

It was *Show and Tell* day in a 1st grade class room. The teacher picked three boys to stand up and present their objects to the class. The first boy stood up and said “Hi, My name is Abram, I’m Jewish and this is a Star of David!” The second boy got up and said “Hi, my name is Johnny and I’m Catholic, this is a Crucifix!” Finally the third boy got up and said “Hi, My name is Billy and I’m Baptist and this is a casserole!!”

Meals, food, eating together are part of Christianity. They’re a vital part of the church. One of the things that I’m looking forward to in 2021 is returning to more church fellowship and meals together. 2020 has taught us something that previously we took for granted – How precious a table gathering with family and friends is.

Did you know food is mentioned 90 times in the four gospels? Jesus used meals to engage with people and teach important lessons. In the gospel of Luke alone, there are 10 stories of Jesus dining with various people. And He continues to call us to His table, the Communion Table, to feast on who He is and learn more about Him through His Word, to draw closer to each other. Jesus’ example provides an opportunity to invite friends, outcasts and even enemies to know God’s story of grace, love and salvation.

The Lord’s Table is not an ordinary meal. It’s very special. Yet, the Bible never tells us how often we’re to have Communion. At Grace we only celebrate the Lord’s Table every other month. Some churches celebrate Communion every Sunday. Some celebrate it every month. Some celebrate it once a year. At Grace we’ve tried to balance out with doing it too often where it becomes overly familiar, yet not too infrequent where we forget His sacrifice and miss the special blessings of this Table. Are we doing it right? I don’t know. We’re seeking to balance it out where it stays special because it is, but not overly familiar. .

The Lord’s Supper is far from ordinary. The Lord’s Table, Communion—Eucharist—whatever you call it—is not an ordinary “meal.” It’s not like the sack lunch we pack to take to work or school. This is not a fast-food value meal we pick up at the drive-through to devour as we drive on the way to a soccer game. When we eat together here, it’s not like grazing our way through the fridge for leftovers. This is **Not just an ordinary meal.**

Has that awareness hit your brain? This meal is special—precious—because even though the food on the table before us won’t take long to consume—just a few moments—it’s meant to linger in our souls. This meal we are about to share holds no great variety—it’s just tiny dry pieces of unleavened bread—and a cup with barely a swallow full of liquid. But in spite of its size, it carries in it the eternity-impacting truth of God’s great love. It’s not the kind of meal that will fill our stomachs but it reminds us of Someone Whose sacrifice fully satisfied a hunger and a thirst that is deep within each of us.

William Willimon (**picture**) recalls the first time he was asked to teach a seminary class about Communion. He went to an older colleague and said, “How shall I begin? What should I do?” The older colleague said, “The first thing you must do is go to a kitchen and learn how to cook.” Willimon said, “Why should I learn how to cook if all I want to do is to teach the meaning of Communion?”

His older colleague replied, “You will never be able to understand the meaning of Communion until you know the love of cooking and the joy of those who are satisfied.”

And that’s what we do this morning. The food we are about to eat and drink reminds us of the fact that Jesus came to satisfy that deep longing we all have for God—the hunger and thirst for righteousness that Jesus talked about in the Sermon on the Mount.

Before we partake I want to delve deeper into this truth by seeking an answer to this question: **What else makes this an Extra-ordinary Meal?**

1. Our Host is not ordinary. Our Host this morning isn’t Gordon Ramsay (**picture**) or Rachael Ray (**picture**) or even Emeril Lagasse (**picture**). It’s not some restaurant maître-d—friendly, efficient, but aloof. Nor is He the chef of a buffet, some nameless guy in a puffy white hat lurking between counter and kitchen directing staff to keep the chafing dishes full.

What makes our meal special is that our Host is Jesus Himself. It’s the Lord Jesus Who invites us to this table. The unique thing about Jesus doing this is the fact that He is not at all like the hosts at earthly banquets. He doesn’t supervise the waiters who bring us our food. Nor is He the kind of host who sits at the table with us while servers deliver our meal—servers who are careful to serve Him and the rest of the head table first. No, Jesus comes and serves each of us Himself.

