. When our soul feels full with spiritual food, our stomachs do not ask for earthly food. What foods do you crave?

Dear Lord, when the pangs of hunger visit us, remind us to fill our souls with your spiritual food. Amen.

MARCH 18

Picnic

*On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make
for all peoples a feast of rich food,
a feast of well-aged wines, of rich food filled with marrow,
of well-aged wines strained clear.*

ISAIAH 25:6

I love a good picnic! It is an out-of-the-ordinary meal, which somehow tastes much better when you eat it under a sunny sky, while being massaged by a warm breeze. I often pack foods I do not usually eat at home, which makes the whole event even more festive. We do not often think of Lent as a festive time, where the ordinary seems much, much better...but I bet we could! Rather than giving something up for Lent, what if we changed the way we do something ordinary? I know someone who observes kosher laws during Passover, so she chooses to eat the same food every day. She told me that it frees her to focus on God instead of what she was going to eat, which gave her a new energy. Maybe I will simplify my meals, or maybe make them more festive! Maybe I will wear the same outfit every Monday. Or maybe I will wear something fancy just to go grocery shopping. And when I do these things, it will wake me up and remind me that God has promised to someday make us all a fancy picnic up on the mountain. What will you do to make something ordinary seem much, much better to remind you of God's presence?

Generous God, you have provided the clothes we wear and the food we eat. Living life for you makes it much, much better. Keep reminding us that having you in our lives is worthy of celebration. Amen.

MARCH 19

Crumbs

*She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs
that fall from their masters' table."*

MATTHEW 15:27

It is quite easy to dismiss crumbs. Most of the time we do not even know they are there. And when we see them, they are often too small and insignificant to bother with or a terrible annoyance and reminder that there is yet another mess to have to deal with. But a crumb does not start out small. It does not start out annoying. Every little crumb comes from something wholesome and lovely and good - a loaf of fresh baked bread, a slice of cake, or a scrumptious cookie right out of the oven. And even though just a crumb, it gives us a taste of the feast that is yet to come. That is how it is with faith and forgiveness, hope and love - those wonderful gifts that come from God. Sometimes all we get are little bits and pieces. No matter how small they may seem or how much they bother and annoy us, they are blessings that remind us of something bigger - God's everlasting promise of goodness and mercy. What are the small blessings that give you hope for the future?

Dear God, help us to see the hope and goodness in the imperfect, small, and crumbly things around us. Amen.

MARCH 20

Stir

*“And let us consider how to stir up one another
to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together
... but encouraging one another. . . .”*

HEBREWS 10:24-25

To *stir* is to experiment – to mix something up – to make something new. You can literally stir eggs, flour, butter, sugar, baking soda, salt, vanilla, and chocolate chips together and get delicious cookie dough. Add heat to the mix and get yummy cookies. Water stirred into sand makes mud – and mud packed, stacked, and shaped can make a cool fort or castle. When my kids were younger, they loved to stir random things together and put them in the freezer to see what would happen. Jesus stirred things up by bringing unlikely people together, teaching them a few things about God and God’s love, and sending them into the world to love everyone. The disciples were a little anxious and nervous about their task at first, but Jesus gave them a pep talk, and promised to be with them always. So – the disciples went out and changed the world with Jesus’ love. How can your family experiment with stirring things up – mixing things together - to change the world with love and encouragement?

Jesus, stirring things up and making something new can be uncomfortable. Help us love and encourage the people we meet each day. Help us change the world with your love. Amen.

MARCH 21

Bowl

*Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.
Blessed shall you be when you come in,
and blessed shall you be when you go out.*

DEUTERONOMY 28:5-6

Our lives are filled with bowls. We eat cereal or soup in them, we mix things in them, we play games with big heavy rolling balls, we call post season football games “bowls,” the hollow of a spoon is a bowl, and we learn when we are little how to go to the bathroom in a toilet bowl. If we think of bowls as blessings for our use, how can we share our blessings, our bowls?

Have you heard of Blessing Bowls? These are vessels to share caring, love, thoughtfulness, compassion, joy, feelings, gratitude, and more. The Blessing Bowl holds written acknowledgment of the blessings in your life. It is a way to celebrate life’s blessings. So often we forget to tell people in our life how much they mean, and the Blessing Bowl gives you the opportunity to tell them how important they are.

What would you write and place in your families’ blessing bowls? Maybe something like: *Your enthusiasm for life lifts my spirits. I love you. Your very presence in this world is a gift from God. Your joyful optimism is a beacon that brings me hope. I respect you. Our lives are blessed by your very existence. You are fun! The grace and light that surround you fill me with warmth and joy. Your love for our family is a beautiful gift.*

Count all the ways you use a bowl today.

Dear God, Thank you for Jesus. Help us share our blessing bowl thoughts with others. Amen.

MARCH 22

Dessert

“Taste and see that the Lord is good.”

