

One of the side benefits of our stay at home orders during COVID was family experienced family meals ... every night! For the first time in years!

What were your family meals like growing up? Has that changed? I remember quiet Sunday afternoons with grandparents, chicken and gravy and wonderful stories. Or sitting at dinner during the week with the entire family, reviewing our days, eating everything on the plate, and planning from each tomorrow.

Such memories cause me to wish I could still sit with my grandparents today; but because I shared so many meals with them, I still feel their presence and remember the love they shared. I imagine it is the same for you as well!

What a change we face today! We rush! We eat alone! We rush! We eat quickly! And are on the road again! Meals come at different times and “fast foods” have replaced “home cooked meals” with the family. I am not sure how we will change that, but the Emmaus story reminds just why we might want to.

On the night of Easter, the disciples were so absorbed with the incredible loss of Good Friday that they were blind to anything else. Some heard that Jesus had been seen alive, but that seemed to many an idle tale. They cried. They scattered. They ran. And two who headed home, to escape the pain, were joined on the road by Jesus, but their eyes were closed to seeing who He was!

Most interesting is HOW their eyes were opened. Easter finally dawned as they invited a stranger to join them for a meal. When Jesus broke the bread and said a prayer of blessing, they recognized him! Were it not for that meal, the joy of Easter would have been delayed, and an opportunity easily missed. It happened only because the meal was so important, they invited this stranger to join them.

How different we are! It isn't just “fast food” but we email or text rather than talk face to face. We leave sticky notes on the fridge, and rush from breakfast in the car to microwave dinners in front of the TV. We become so detached we miss simple joys and clues which loved ones seek to share. We didn't even realize it until we were forced away from busy-ness and back into our homes!

When we don't spend such time with loved ones, how can we remember we are loved? How many opportunities are lost when we could have said, “I am sorry” or “what is it you need from me?” There is a cost for everything we embrace, and the cost of “fast food” is a loss of family togetherness, brotherly love, and intimate conversations of substance.

When tear-filled disciples invited a stranger to their family meal, the breaking of bread caused Easter to dawn in their hearts and their eyes to open! Our eyes always glaze over when we read all the rules and regulations of Leviticus, but do you now understand why so many of those rules dealt with family meals? This is the time and place to gather our family as one!

The family meal was a sacred time of worship. A time to escape the brokenness of daily life and be one with God and with each other. How wonderful for God's love in a meal to be the key to a fulfilling nourishment of body and spirit! And for many who are alone too

often, it is the fellowship and family meal called communion that made our separation during COVID even more difficult.

This is one reason we share the family meal of communion before confirmation. First we bring our children to the table and feed them. This family meal becomes the place from which the heavier conversations in confirmation class and home can take place. Remember Jesus words about “welcoming little ones?” This is faith in practice. On the day of Confirmation, young people affirm the faith learned through the intimate meal and loving conversations here at Zion.

It is for the same reason that we have changed the way we share communion (the family meal of the Church.) In the action of continuous communion, some worry (and rightfully so) that we are rushing, like the drive through lane at McDonalds. But the reality of this practice is that it allows everyone to join us at the same table. Steps which were a barrier for some now allow all to come to the table at the same time. This way, no one in the family is left out or kept away.

Just as eyes are opened in the familiar actions of the liturgy of bread, and wine, and the word in the flesh, so can a similar miracle occur at home! Instead of focusing on the opened eyes of the disciples, let’s finish in a different way.

As we embrace our baptismal faith we understand we are called to serve. We are now to invite loved ones and stranger alike to join us at the table. How often, like Jesus are we walking next to people, who for one reason or another are so rushed or distracted that they can’t see the miracle of Easter in their own lives?

Whether it is our children or parents or a co-worker or a stranger, when we take time to “break and bless bread” eyes will always be opened. And for those who have no family at home, it is the family here that becomes even more important!

“Fast food” certainly weakens nourishment and misses community, but more than anything misses the ONE who prepares the meal!!! How lives of sad disciples were changed because they took the time to sit down in the quiet, reflective, renewing time of a meal? And how special it was when those separated from communion during a quarantine celebrated as they rejoined their faith family around the Table of the Lord!

As Easter people we are called to sit down to dinner more often with /family, friends, strangers, not only in communion, but in fellowship, worship, prayer, and the actions of servant love. All of that is part of the God’s holy meal in which the broken bread reminds us how Jesus’ life was broken to be shared with us.

In that family meal, our eyes are opened, and hearts are warmed by the true love of Easter and risen Jesus! Fast food is convenient when we are in a rush, but too much of it weakens nourishment and community. And it misses eating with the cook!

What would Emmaus dinner have been like without Jesus? What was the rest of those lives like because they took time to invite Jesus to their table? It is in a familiar setting of the family meal that eyes are opened, so that in unfamiliar places we remember “we’ve been there, done that” and our eyes stay open. So, what will it be for you – fast food or a family meal?