Do you remember what He did the night He hosted that first last supper? After settling that dispute among the guests as to who was the most important. Jesus—the Host Himself—got up from the table—took a towel, wrapped it around His waist—and then taking a basin of water, knelt to wash the muddy feet of His followers. Is that Extra-ordinary or what!?!

That's the kind of host we have this morning. As Jesus put it in Matthew 20, "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*" It's important for us to "pull back" long enough to remember this—because having a Host like this—a Lord like this—inspires us to do the same. To grow to be more like Jesus—means focusing not on self—but on others.

Nik Wallenda (**picture**) is a follower of Christ who has become the most-watched high wire artist and daredevil in the world. His two most recent feats were seen by a billion people across this planet. In 2012 Wallenda walked a tightrope across Niagara Falls. The next year he became the first person to high-wire walk across the Grand Canyon.

But Wallenda knows he'll be tempted by pride, so after the huge crowds and the media fade away, he engages in a simple spiritual discipline. He walks where the crowds have just stood and quietly picks up trash.

Wallenda recently wrote, "*My purpose is simply to help clean up after myself. The huge crowd left a great deal of trash behind, and I feel compelled to pitch in. Besides, after the inordinate amount of attention I sought and received, I need to keep myself grounded. Three hours of cleaning up debris is good for my soul. Humility does not come naturally to me. So, if I have to force myself into situations that are humbling, so be it. I know that I need to get down on my hands and knees like everyone else. I do it because it's a way to keep from tripping. As a follower of Jesus, I see Him washing the feet of others. I do it because if I don't serve others I'll be serving nothing but my ego.*"

So—this is no ordinary meal—because we have no ordinary Host. Our Host serves us, and inspires and commands us to do the same.

2. Our Table is not ordinary. That's another thing that makes this meal special is that we dine at no ordinary table. It's not one of those tables with fixed seats like the ones at McDonald's with a plastic top held firmly in place by individual tubes, and seats of welded steel that only seat one. It's not some pressboard table covered with a plastic "cloth." Nor is this a foldaway table like you use on an airline.

It's not even a beautiful cherry wood or oak table carefully crafted by a skilled carpenter. No—the unique thing about the TABLE Jesus calls us to—is that it expands and expands and expands. It has an infinite number of leaves to insert. There is no limit to its size. This table expands with the selfless love of our Host, and it grows with the grace of His invitation to sinners.

Jesus loves all people—in spite of our sin—and He invites all to come. Why, He even invited Judas to His table—knowing he was the one who would betray Him. To be clear, Jesus hates sin because He knows how much it hurts us. Jesus knows that the wells of this world don't satisfy—so He lovingly, generously says, "*If anyone—any sinner—is thirsty, let them [turn from their sin and] come!*" (John 7)

And down through the millennia they have come—sinners of all types—the thief on the cross—a woman caught in the act of adultery—murderers like Saul—deniers like Peter—lustfuls and liars—racists and abusers—the proud—the foolish—the selfish—Jesus has welcomed countless repentant sinners. Why—He even invites you and me to come to this table!

So—this is no ordinary table! As one theologian puts it, "*It expands with mercy, it lengthens with love, and it pushes to the ends of the earth with the gospel of peace.*" That brings us to the final thing that makes this meal special.

3. We dine around it with unordinary people. We're eating with extraordinary friends, friends who stick closer than a brother, because we're people who've each experienced our Host's—our Heavenly Father's love and grace—and have obeyed His command to do—to love—likewise.

We are commanded—commissioned—to love each other as our Host has loved us. We are to take the love with which He has welcomed us to this ever-expanding table and love others no matter what their sin. That kind of love makes us stand out—it makes us far from ordinary.