PSALM 34:8

“Life is short. Eat dessert first.” – bumper sticker

When I think of dessert, I think of sweets. A double-chocolate fudge cake. Mountain Dew and Twinkies. There is dessert for the palate, and then there is dessert for the heart. A baby’s smile. A welcomed hug. A child’s song. A pleasant surprise. Things that bring us honest joy. Dessert puts a pleasant finish to a wonderful meal. Psychologically and neurologically, dessert tells our brains: *“I’m done. I’m satisfied. And it is good.”* A dessert that only sits on a plate might look sweet, but unless it is tasted, we do not really know if it is sweet and pleasing. Unless we ingest it, it does not get into our system. The Psalmist tells us to *“Taste and see the Lord is good.”* What can you do today to taste and see the Lord’s goodness? To ingest it into our systems?

Dear God, you are good. Let me taste and see your goodness in surprising ways today. Amen.

MARCH 23

Mustard

*[Jesus] put before them another parable:
“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed
that someone took and sowed in his field.”*

MATTHEW 13:31

Mustard seeds start as one of the tiniest particles the human eye can see. We find it hard to believe in something we cannot see, but that is what faith is all about. Like the mustard seed, we need to feed our faith. God is the one that feeds us in our joys, our struggles, and our doubts. What are you doing to feed or nurture your faith?

Gracious God, open our hearts that we may grow in love for you through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

MARCH 24

Feast

“The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding banquet for his son.”

MATTHEW 22:3

Have you ever wondered what it is like to go to a huge party where all of your favorite foods and favorite drinks and favorite desserts are served? Where all of your favorite people are there to enjoy the feast with you? Where all of the party sights and sounds and activities are your favorites, too? That is what the kingdom of God is like. It is a feast filled with plenty of food to fill all of your senses. Plenty of love, too. Still, there are people in this world who would turn down such an amazing invitation. Maybe they do not think they are good enough to receive it. Maybe they think something or someone else is better for them to follow. Jesus invites you to join him in this amazing feast in the kingdom of God. Bring your neighbors and friends! Jesus loves you all that much! What does a feast in the kingdom of God look like for you? How can you thank God for such an amazing invitation?

Dear God, thank you for inviting us to your amazing feast in your kingdom. Help us to welcome others to this feast so that we all can feast on your food, drink and love. Amen.

MARCH 25

Grape

“Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles?”

MATTHEW 7:16

Everyone knows grapes grow on grapevines, right? And figs on trees? You would not find a banana growing in a pumpkin patch, or an apple growing next to blueberries. Fruits, like people, are meant to be true to themselves. God made us to be wonderful, generous, kind people. Sometimes we do and say bad things, and when we do, we are not being true to the way God made us. It just feels wrong. When we are good and loving, we are true to who we really are—precious children of God. What makes you feel happier: when you act like a grape in a thorn bush, or a grape on a vine?

Dear God, help me remember who I really am, and where I belong – with you. Amen.

MARCH 26

Flour

*When anyone presents a grain offering to the LORD,
the offering shall be of choice flour; the worshiper shall pour oil on it,
and put frankincense on it, and bring it to Aaron's sons the priests.*

LEVITICUS 2:1

Growing up I would bake chocolate chip cookies with my mom. We would experiment with adding more or less flour to our recipe to get the perfect cookie. It is all about balance, too little flour and your cookie would be flat, and too much flour and your cookie would be big and fluffy. In life we have to find the right balance, too - the balance between taking care of others and taking care of ourselves. Have you heard the saying “You cannot fill up another’s cup if yours is empty?” This is a reminder to me that I have to take care of myself physically, emotionally, and spiritually before I can help someone else. This is sometimes a challenge as we are called to love and help our neighbor. At times we can get so involved in helping others that we forget to also take care of ourselves. I had an aunt who was always helping others and forgetting to take care of herself as well. However, when she saw me doing the same by spreading myself too thin helping others or not also taking care of myself she would often remind me to take time for myself, to rest, and to pray. It takes time and practice to find a good amount of balance in life just as it does to find the right amount of flour in your cookie recipe. So I ask during our Lenten journey how can you find the balance of caring for yourself and others?

Heavenly Father, help us to find balance in our lives, strength to help others, and rest when we need it. Amen.

MARCH 27

Fish

*And Jesus said to them, "Follow me
and I will make you fish for people."*

MARK 1:17

Fish for people?! Jesus had just invited Simon and Andrew to follow him. And they dropped their fishing nets and followed Jesus. Fishing for people. I wonder what they thought that meant or how they would do that. Simon and Andrew, as well as other fishermen of the time, used nets to fish. People who fish today use nets, fishing poles with lines and hooks on the end, and boxes for creatures such as crabs and lobsters. Fishing for people with hooks and boxes would be painful and difficult. We, as followers of Jesus, are also to fish for people so they may come to know that they are beloved children of God. When we fish for people, we use a net. It is a net made up of kind and loving words and actions; a net of welcoming invitation and hospitality, and a net of compassion and generosity. This is the net we use to fish for people, to show them God's generous and unconditional love. It is not the same kind of net fishermen use, made of knotted ropes, but if we throw a big net of loving and kind actions towards people, we will more likely catch "fish." Fishing nets are made of ropes knotted together; so if each knot represents something that shows God's love to others, what "knot" or action can you add to your net to help you fish for people and share God's love?

