

A Big, Big Table With Lots & Lots of Food
Message for North East United Methodist Church
June 2, 2019
Rev. Dr. Drew M. Christian

Years ago I saw a beautiful foreign film years called *Babette's Feast*.

In the film, a young woman, Babette, arrives there and two kindly women take her into their house. Babette serves them faithfully for decades until one day she discovers that she is holding a winning lottery ticket. The village expects her to leave the small village and go to Paris; instead, Babette sends to Paris for the finest foods, wines, china, and crystal. She plans, cooks, and prepares a feast for the people in this village.



Many of the religious folk are against the pleasures of the world; yet, they agree that they must accept Babette's hospitality. Thus; they gather at the table reluctantly.



As the meal progresses, pleasures many of these folks have never experienced begin to entice them.



A visiting nephew proclaims that he has never tasted food so wonderful other than in the most prestigious restaurant in Paris.

Stookey writes, in his book, *Eucharist: Christ's Feast With The Church*, "*Those gathered at the table soon begin to warm to the feast, and to each other. Old grudges are forgiven, new pleasures experienced, and in the end those who came unwillingly are dancing in the village street, despite their age and the chill of the night air. Only then is Babette's true identity*

revealed. She acknowledges...that... she ...was the chef of that preeminent Paris restaurant. Further, this most applauded cook in Europe used up her entire lottery prize to give this obscure village a banquet they did not want – and in the process to bring about a reconciliation and joy they could have experienced in no other way.”

Stookey continues, “*Whether intended by those who made the film or unintentional, is not Babette a superb Christ-figure; the incognito person of honor who humbly assumes the role of a servant, joyfully and freely sacrificing all for the transformation of those she loves? And is not Babette’s marvelous feast strangely akin to what some Christians call...Holy Communion?*”

A Marvelous Feast. It is a privilege to be invited to the table...it is a place we should jump up, unable to wait to receive, to remember...it is a place we should bow down in awe that God would invite us to this Holy Meal...it is a place where we, like the villagers sitting down to Babette’s feast, will experience transformation...

I want to take you today through the experience of Holy Communion...Let us open our hearts to hear, to remember, to understand this wonderful invitation we are given in the church...

Prayer

When we come to the table of Christ we experience many things. We experience...

- Community
- Repentance and Forgiveness
- Christ’s Death and Sacrifice for Us
- The Future as we look forward to Christ’s return and our Feasting at a Heavenly Banquet.

First, at the table...during Holy Communion...**We Experience Community.**



Paul reminds the church at Corinth that when we come to the table, when we receive communion, when we are reminded of Christ’s great sacrifice for each of us, we become one. By sharing at the table of Christ, Paul writes, in I Corinthians 10: 16-17, “***When we bless the cup at the Lord’s table, aren’t we sharing in the benefits of the blood of Christ? And when we break the loaf of bread, aren’t we sharing in the benefits of the body of Christ? And we all eat from one loaf, showing that we are one body.***”

Paul wrote in Ephesians 4, “***There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to one hope when you were called...***” When we come to the table, celebrating communion, we are reminded that we are members of God’s family...each of us belong to God and therefore, each of us belong to one another. We are called to take care of each other...



...lift each other up, love each other, and always remember that we are one because of our faith in Christ.

Are there others in the congregation at North East United Methodist Church that you can reach out to, help, love, and offer assistance? Is there anyone who you are angry with, disagree with, have had difficulty with, that you need to forgive? Are you causing division in the body of Christ or are you doing everything you can to build unity? Pray that God will show you where you can reach out to others, if there is anyone you need to forgive, and how you might build unity in the church by refusing to gossip, reaching out today to the stranger, and listening to others.

Secondly, at the table...during Holy Communion... **We Experience Repentance and Forgiveness.**

In I Corinthians 11: 27-29, *“So if anyone eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily, that person is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup unworthily, not honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking judgment upon yourself...”* Then in verse 31, *“But if we examine ourselves, we will not be examined by God and judged in this way.”*

Paul is explaining to the church in Corinth that they must “examine themselves”...



...before they eat of the bread or drink from the cup, before they celebrate Holy Communion.

Paul’s words to the church in Corinth have caused Christians, as Laurence Stookey writes, to *“engage in untold agony by examining themselves in advance of a Eucharistic celebration and asking, ‘Am I worthy to receive communion this week?’ Usually the answer has been ‘No!’ And logically so. Who is worthy of God’s grace? More to the point, who needs grace if worthiness exists? By definition, grace is only for the unworthy.”*

Yes, we are unworthy...But the word of God is clear...when we come to God with our “unworthiness,” our need for grace, God offers us forgiveness. John writes in I John 1:9, *“But if we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from every wrong.”* In Job 11:13-17, it is written, *“If only you would prepare your heart and lift up your hands to him in prayer! Get rid of your sins and leave all iniquity behind you. Then your face*

will brighten in innocence. You will be strong and free of fear. You will forget your misery. It will all be gone like water under the bridge. Your life will be brighter than noon day. Any darkness will be as bright as morning..”

How do we prepare our heart for communion...We confess our sins. We repent. We share openly and honestly with God where we have fallen, where we have messed up, where we have been self-centered. God promises to hear us...



...God promises us that we will be cleansed and made “whiter than snow.” We remember that the communion itself does not magically take care of our sins; only faith in Christ, repentance, seeking God’s forgiveness, does that. Communion is an “outward sign of an inward grace;” it is an outward expression of what God does for us when we come to Him, faults and all, honestly, hearts bared...God forgives.