Do you remember our Host's command? Jesus said, "*As the Father has loved Me, so have I loved you. Now remain in My love...My command is this: love each other as I have loved you.*" (John 15) "*By this will all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another*" (John 13:35). In other words, we will be known, we will stand out as extraordinary if we love as Jesus loves.

An article in *The New York Times* by Nicolas Wade was entitled: "Depth of the Kindness Hormone Appears to Know Some Limits."

Wade reports that scientists have identified a specific, love-inducing, trust-building chemical called Oxytocin. Psychologists refer to it as the "hormone of love." When oxytocin is present in our brain, we want to reach out to help and bond with other people.

However, research has shown that this "love hormone" has its limits. Studies show that human oxytocin produces a brand of "love" that only extends to people in our "group." In other words, in sinful human beings, oxytocin unleashes a narrow, ethnocentric kind of love—a love that extends only to "our kind of people."

Scientists did an experiment. A number of Dutch students were given doses of oxytocin and then presented with hypothetical dilemmas. In one scenario, students were asked “whether to help a person onto an overloaded lifeboat, thereby drowning the five already there.”

In another scenario, they were asked whether to save “five people in the path of a train by throwing a bystander onto the tracks.” The five people who might be rescued were nameless, but the person who might be sacrificed was given a Dutch name. Students who sniffed oxytocin prior to these tests were much more likely to favor their own kind and sacrifice ethnic outsiders.

The study concluded that oxytocin only increases our love and loyalty for people of our in-group. But conversely, it makes us more likely to exclude those who aren’t like us. Clearly, in our fallen state, our love doesn’t stretch very far.

But the love of our Host is not like that. Remember? Jesus told Nicodemus that His is a love that extends to everyone in this fallen world. Our Lord healed, embraced, and then died for not just “insiders” but for blatant outsiders—including His enemies—the people who put Him on that cross. And that is what makes those of us at this meal special.

As brothers and sisters in God’s family, we are called to love in that same extraordinary way. Jesus calls us to love enemies and outsiders. Because of that, when we leave this table, we must no longer live like ordinary people.

If we come to this table with the right attitude—open to what Jesus wants to teach us—something happens to us. The ordinary is swallowed up into the extraordinary. The usual vanishes into the unusual.

The worst of us is crucified with Christ and the best of Him takes its place in our lives. And when that extraordinary thing happens, other sinners notice and are drawn to Jesus.

Dr. Lewis Smedes (**picture**) tells of a woman who teaches with him on the faculty of Fuller Seminary. He says that she used to be an ordinary person, a contented unbeliever. She was typical—usual—until one day she ran into a group of people who seemed very unusual. Yes—they were Christians, and they didn’t play the same games that she saw others playing. They didn’t push the same politically correct values that she was pushing for in her own life but they seemed loving, deep and real.

She said to herself, “If Christianity were true, this is how I would expect Christians to live. These people do live that way. So maybe Christianity is true. Maybe Jesus is real.”

She went to church, she read the Bible, and she learned about the love of God. She asked Christ into her heart and life. And in that decision, she learned that—as I have said—this is no ordinary meal, and Jesus is no ordinary host. She learned this is no ordinary table, and those who eat here are no ordinary people. Smedes says that woman went back to school to earn a second Ph.D.—this one in theology.

Today she teaches at Fuller because of the love of those extraordinary people—people like us who left this extraordinary table with a renewed commitment to love as our Host has loved us.

Conclusion: So with all this in mind—as we share this meal—I invite all Christians to join us—even if you’re not a member of this church—because if you are His—this is yours. This morning I want to remind all Christians present—that we are called by our Extra-ordinary Host to love others as He has loved us.

But if you’re here today and have never experienced that love—if you thirst for more—then hear Jesus’ invitation to come. Romans 10 says, “... *If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved...For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*”

This is your opportunity to respond to the extraordinary invitation of our extraordinary Host. Is He your Host? Is Jesus your Lord and Savior?