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Beach Banquet

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Beach Banquet

One of my favorite stories in the Gospels is about the Risen Jesus hosting a BBQ breakfast for some of the disciples who had been in a boat all night, fishing. They had been confused and distraught, and also frustrated in their attempts to catch fish. Suddenly, they experienced the presence of Jesus at a very simple, but lovingly prepared beach breakfast. How important it can be for us, no matter how many difficulties we have endured, when we can share a meal with people we care about, and who have our interests at heart. God relates with us in just this fashion, inviting us to moments of being together, especially in the context of a meal, often making recent painful experiences become of no great importance.

We participate in formal meals, as at weddings and other ceremonial occasions, and we share food in many informal settings as well. Whether we sit together with one person or many, eating a bag lunch or dining in a banquet hall, much more takes place among us than the consumption of food. Though each of us is a unique creation, God made all of us social beings who require both food and companionship for meaningful life. As we grew up in families and in society, we found that sharing meals together nourishes us in body, mind, and spirit.

If we eat more than we need, we gain weight. Without sufficient food, we experience hunger. Both are physical realities. Less visible, but equally real, are the consequences of articulating desires, goals, lofty thoughts and aspirations as well as everyday experiences to people who care about us. We also need to see, hear and otherwise perceive empathy, suggestions, opinions, and the stories of others. To live healthy lives as humans, interaction is as necessary as eating, and both can be done at the same time. God made us this way.

The resonances of the physical with the spiritual are very tightly bound together in us. We are made in the image and likeness of God, who is revealed to us in Jesus as human and divine. Jesus often made clear God's love for us and the appropriate response we can make by loving one another, at meals. From the wedding feast at Cana, to the Last Supper, and including the cook-out on the shore of the sea of Galilee, Jesus literally ate and drank with us to enact as well as put into words, the entirety of God's intention that we learn to live in a unity of trust and love on earth, before doing so in the life that continues into eternity.

Meals almost always provide opportunities for benefiting our spirits as well as our bodies. We can thank God for food and drink that sustain us in life, and we can also thank God for the persons who eat and drink with us and who make our lives worth living. When we share meals with people, the differences that at first we might have noticed usually diminish as soon as we decide that we will seek reasons for giving thanks to God regarding every aspect of each event. The prize of coming to know a diverse set of people is more easily gained when we get past some of our differences of table manners, customs, or kinds of food. Few of us thrive on an unvarying diet; a variety of relationships pleases most of us.

All of our meals now are occasions that prepare us for the banquet feast of heaven. It is the companions we have and will have who can make even a shared piece of bread, a "banquet" at the beach.