

SERMON
LA VERNE CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN
NOVEMBER 21, 2021
THANKSGIVING SUNDAY
Tom Hostetler and Corlan Harrison

Tom:

In Budapest, a man goes to the rabbi and complains, "Life is unbearable. There are nine of us living in one room. What can I do?"

The rabbi answers, "Take your goat into the room with you." The man is incredulous, but the rabbi insists. "Do as I say and come back in a week." A week later the man comes back looking more distraught than before. "We cannot stand it," he tells the rabbi. "The goat is filthy."

The rabbi then tells him, "Go home and let the goat out. And come back in a week."

A radiant man returns to the rabbi a week later, exclaiming, "Life is beautiful. We enjoy every minute of it now that there's no goat -- only the nine of us." Gratitude is about perspective, isn't it?

On the 4th Thursday in November, wherever we are, we reach a high point in the year. Some ancient, ancestral instinct in us knows the satisfaction of gratitude. We welcome family and guests to the table. We play games; we watch football; we take a walk; we take a nap; we go to the mall; we eat leftovers; we reckon our prosperity, be it little or much. We tally our gains and losses. And if, on those days, our hearts are not just a little fuller, or as someone said, "if that doesn't light your fire, then maybe you just have wet wood."

In the house where I grew up, the table at Thanksgiving was full of aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, babies and kids galore – all talking at once. It was a cacophony of sound. The people of my parents generation would talk about the hard times, the lean times, and would wax poetic about how great life was even though they didn't have any money; and they had to walk miles and miles to school, up hills, and down dales, backwards in the snow; and we had no shoes, and we liked it! And how they had to eat squirrels and blackberries day after day, but at least we were eating...down right poetic about the good old days when they were younger and poorer, but they were happier then than they are now that they have moved up the ladder and their kids have more than they ever dreamed of.

There is a danger in romanticizing poverty, when all too many people who are in poverty have no hope of ever escaping it. Moving up the ladder out of poverty is much more difficult today than it was a generation ago.

We are the wealthy ones on this planet. We know that, right? We live lives that are beyond the imaginations of 90 percent of the people who share this planet with us. Now, we are not the 5% who own 90% of all the wealth in the world, or the 1% who own 50% of all the wealth, but we are richly blessed. We are wealthy beyond the wildest dreams of most of the generations who celebrated Thanksgivings before us.

Someone wrote:

"If you have food in your fridge, clothes on your back, a roof over your head and a place to sleep you are richer than 75% of the people of the world.

If you have money in the bank, your wallet, and some spare change you are among the top 8% of the world's wealthy.

If you woke up this morning with more health than illness you are more blessed than the million people who will not survive this week.

If you have never experienced the danger of war, the agony of imprisonment or torture, or the horrible pangs of starvation you are luckier than 500 million people alive and suffering.

If you can read this message you are more fortunate than 3 billion people in the world who cannot read at all."

That sort of sets things in perspective, doesn't it? We have much to be thankful for!

I have never known a Thanksgiving in our family when we didn't have more than we could eat: turkey and dressing, ham that just fell off the bone, my mother's green bean casserole and 7 layer jello salad, my grandmother's potato salad, my cousin's corn casserole, my grandfather's homemade bread and hot cross buns with home-made apple butter we ourselves made over the fire in a big kettle and stirred with a boat oar all night, Aunt Helen's deviled eggs and pickled beets, Aunt Lois' cherry cheesecake, and in the afternoon, after our usual practice of felling a tree and cutting it up for firewood, we had chocolate cake and home-made ice cream, made with no eggs but 3 cups of sugar and a pint of whole cream. Like we really needed that. Just thinking about that adds 3 pounds.

So much of Thanksgiving Day is about food for North Americans, so today

we want to think about food and why we eat, and what food means. I can't think of anyone better to help us think about the meaning of food, and the joy of food, than Corlan Harrison, our Kitchen Coordinator. She and her team in the kitchen represents our church in the community every day in ways that are compassionately practical and service minded. I asked her to fill us in a little about ways that food plays a part in our ministry here at the La Verne Church of the Brethren, and more widely, what food means to her.

Corlan:

For just over fifteen years now, I've had the privilege of serving as this congregation's kitchen coordinator. A little part-time job, that changed my life.

Mark Twain once said:

The two most important days in life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.

I'm incredibly thankful to all of you, this congregation, for helping me discover my why.

If I've learned anything, in our kitchen, over the years it's **that we use food as our vehicle and our journey is Love.**

Food is the vehicle and our journey is LOVE

We use our kitchen to teach our children lessons of life and faith. To share our history and fill empty stomachs of college students. We've delivered thousands of dinners to our homeless neighbors, often using vegetables grown in our Peace and Carrots Garden (Labors of Love). Not to mention, memorial celebrations, wedding receptions and snacks after church we call Nosh. Lunches, brunches, love feasts, picnics and our famous Easter Omelets, this is where we gather our church family in fellowship in faith in the name of love. The youth make pies to earn funds to attend National Conference and occasionally we film a Cooking with Corlan episode, just for fun. We create connection through Welcome Bread and continued relationship with Loaves of Love.