Loving God, help me to create a net full of love, grace, joy, welcome, and other good things as a reflection and sharing of your goodness so that others may come to know you. Amen.

MARCH 28

Plate

*“How happy are those who will sit down at the feast
in the kingdom of God!”*

LUKE 14:15

Some families have a special plate - usually red - that they use for celebrations. The plate can be used for birthdays, graduations, getting your braces off, or any day that is most special for one member of the family. On that day, the special person eats from the red plate. In the kingdom of God, there is also something special for meals, but it is not for just one person. It is for everyone! When we sit down to feast in the kingdom of God we get the bread of life, and Jesus is right there with us. Maybe that should be served on a red plate! What is your favorite plated meal?

Dear Jesus, thank you for the plated feasts! Amen.

MARCH 29

Apple

*“Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apples;
for I am faint with love.”*

SONG OF SOLOMON 2:5

A is for _____. Play a game to name all the things you can that start with the letter A. How many did you list?

I bet someone in your family said “Apple!” I know apple is the first thing I think of when I think “A.” But apple is NOT the first thing I think of when I think about the Bible or the season of Lent.

Our Bible verse about apples is tucked away in a book of the Bible named Song of Solomon that we do not read very often. Song of Solomon is a book about love - the lovey dovey kind between people. So instead of “an apple a day keeps the doctor away” maybe we should say “an apple a day keeps us strong in love.” Who are some people that you love? Who are people that love you? What keeps your love strong? During Lent we think about Jesus’ great love for us. How about having an apple for lunch and thanking God for love!

Dear God, thank you for all the people who love me, and thank you for your strong in my life. Oh and thanks for yummy apples. Amen.

MARCH 30

Seed

*Though it is the smallest of all your seeds, yet when it grows,
it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree,
so that the birds of the air come and perch in its branches.*

MATTHEW 13:32

In the winter, I feed the birds in our front yard from a feeder that overlooks a sloping meadow. When the birds venture to the feeder they often pick one seed. They fly to a nearby sanctuary that is both a thorn tree and a multiflora rose bush which has threaded its way into the branches of the small thorn tree. It is there the birds eat the seed. There is great protection from the hawks and occasional bald eagle that also share the meadow in this bush mangled tree. Today a brutal polar vortex has hit our state and the birds find warmth in this thorn tree, too. Matthew compares the kingdom of God to the smallest of seeds that produces sanctuary in this garden. I picture our world as a fallen garden yet yielding from its tiniest seeds a sanctuary. Are we sowing seeds of kingdom kindness and love, protection and provision?

Lord, help us see the growth of your kingdom in this world as we scatter what we think are the tiniest of seeds. Amen.

Wedding Cake

*“Keep awake therefore,
for you know neither the day nor the hour.”*

MATTHEW 25:13

Five years ago, my childhood friend posted a picture on social media of her wedding cake. It was a beautiful! The cake had all kinds of details: a silky-looking bottom tier, pearl accents at the center, and lacy frosting that looked like a doily on the top. Before their wedding day, the bride and groom tasted many different wedding cakes. They meticulously picked out the cake’s design and decorations. But the people who attended the wedding commented on social media that they did not recall her beautiful cake! Why? The wedding cake was not the focus of the celebration. The guests remembered the happy bride and groom blessed by God’s love and promises. Jesus tells us to keep awake! Sometimes we go through life caught up in things that really do not matter. We become sidetracked with life’s details, and

WEDDING CAKE CUPCAKES

- 1 box white cake mix
- 1 cup all purpose flour
- 1 cup granulated white sugar
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1-1/3 cups water
- 2 tablespoons vegetable or canola oil
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 cup sour cream
- 4 large egg whites

Preheat oven to 325°F. Place cupcake liners in cupcake pans (you’ll need approx. 36).

In a large bowl, whisk together cake mix, flour, sugar and salt. Add remaining ingredients and beat with hand mixer for 2 minutes, or until well blended.

Use an ice cream scoop to fill prepared cupcake tins- fill about 3/4 full. Bake about 18 minutes, or until toothpick inserted in center comes out clean. Cool. Frost with your favorite frosting.

we fall asleep in the mundane rather than being awake to the signs of God's love and promises. In Lent, we are reminded to turn toward God and remain awake and alert to focus on the celebration of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With our attention on the focus of the celebration, neither the day nor the hour matter. God's grace and love is at the center of every minute of our days.

Holy God, be with us as we make your grace the main thing in our lives. Amen.

APRIL 1

Salt

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

MATTHEW 5:13

In several places in the New Testament Jesus compares his followers to salt. You may have even heard someone use the phrase “salt of the earth” when speaking about someone. What exactly does that mean? Salt is a common element. We use salt to help flavor our food (make it taste better) and preserve it. We also use salt to help keep us safe – we use it on our roads when it is icy to make the roads safe, and help make sure people do not slip and fall. So it seems as if God is calling us to do our part to make the world better. God is calling us to do whatever it is we were created to do (salt cannot be something different than salt), and to use that to serve God and our neighbor. What gifts has God given you that you can use to help serve your neighbor?