Thirdly, at the table...during Holy Communion...**We Experience Christ’s Death** and sacrifice for us.

We experience Christ’s death and sacrifice for us in what is called The Great Thanksgiving. On that night, he was betrayed, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “*Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me.*”



We remember as we approach the table...as we see that bread broken and the cup of juice held up...we remember...as the prophet Isaiah, Isaiah 53: 3-5, cried out, ***“He was despised and rejected – a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way when he went by. He was despised and we did not care. Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from god for his own sins! But he was wounded and crushed for our sins. He was beaten that we might have peace. He was whipped, and we were healed.”***



As the bread is broken we remember that Christ's body was broken...we experience in Holy Communion Jesus' sacrifice...as it is written in Romans 5:6-8, ***“When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time and died for us sinners. Now, no one is likely to die for a good person, though someone might be willing to die for a person who is especially good. But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.”***



We come to the table awed at such sacrifice, such grace, such unconditional love.

Lastly, at the table...during Holy Communion...**We Experience The Future** as we look forward to Christ's return and our Feasting at a Heavenly Banquet.

As Stookey writes, *“Feasting with Christ on earth is done, as we have seen, in anticipation of feasting with Christ in heaven.”* Revelation 19 declares, *“Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”*

One day we will feast at a “heavenly banquet.” Wow! What an awesome picture...a picture that is beyond our imagination. Paul writes in I Corinthians 2:9, ***“That is what the scriptures mean when they say, ‘No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him.’”***

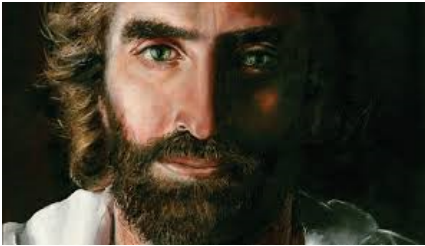
Akiane Kramarik...



...began telling her family about seeing visions at the age of four years old...she began to draw, sketch, with anything she could get her hands on...she later explained to her family that God gave her the visions and the abilities to create her artwork and poetry...



...both her parents were atheists...God was not spoken about in her home...through her dreams and visions...through her paintings...her parents converted to Christianity...later at age she would paint a portrait of Jesus, Prince of Peace...



***Akiane Kramarik – Prince of Peace
Painted at Age 8***

...the only picture of Jesus that Colton Burpo, the little boy in the story *Heaven is for Real*, says he has ever seen that captured what Jesus looks like.

One morning, Akiane was found gazing through the window at the sky, her face glowing, her eyes sparkling. Asked what she was doing she simply answered, *"I was with God again, and He told me to pray continually. He showed me where He lived. I was climbing transparent stairs; underneath I saw gushing waterfalls, and as I was approaching Him, His body was pure and intense light. What impressed me the most was His hands -- they were gigantic! I saw no bones, or veins, no skin or blood, but maps and events. Then He told me to memorize thousands upon thousands of wisdom words on a scroll that did not look like paper, but more like intense light. And in a few seconds I got somehow filled up. From now on I will get up early to paint. I hope one day I'd be able to paint what I was shown."*

All the pictures remaining, that you are going to see, are divine visions given to child prodigy, Akiane Kramarik...perhaps they give us a glimpse of what awaits...

When we come forward on a Sunday morning and receive communion, we look forward to the day that we will feast at a "heavenly banquet."



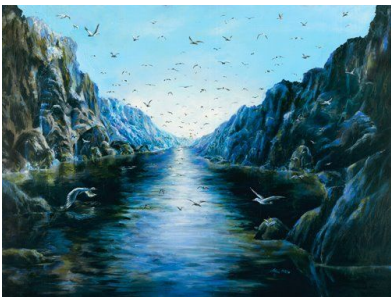
*Akiane Kramarik – Supreme Sanctuary
Painted at Age 11*

We are reminded that Jesus has gone to prepare a place for us.



*Akiane Kramarik – Returning Home
Painted at Age 12*

Several years ago, I officiated at the funeral of a good man from our congregation... a man that in the last months of his life had shown tremendous faith... His name was Ed Short... and as I visited Ed, as he lay in the hospital, I said to him, "You're having a rough day... aren't you?"... He replied, "Yea... but there are better days ahead."



*Akiane Kramarik – Power of Prayer
Painted at Age 10*

There are better days ahead! Better days ahead! Days without heartache...without cancer...without stress and broken relationships...without campus shootings and war...without violence and hopelessness...



Akiane Kramarik – Possibilities
Painted at Age 15

There are better days ahead!



Akiane Kramarik – Possibilities
Painted at Age 12

Personally, I like the way the contemporary Christian band, **Audio Adrenaline** puts it...

**“It’s a big, big house...with lots and lots of rooms...
A big, big table...with lots and lots of food...
A big, big yard...where we can play football...
A big, big house...It is my Father’s house.”**

As we come to the table today...come...know that it is not I who invite you to the table...it is Christ Himself...



Akiane Kramarik – Faithfulness
Painted at Age 16

...know that this table is open to everyone...no one is denied...God wants His house full...

Come... and remember that you are part of a Community....

Come...confess, and accept God's wonderful forgiveness through His Son, Jesus....

Come...remember and experience Christ's death and sacrifice for you...His love...

Come...and catch a glimpse into the future...a glimpse of a Heavenly Banquet...

A glimpse of a big, big table...with lots and lots of food...