

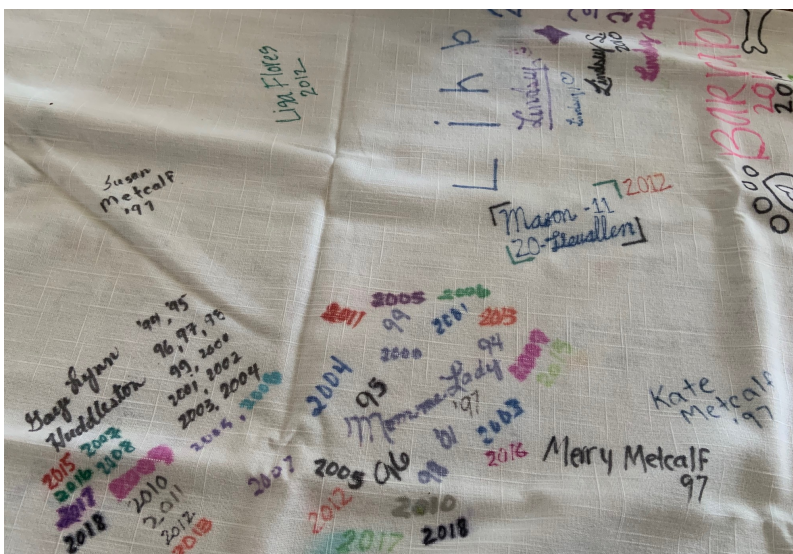
## A Table Worth Dining At

A sermon by the Rev. Nate Huddleston  
Last Sunday after Pentecost – Year C

- Digging into smoked turkey, wondering if we might bite down on a piece of buckshot, left from Pawpaw's turkey that he had shot earlier in the week on his annual turkey hunt.
- Cigars with my dad and uncles as we watch the turkey fry and feeling even more grown up than my pimple face would denote.
- Eating pumpkin pies with pie crusts gone as evidence of those with little patience and lack of self-discipline.
- An after-dinner strategy meeting about what time to get up and whether to go to Walmart first or the Circuit City for the best Black Friday deals.
- Anxiously awaiting the OSU vs. OU game and wondering if this would be the year we would beat Sooners.
- Eating a feast at the odd hour so that there was still enough time left in the day to have the leftovers.

But always and most importantly in the middle of the room, a table draped with an old linen. On this tablecloth there are names written haphazardly as if it were a kindergarten thanksgiving project to tape to the fridge. Names like: Ray Sharp, Mark Dyslin, Mary Metcalf, Lisa Flores, Reade Huddleston. The list grows each year.

You see, one of the sacred traditions for the past 36 years gathered around our Thanksgiving table is not only our family, but also those who had no other place to go or were too far from family, some we barely knew. The names represented here were, of course, friends, but surrogate grandparents, best-selling authors, a young man who was just released from prison, visitors from other countries who my brother had dragged home with him from college and of course, the cat and dog. All of them were required to sign their names and date or dates they had been present. It was always fun to watch as people tried to find where they had signed previously and then squeal with delight and joy.





That tablecloth was for me, an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace of thanksgiving, community and acceptance. We welcomed **everyone** at our table, **especially** those who were not a part of our biological family.

**It is at that table that I learned that the only table worth dining at is one that includes everyone.**

It is where I learned the meaning of the Eucharist, as we call it the Episcopal Church. The word comes from the Greek word meaning "thanksgiving," It signifies a giving thanks for the wonderful acts of God throughout history that allow us to be reconciled to God. It is giving thanks that we can be in union with God, which is our true desire and goal.

It is also called the Mass, from missa, the word of dismissal used at the end of the Latin service. It is the end. It is over. We are charged to go back into the world renewed, refreshed, reinvigorated to be about being Christ's hands and feet in a sinful and broken world. It is where we learn to live like Christ, because Christ has become a part of us, and we have become a part of Christ. We can now begin to bring about the Kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven, in this place at this time. Now life can truly and really begin.

It is also called Holy Communion because by the grace of God we believe that we are communing with the Holy One himself, his spirit enlivening their spirits, heating the blood, and gladdening the heart just the way wine can.

But I think more important than what we call it, is what it does! The Eucharist can wake up the molecules of love inside of us. Opening us to the possibility of our loving the world, each other and ourselves as Christ loves us. With each piece of bread and sip of wine we become more aware of the deep unfolding mystery of who we called to be **Christ Incarnate**. Simple bread and wine become a profound way to connect with God but more importantly to connect with one another. Gathering around this table is meant to show us that every table, every meal with another can be sacred. If God can show up here, where can't God show up?

As we wait with expectant hope, during the Season of Advent, for Christ to be born again, we must remember that we are already a part of the kingdom.

"Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom" - no truer words have ever been uttered.

When we gather around the table and partake of the seemingly insignificant piece of wafer we call the bread of heaven and drink a wine that would make no Wine Enthusiast's list, it reminds us that we now carry some mark of the whom who we remember: Christ himself. That Jesus have left some mark of who he is on who you are. It means that you can summon him back to your mind.

But even more it helps me remember those with whom I have shared this meal, just the tablecloth of my youth, even though countless years and miles may stand between us. It means that if we meet again, they will know me. It means that even after I die, they can still see my face and hear my voice and speak to me in their heart.

The same is true here today. The Eucharist helps to remember who we are a children of God. For as long as you remember me, I am never entirely lost. When I'm feeling like a shadow of myself, it's your remembering me that helps remind me that I actually exist. When despair is overtaking me, it's my consolation. When I'm joy permeates my being, it's part of why I feel that way. If you forget me, one of the ways I remember who I am will be gone. If you forget me, part of who I am will be gone. "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom," the good thief said from his cross (Luke 23:42). There are perhaps no more human words in all of Scripture, no prayer we can pray so well.

Making it to church isn't easy. The life of a disciple or follower of Jesus is difficult and demanding. The simply simple act of gathering with others, all of us broken and hurting in some way, around a table is where the Church is most the Church has the possibility of changing us, as the wine and bread are changed, into the very body and blood of Christ. In essence, Christ becomes so much a part of us, literally, that we become a part of Christ. We become in C.S. Lewis words, "Little Christs." Receiving the bread and the wine, the body and blood of Christ is the most dangerous, radical and life-changing act one in which one can engage. It says that I find my identity, not in my education, my job or my bank account, but in being God's beloved child. There is nothing I can do to make God love me more and there is nothing I can do to make God love me less. I am loved!

That is what the Thanksgiving tablecloth of my youth has come to mean to me. It is what the gathering around the table here and now means.

And in being loved I can become more fully alive, more truly alive. We can then say with Peter, where else will we go, you have the words of life, true, authentic life, the life we were intended to live when God created human beings. A life of total union with God. God is not in us and we are in God. Therefore, we can echo the most quoted words in the scripture "Fear not." We now no longer have to live in fear, but in love.

So be careful when you come to receive this morning, you are about to engage in a dangerous, death-defying, possibly life changing act.

As you come to receive the Eucharist today look around you at the presence of God in all those around you and rejoice. Your name is not written on a Tablecloth, but in the Book of Life and more importantly, in the heart of God. Remember that you are loved! What else matters?