Gracious God, thank you for the gifts we have been given to serve others. Help us use those gifts to serve our neighbors and make the world a better place – allowing us to truly be the “salt of the earth.” Amen.

APRIL 2

Stew

Once when Jacob was cooking some stew, Esau came in from the open country, famished. He said to Jacob.

“Quick, let me have some of that red stew! I’m famished!”

Jacob replied, “First sell me your birthright.”

“Look, I am about to die,” Esau said, “What good is the birthright to me?” But Jacob said, “Swear to me first.” So he swore an oath to him, selling his birthright to Jacob.

Then Jacob gave Esau some bread and some lentil stew.

He ate and drank, and then got up and left.

So Esau despised his birthright.

GENESIS 25:29-34

Oh Esau! We have all been in a position where we make poor decisions based on our current desires, and forget to follow God’s path that is laid out before us. Many choices we make have a ripple effect, and in turn can hurt or hinder many around us that we care about; our family and friends. It is easy to let your faith wander when you are hungry, and there in front of you is a tempting bowl of stew. Faith is trusting God...Trusting in God’s plan for us and that we can make our choices through God who cares for us so deeply. We do not want to allow a simple bowl of stew to bring us to decisions that can hurt our relationship with God, and the plans God has for us. Think of a time when you made a poor decision. What consequences did you experience? How did that experience change the way you make decisions today?

Gracious God, we ask for you to be present with us as we make decisions that can sometimes be difficult. Help us to trust in you. Amen.

APRIL 3

Millet

*And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils, millet and spelt;
put them into one vessel, and make bread for yourself.*

EZEKIEL 4:9

I love bread. In fact, I cannot think of anyone I know who does not love bread. It is so yummy when it comes right out of the oven and then topped with butter and jelly! Making bread goes all the way back to the biblical days where people grew crops of wheat so that they could harvest the crop and make their bread. Ezekiel reminds us that bread dough was made with not only wheat, but also barley, lentils, millet, and spelt. Each house made their own bread and it took up to 2-3 hours of hard labor *every* day just to feed a family of five people. Imagine how yummy the bread was coming off the hot stones they used to bake the bread! It is no wonder that Jesus used “bread” with his disciples at the Last Supper just before his crucifixion. Not only is bread something that we look forward to eating and sharing together in a meal, but also in the sharing of the Lord’s Meal in the breaking of bread, given and broken for each one of us – cleansing us from our sins and making us whole again in the life of Jesus!

Dear Jesus, thank you for giving us our daily bread that feeds our tummies and purifies our hearts. Amen.

APRIL 4

Knife, Fork, and Spoon

*And He also went on to say to the one who had invited Him,
“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or
your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, otherwise
they may also invite you in return and that will be your repayment.
But when you give a reception, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame,
the blind, and you will be blessed, since they do not have the means to
repay you; for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

LUKE 14:12-14

For many homes, the kitchen is where families gather. I find cooking is a labor of love. It is how I show my spouse and children that I care about them. The first thing I do in the morning is make them breakfast. The last thing I do at night is make lunches for the next day. I also enjoy having friends over to our home and hosting. It is another way I show people outside of my immediate family that I love them. But...these are the people I am most comfortable with. In this passage, I think Jesus is telling us to get out of our comfort zone and invite ones that we would not typically choose. Growing up we typically spent holidays with our immediate family. As my brother and I got older, my parents would set an extra place setting with a knife, fork, and spoon. They would invite someone from work, a friend, or an extended family member to Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter. These people often did not have someone to spend the holidays with. I can remember the first year was someone we had never met before. It was a man that my dad had worked with on a construction site. I was so uncomfortable. I had never met him, and he was from another country, English was his second language, and he had no family in the United States. I had asked my dad why we needed to have him, and that it would be so awkward. My dad's reply was this Bible passage, along with saying to me, “When someone doesn't have a place, we make a place for them.” It ended up being one of my favorite memories. We heard about his family and home in Uruguay and played card games late into the night. What space do you need to make at your table? Who is Jesus calling us to invite?

God, create inviting and safe space in our homes, in our churches, and in our lives. Amen.

APRIL 5

Melons

“We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic. . . .”

NUMBERS 11:5

When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, they complained – a lot. God had freed them from slavery. God rescued them from the army of soldiers at the Red Sea. God gave them water from a rock and manna to eat. And they complained. They wanted meat. They wanted the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion and garlic that they had when they were slaves. But they forgot something important. They forgot that, in order to have cucumbers, melons, leeks, onion and garlic, they were slaves to Pharaoh. They forgot they had to work long, hot hours in the desert heat. They forgot that life was hard – very hard. Sometimes it is easy to complain when we do not get what we want or when we have to do something we do not want to do. Maybe we are just having a bad day. But, instead of complaining, make a list of all of the things God has done for you and given you, and then give thanks! What three things can you give thanks for today?