This congregation celebrates, welcomes, grieves, gives care, teaches, learns and worships with food!!

Susan Boyer calls it our Food Ministry!

Our Food Ministry is a journey of Love!

I've had the privilege of a front row seat to this ministry!

For example, watching a young Peace Camp camper, learn a simple lesson of hidden qualities. During a pre pandemic Peace Camp, as part of the daily activities, I had a group of campers, about 15 kids around a table in the kitchen. I had offered the campers a piece of snack cake as they arrived and invited them to enjoy it. Along with the cake, I had placed an extra- large

platter, full of fruit and vegetables, at least 20 different kinds, in the center of the table. As they ate, I informed the campers that something on that platter was an ingredient in the snack cake. Our lesson was to discover the hidden quality (or ingredient). This particular young camper had enthusiastically devoured the cake and finding that there was a secret ingredient, announced it wasn't zucchini, couldn't be because he hated zucchini. As the kids guessed I would remove that fruit or vegetable and even when we got down to it either being an onion or the much-hated squash he still insisted it wasn't zucchini! I wish words could fully describe the look on his face when I removed the onion. Priceless! He thought for a moment, then said "I guess I love zucchini!"

It was a journey from Hate to Love through a simple snack cake (well it was chocolate).

Food Network is another journey of love for us and a personal one for me. Some of you know, I grew up on the La Verne College campus, attended University of La Verne, met my husband there and enjoyed watching our daughter graduate from ULV. Once a month, along with numerous volunteers, we provide a free, homestyle meal and invite the ULV student body. As the founders of that educational institution, this event allows us to share our history, in this community, around the comfort of a simple dinner table.

Brethren style- simple food served with love.

But your commitment to our Food Ministry was never more apparent, than during this Covid Pandemic. The last 21 months has provided a window into our journey of love, using food and following the teachings of Jesus. When other churches were forced to stop their charitable work, providing meals to our homeless neighbors, you decided to provide even more meals. Through the work of our service commission, we had been providing a main dish, once a month for 150-175 participants at the Armory, then the Hope for Home facility, so annually we were assisting with 1800 -2100 plates of food. Then Covid hit! And as I mentioned, many churches were unable to help out. This congregation and denomination, flipped the script! We applied for and received two grants through the Brethren Disaster Ministries, but it was your commitment to feed the hungry and your generosity that made it possible. From March 2020 – November 2021 -21 months, we have delivered close to 10,000 plates of food to our neighbors in need.

Food is the vehicle the journey of Love.

I'm an ok cook, not the best, not the worst, but I am brilliant because I've surrounded myself with the best volunteers in the world, the kindest, hardest working human beings I've ever met! You have carried this cook through the last fifteen years and somehow you do it with grace, humor, grit and great

attitudes even when I take credit for your hard work! Thank you, my friends!

My journey here has been made possible because of your love.

I grew up with kitchen table ministry- witnessed at many meals, shared recipes and stories about the power of the plate: My grandpa Ortmyer sat me down one afternoon in the Summer of 1973, he was a pastor and a man of peace. He was also an avid believer in the power of my grandma's pancakes. Those same pancakes I told our children about earlier today. He witnessed many conflicts turned peaceful resolutions over a platter of those cakes. He claimed that peaceful resolution doesn't have to be complicated, it's a matter of finding common ground, and he never meet a person that didn't like his wife's pancakes. Now, keep in mind, this is the summer of 1973 we were all very concerned over the conflict in Viet Nam. He was certain if the leaders of the nations involved would gather around a table, over a stack of my grandma's pancakes, they could find common ground and end the conflict, find their way to peace through Pancakes.

Food is the vehicle the journey is LOVE

I'm sending the recipe to our congressional leaders for Christmas and Hanukkah. Fingers crossed!

I don't mean to over simplify the complications of war or conflict; I want to amplify the power of a simple meal shared. Jesus taught us so. A simple table of food can create common ground and that brings us together, that allows a family in conflict to talk, couples struggling to take a breath and reconnect, children to sit eye level with their parents and church families to give thanks and remember.

I know it's just food- but when created from your heart it can be that vehicle that takes us on a journey of Love. Let it be so!

Thank You

Tom:

"Food is the vehicle. The journey is love." Corlan is right. Let's remember that phrase. "Food is the vehicle. The journey is love." (Say that with me...)

"Food is the vehicle. The journey is love."

That is the best political statement and the best political method available. And we Brethren learned that at love feast. It's food, but it's food that makes a point. And the point is that our journey is love. Food that reminds us of who Jesus is, and that the table of love is bigger than we thought; big enough for all, no matter who we are, or where we're from, or what we've done; food that reminds us that it's better when we share, and that there is enough for everyone; because we're all on the same journey – the journey of love...

Someday, at Love Feast, we'll have to serve Love Pancakes.

We share the bread and cup, but this bread and juice remind us that God's love is deep enough to free us and forgive us and fit us for a life of grace and compassion and service – the journey from hate to love... with or without zucchini. For Brethren, we learned that at Love Feast. It's in our bones. It's who we are.

"Food is the vehicle. The journey is love."