Dear God, thank you for making melons. Help me to remember that when I bite into the sweetness that melons offer I thank you for your blessings instead of complaining. Amen.

APRIL 6

Locusts

*And the LORD changed the wind to a very strong west wind,
which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea.*

Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt.

EXODUS 10:19

I am afraid of bugs – spiders, locusts, or crickets! One year, when I was in middle school, I opened up a duffle bag pocket and pulled out what I thought was a Kleenex. Turns out it was not a Kleenex, but a spider sac filled with baby spiders that blended into my carpet. I ended up screaming at the top of my lungs and standing on the highest point of my bed. My brother ended up saving me from those millions of monsters with a shoe. You may not have a bunch of bugs attacking you on a regular given day, but I am sure you have been through something that seems like it might be impossible to deal with; whether it is a test coming up, feeling alone, or trusting in God for future plans, know that God is with you even when it seems like you are covered in a swarm of darkness (or locusts!). When was the last time you prayed to God for guidance?

Dear God, help me to remember that you are with me even in the times where I feel the most scared and lost. You are way bigger than anything on this earth – bigger than spiders, locusts or any bug! Amen.

APRIL 7

Lamb

*All the nations will be gathered before [the Son of Man],
and he will separate people one from another
as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*

MATTHEW 25:32

Separating sheep from goats seems like such a simple, visual task. They have acquired different reputations for a reason. Sheep flock; goats maraud. Sheep follow the leader; goats go their own way. Sheep seek safe haven; goats go head-first into danger. But, it is not so simple. Down deep, hidden by clouds of wool and spills of angora fur, are the lambs and the kids. They have no label. They are utterly dependent on the ewes and does that birthed them. Lambs and kids can be easily lost, overlooked in the tumult of larger movements. When one is eager to build barriers that separate sheep from goats, it is good to consider that lambs, and kids, are part of the flock. Maybe it is better to remember that the question of “Who is in?” and “Who is out?” is not up to us.

Lamb of God, be visible to me today in the faces of humanity across the entire creation. Amen.

APRIL 8

Eggs

*God gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.*

ISAIAH 40:29

Eggs may be one of the most mysteriously delicious foods we eat. An egg is durable. Did you know you cannot crush an egg by squeezing it in your bare hand? At the same time, an egg is delicate and precious. I am sure I am not the only one who opens every carton before I put it into my shopping cart to check for cracked shells. An egg turns plain “ingredients” into a full meal. It has a perfect fat to protein ratio and to be honest, I eat at least one egg every single day! God’s strength to the weary reminds me of a strong, unbreakable egg added to weak mushrooms, peppers, salt and pepper to create a delicious nutritious meal every time!

Where in your own life could you be an egg for someone else who needs the strength and compassion God gifts us with every day?

God, thank you for your continued strength especially in our weakest moments. Help us to look for places in our world and people in our lives who need a little extra strength, support and precious love. Amen.

APRIL 9

Milk

*. . . and he brought us into this place and gave us this land,
a land flowing with milk and honey.*

DEUTERONOMY 26:9

Mmmmmmmilk! Milk is a miracle. The milk that babies drink until they can eat solid food gives them all the nutrients they need to stay alive. It helps little ones fight off diseases, grows their tiny fingernails, and makes their bones strong. It does thousands of miraculous things in their bodies. God promises a land flowing with milk and honey to people who are desperate for food, water and shelter, because milk symbolizes life! Milk and Honey are symbols of all of the good things God provides in our lives. So the next time you drink a glass of milk, (cow's milk, goat's milk, almond milk, soy milk...pick one!), thank God for the gift of life! What are some of the things that God provides to keep you alive every day?

Dear God, thank you for the miracle of milk and all of the good things that fill our lives. Amen.

APRIL 10

Beans

“. . . we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church.

He makes the whole body fit together perfectly.

As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”

EPHESIANS 4:16

Beans . . . what to say about beans. . . .

The first thing that came to mind surprised me: “Beans, beans the magic fruit. The more you eat, the more you toot! The more you toot, the better you feel. So, let’s have beans for every meal!” What am I, in 3rd grade?! I decided to dig a little deeper and what I found was much more inspiring. Native Americans grew beans along-side corn and squash. They called them the three sisters. The beans were planted around the base of the corn stalks. Beans need an external structure for support to grow. The corn stalks provided the structure and support for the beans. When I think about the family of God and my brothers and sisters in Christ, I am like the bean plant that needs support and structure around me to grow in faith. I am blessed every day by this body of Christ that fits together, each part with its own special work, growing together in love. What are the external supports in your life that help you grow and produce good fruit?

Dear Jesus, thank you for your love and support that is with me every day. Guide me to support others in need. Help me to share your love with the world. Amen.

APRIL 11

Just Say “Cheese”

*A cheerful heart brings a smile to your face;
a sad heart makes it hard to get through the day.*

PROVERBS 15:13

“Say cheese!” How many times have you been given this instruction just before someone snaps a photo? No one knows for certain who came up with the phrase or why the word itself obliges one to make a facial expression that resembles a smile-like shape or grin. A smile on one’s face is a powerful force. Smiling is beneficial to the person grinning, and it is good for those one encounters, especially the grouch in one’s midst. Although there are no actual instructions in the Bible to say “cheese,” there are many passages that encourage us to smile, to be joyful and grateful. Name the people and pets that brought a grin to your face today. To whom did you give the gift of a smile? Say “cheese” as you name all the things for which you are grateful this day.

May God bless you and keep you, God’s smile on you and gift you, God look you full in the face and make you say “cheese!” Amen.

Pomegranates

*“You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God
for the good land that he has given you.”*

DEUTERONOMY 8:10

Are we there yet? How much longer? I am tired. I am hungry. I cannot wait any longer. Most of us have either said these words or heard them many times, over and over. When going out to eat, the waiting seems to never end. We must decide where to go, get to the restaurant, wait to place your order, and then wait again for the food to be prepared. We get anxious. We lack patience. We are hungry. We want our food now. We do not want to wait for something we cannot even see being prepared. But have hope. Eventually you do arrive at the restaurant, the food does come, and you are fed. Even better than restaurant food, God has prepared food for us, “...*a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey*” (Deuteronomy 8:8). The Lord provides for us and fills us. God meets our every need. God has more “food” prepared for us than we can imagine. This food might look like pomegranates or pineapple, like celery or cauliflower, like strength and patience, or even like chicken nuggets and French Fries, but all of these have one thing in common: they are prepared for us by the Lord, our God, and they endlessly fill us to do his work. What food are you thankful to God for providing?

Lord, thank you for feeding us. We praise you for your generosity and the many gifts you prepare for us. Amen.

APRIL 13

Spelt

*“When they have leveled its surface,
do they not scatter dill, sow cumin,
and plant wheat in rows and barley in its proper place,
and spelt as the border?”*

ISAIAH 28:25

Spelt! What a funny word! It makes me think of spelling. But spelt is a type of grain, something you use to make bread, like wheat or barley. It is a grain that has been around for thousands of years! Lately, people have decided that spelt can be good for your health. It is full of fiber and protein. Sometimes, it is helpful for people with food allergies.

In the Bible verse, I think it is interesting that the farmer used spelt as a border. Have you ever planted a garden and put marigold flowers around the edge? Do you know why you do that? Rabbits do not like the smell of marigolds, and so they will stay out of your garden. As I have learned more about spelt, one thing that I have found interesting is that spelt has a way to protect itself from bugs that want to harm it. Spelt has a husk that has to be removed by a machine. Think of the husk like a sunflower seed. The shell keeps the seed inside safe. Other grains, like wheat, lose this shell and bugs can get in and easily ruin it. Maybe the farmer that Isaiah is talking about knew that spelt could stop other bugs from getting into the crops.

Like spelt, God created us with something to protect our bodies. Do you know what it is? Skin! Our skin protects us from cold, germs, and lots of things. We also need to stay safe in other ways. We wear coats when it is cold or wear a seatbelt in the car. Our parents may say we cannot go to a certain place or use our cell phone because they want to protect us. We know that God is always watching out for us, too. Can you think of something that keeps you safe? Who helps to keep you safe? Why do you think they want to keep you safe?

Dear God, thank you for giving us people and things to keep us safe. Amen.

APRIL 14

Greens

*A very large crowd spread their cloaks on the road,
while others cut branches from the trees
and spread them on the road.*

MATTHEW 21:8

Whenever my kids find little green specks mixed in with their food, they pick them out. They are skeptical about where the seasoning came from and what it will taste like. But in the summertime, when our garden is bursting with basil, mint, kale and lettuce, they forget to ask questions! They pick leaves and wave them around with excitement about what we have grown together. It is fresh and good, so we eat and give thanks.

In Jesus' time, people would wave green branches or leaves for all kinds of reasons: victory, royalty, celebration and greeting. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, some people wondered who he was or wanted to pick him out. Others waved branches because Jesus brought news that was fresh and good. What is your favorite green food?

God, thank you for fresh food and good news that keeps us healthy and gives us hope. Amen.

APRIL 15

Curds

*He will be eating curds and honey when he knows enough
to reject the wrong and choose the right.*

ISAIAH 7:15

Curds can make many different images pop into your mind. For my daughter the image of the Kurdish people she was learning about in world history popped up. Being from Wisconsin, images of that cheesy goodness known as the cheese curd popped into my mind—the golden fried kind and the squeaky fun unbreaded kind. For others, the creamy goodness of cottage cheese and its smaller curds might pop up. This last image is likely closest to what was being referred to in Isaiah. Children in biblical times enjoyed a mix of curds and honey whenever possible. Isaiah’s words tell us that even as a young child, Jesus would show his godliness by choosing right over wrong. Just like the word “curds” can mean many different things, Jesus’ name also makes many different images pop into our minds. Jesus as savior; Jesus as light; Jesus as healer; Jesus as teacher; Jesus as friend; and Jesus, above all, as love. When you think of “curds” what comes to your mind? When you think of the name of Jesus what comes to your mind?

Dearest Savior, help us to know you and love you in all the ways you come to us. Amen.

APRIL 16

Honey

God said, "I've taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I've heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey.

EXODUS 3:8

Do you have a place that is special to you? It might be far away, it may just be a spot in the town you live in where you just love to spend time hanging out with your family or friends. Perhaps this place is so special to you that you just feel warm, safe, and happy just being there? That is the type of place that God told Moses he wanted him to lead the Israelites to – *to a land of milk and honey*. God told Moses that he would go on a long trip. Moses learned quickly that he would become the spokesperson for the Israelites. It took some time, but the Israelites were freed from the Egyptians. They eventually made it to the special land that God promised Moses. This land flowing with milk and honey was where the Israelites lived together freely and worshiped in peace. It was their special place. But until they got to the honey part not every day was sweet. Wandering through the wilderness was hard work. Like the Israelites, sometimes we need a spokesperson – someone in this world who will help us when we are sad, worried, or angry, when it feels like we are not in the land of milk and honey. When we feel like life is without honey, we can turn to our spokesperson, Jesus and do as he taught us. We can pray to him. We can thank him for all the good things in our lives and all that this world offers like bugs and bees, birds and trees, friends and family. We can sing our prayers or write them out with sidewalk chalk. Just remember that whether you are wandering in the wilderness or sipping on honey sticks life in this world is sweet.

Dear God, we thank you for everything we see and do not see that makes the world so special. Amen.

APRIL 17

Lentils

*“And you, take wheat and barley, beans and lentils,
millet and spelt; put them into one vessel,
and make bread for yourself.*

*During the number of days that you lie on your side,
three hundred ninety days, you shall eat it.”*

EZEKIEL 4:9

Lentils. What even is a lentil? Isn't a lentil just another bean? While lentils and beans are in fact both in the legume family, lentils are not just any bean. They are a superfood! These tiny little edible disc-shaped beans are protein-packed, vitamin-filled, and antioxidant rich. Not only are they amazingly good for you, but they are also incredibly convenient. Lentils have a long shelf life and are inexpensive. Another bonus, unlike other legumes, lentils do not require soaking before cooking. I do not think it is a coincidence then that God specifically mentions this tiny but incredibly powerful food as a way to prepare for terrible coming famine. God is able to pack a whole lot of nutrition into this one little legume. I wonder then how much your spirit can be fed daily with a little bit of God's Word?

God, thank you for the amazing foods you created to fuel our bodies as well as your word to feed our spirit. Amen.

APRIL 18

Wine

*Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying,
“Drink from it, all of you; for this is my
blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many
for the forgiveness of sins.*

*I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine
until that day when I drink it new with you
in my Father’s kingdom.”*

MATTHEW 26:28-29

Jesus says the wine he offers is the wine of a new covenant, a new promise of our life with God. I have sat at tables where the opposite has happened, where we have lived so deep in the sorrows and troubles of the past that the future became lost and obscured. Jesus wants something else though, a table of fellowship and drink that never ends, always expands, where even those who will betray are welcome because, at least for a moment, they can experience the kingdom of God they reject, but which does not reject them. In the end, Jesus says he will drink again with us in his father’s kingdom, the reign of God made real. So we can raise a glass to that and give thanks. What table did you sit at today and with who? What did you drink?

Loving God, mother and father of us all, help us build table of endless welcome where we drink your drink of life, love, and welcome. Amen.

Vinegar

“Along the way they came on a man from Cyrene named Simon and made him carry Jesus’ cross. Arriving at Golgotha, the place they call ‘skull hill,’ they offered him a mild painkiller (a mixture of wine and myrrh) but when he tasted it, he wouldn’t drink it.”

MATTHEW 27:34

In my cooking, I sometimes use vinegar in certain recipes. Vinegar, when used appropriately, can add a brightness and freshness to a recipe. However, too much vinegar leaves a sour taste in our mouths. In fact, vinegar is primarily an acetic acid that makes up 4-7 percent of table vinegars. In addition, vinegar can be also be used as a cleaning agent because of its acidic nature. Vinegar is only one of the many items that can be sour when tasted. This reminds me of children and how they are not afraid to tell us how they feel about something they ate or drank. If it tastes sour and has an unpleasant taste, a child often will be very vocal of their opinion. Jesus seems to react in much the same way in his final moments. On the night of his crucifixion and death, Jesus, hanging on the cross, is offered a vinegar wine to drink. Jesus does not finish it. It is too bitter. Jesus is not going to give his murderers the satisfaction they desire. Jesus knows that even in his death, life will eventually have the last word - that Christ will overcome death and the grave. What bitterness and resentments and souring do you need to leave at the foot of the cross this Good Friday?

Gracious God, on this Good Friday, we come to you bringing our own bitterness and resentments. Help us to leave them at the foot of the cross and to trust that your love and grace truly has the final word. Amen.

Banana Cream Pie

*“For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin,
so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”*

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21

Remember when Luther said something like we find Christ under the sign of the opposite? By this, he meant we find God in places we least expect: weakness, poverty, foolishness, and suffering. If God is there in Jesus, then evil and all bad things cannot win. Christ, crucified and risen, promised God’s people to be with them in their sufferings

and into the resurrection with him. My word for this devotion is Banana Cream Pie. I am letting this glorious dessert remind

BANANA CREAM PIE

5.1 ounces instant banana pudding (1 box)

1-1/2 cups 2% milk

1 cup cool whip

2-3 medium bananas (cut into 1/4 inch slices)

1 graham cracker crust or pie crust (premade)

Whisk pudding and milk in a bowl for 2-3 minutes, or until it has thickened. Fold in Cool Whip and sliced bananas. Then pour the filling into the pie.

Chill at least 3 hours before serving. Garnish with the remaining Cool Whip (or whipped cream) and fresh bananas.

<https://www.iheartnaptime.net/banana-cream-pie/#wprm-recipe-container-70880>

me of our temptation to NOT look for Jesus in Banana Cream Pie’s opposite: places of poison or toxicity or emptiness. Jesus is found most powerfully in the places we do not want to look for or go to, the opposite of the banana-cream-pie places of life. Jesus is also most powerfully in the places that are opposite of the self-gratification places in our own lives. Could banana cream pie actually be a real reminder to us of Jesus’ self-giving, self-sacrificing entrance into the depths of our lives? Is your instinct to seek the places of greatest comfort in life and to actively resist actions of self-sacrifice? If so, why? How can Jesus entering the depths of life in order to carry humanity through them with him cause you to intentionally reshape the perspective and patterns of your own life?

Christ Jesus, in your pure and self-giving grace, thank you for entering our depths, giving your very self so we would be saved from them, and transforming us to willingly give ourselves in self-giving love to notice and help others in their own despair. Amen.

APRIL 21

Olive Spice

Noah knew that the floods had subsided when the dove returned in the evening with an olive leaf in its mouth.

GENESIS 8:11

Noah had intimate olive knowledge because he lived in a place where olive oil was used for frying, lubricating, fueling, as an ingredient in medicines and soaps, for anointing, and for dressing the occasional salad along with a little wine. Olives, olive trees, and olive oil are never more than a chapter or two away in the Bible: They are mentioned well over 1,000 times. As of 2012, roughly 95 percent of all olive oil is produced in nations surrounding the Mediterranean Sea and the majority of it is consumed in that region, as well. The writers and readers of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation would understand the olive oil references because they lived in that world. Even if our knowledge on the subject is imported mostly from Italy these days, we can catch the reference. From the beginning, God was using an everyday item to bless creation. Anointing can be consecrating, sanctifying, blessing or ordaining. Who knew? Even today an individual could use olive-oil soap, participate in a baptism during which olive oil is used to mark the sign of the cross, and then top it all off with a nice salad with olive oil and vinegar dressing all in a single Sunday morning. The Spirit of God is present in all we can see. We do not need to find Jesus, because he is woven into our very lives – we are sealed by the Spirit and marked by the cross of Christ forever.

Heavenly Father, may Noah's leaf be for us a sign of new life, as well. Bless us to see your handiwork along the path we walk and help us hold onto the hands next to us. Amen.

APRIL 22

Easter Peeps

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, Jesus breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit."

JOHN 20:21-22

Peeps® Marshmallows are dressed up like yellow chicks or pink bunnies. Did you know that marshmallows (including Peeps) are made of only sugar, water, and gelatin (like in Jell-O®)? But, if you only mix those three ingredients together, you do not get a marshmallow. To do that, you need to whip it until it's fluffy; you need to add air.

We are Easter
"peeps"
(people), too.
We are made
up of all sorts
of things:
bones,
muscle, brains,
thoughts, hope,

PEEPS FRUIT KABOBS

A fun thing for Easter brunch!

Wooden skewers

1-2 packages of Peeps more if you want a variety of color

Fresh fruit of your choice: I used seedless white grapes cantaloupe, pineapple and strawberries

Layer fruit on a skewer with a peep in the center.

Make shortly before serving so the sugar on the Peeps doesn't run.

<https://ameessavorydish.com/peep-fruit-kabobs/>

and fears. You are a beautiful creation of God. And, that is amazing. Jesus, raised from the dead, breathed on his disciples, and gave them the Holy Spirit. Spirit can also mean wind or breathe, so Jesus breathed the breath of God on his friends. He added air. Then, Jesus sent his disciples out to spread God's love wherever they went.

You are a beautiful child of God, and Jesus breathes the Holy Air (Spirit) into you. That makes you an Easter peep, too! Filled with the breath of God, it is now our turn to go and spread God's love! What is your favorite Easter candy?

Dear God, thank you for making us Easter peeps filled with your Holy Spirit! Amen.

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