

# Advent 2014 ::: 'Life at the Table'

*"The most sacred moments, the ones in which I feel God's presence most profoundly, when I feel the goodness of the world most arrestingly, take place at the table." Shauna Niequist, Bread and Wine*

## Meditation on 'Life at the Table'

### Thoughts on Community, Food, and the Importance of the Table

*"The most sacred moments, the ones in which I feel God's presence most profoundly, when I feel the goodness of the world most arrestingly, take place at the table."*

The particular alchemy of celebration and food, of connecting people and serving what I've made with my own hands, comes together as more than the sum of their parts. I love the sounds and smells and textures of life at the table, hands passing bowls and forks clinking against plates and bread being torn and the rhythm and energy of feeding and being fed.

I love to talk about food and cooking and entertaining. I want to hear about how other people do it, and about the surprising and significant things that happen when people gather around the table. Many of the books I've read and loved most dearly have been about food and gatherings at the table. My best moments have been spent in the kitchen, and many of the most deeply spiritual moments of the last year have taken place at the table.

It's not, actually, strictly, about food for me. It's about what happens when we come together, slow down, open our homes, look into one another's faces, listen to one another's stories. It happens when we leave the office and get a sitter and skip our workouts every so often to celebrate a birthday or an accomplishment or a wedding or a birth, when we break out of the normal clockwork of daily life and pop the champagne on a cold, gray Wednesday for no other reason than the fact that the faces we love are gathered around our table. It happens when we enter the joy and the sorrow of the people we love, and we join together at the table to feed one another and be fed, and while it's not strictly about food, it doesn't happen without it. *Food is the starting point, the common ground, the thing to hold and handle, the currency we offer to one another.*

It's no accident that when a loved one dies, the family is deluged with food. The impulse to feed is innate.

*Food is a language of care, the thing we do when traditional language fails us, when we don't know what to say, when there are no words to say. And food is what we offer in celebration – at weddings, at anniversaries, at happy events of every kind. It's the thing that connects us, that bears our traditions, our sense of home and family, our deepest memories, and, on a practical level, our ability to live and breathe each day. Food matters.*

At the very beginning, and all through the Bible, all through the stories about God and his people, there are stories about food, about all of life changing with the bite of a piece

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of fruit, about trading an inheritance for a bowl of stew, about waking up to find the land littered with bread, God's way of caring for his people; about a wedding where water turned to wine, Jesus' first miracle; about the very first Last Supper, the humble bread and wine becoming for all time, indelibly linked to the very body of Christ, the centre point for thousands of years of tradition and belief. It matters. It mattered then, and it matters now, possibly even more so, because it's a way of reclaiming some of the things we may have lost along the way.

*"Both the church and modern life, together and separately, have wandered away from the table. The church has preferred to live in the mind and the heart and the soul, and almost not at all in fingers and mouths and senses. And modern life has pushed us into faux food and fast food and highly engineered food products cased in sterile packages that we eat in the car or on the subway – as though we're astronauts, as though we can't be bothered with a meal.*

*What happens around the table doesn't matter to a lot of people. But it matters more and more to me. Life at the table is life at its best to me, and the spiritual significance of what and how we eat, and with whom and where, is new and profound to me every day. I believe God is here among us, present and working. I believe all of life is shot through with God's presence, and that part of the gift of walking with him is seeing his fingerprints in all sorts of unexpected ways."*

*Shauna Niequist, speaker and author of Bread and Wine. | Follow her @sniequist*

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## Introduction to Liturgical Season ::: Advent 2014

Advent |'ad,vent| *noun* : The arrival of a notable person, thing, or event : *The advent of television.* The first season of the church year, leading up to Christmas and including the four preceding Sundays. In Christian Theology: the coming or second coming of Christ. Origin: Latin 'adventus,' meaning 'arrival.'

*New Oxford American Dictionary*

The season of Advent ushers in the beginning of a new liturgical year, the first Sunday of four, a "Happy New Year!" of sorts. A slow crescendo of anticipation builds throughout the four weeks prior to Christmastide, a faux shadow of which popular culture tries to imitate in the long commercial build-up to Christmas Day. Throughout the history of the Christian church, Advent's focus has been on the arrivals (yes, plural) of Jesus – his first as God became flesh as a newborn babe in the middle of an occupied country, Messianic expectation confounded in the cries of a newborn. And his second, still coming, a fullness of peace and love that will arrive at the end of days. Perhaps that is why the classic themes of Advent have always been hope, peace, joy, and love – universal desires central to all of humanity in times of waiting with expectant anticipation, regardless of position, status, ethnicity, or gender.

As Richard Rohr writes,

*"The theological virtue of hope is the patient and trustful willingness to live without closure, without resolution, and still be content and even happy because our Satisfaction is now at another level, and our Source is beyond ourselves. We are able to trust that he will come again, just as Jesus has come into our past, into our private dilemmas and into our suffering world. Our Christian past then becomes our Christian prologue, and 'Come, Lord Jesus' is not a cry of desperation but an assured shout of cosmic hope."*

An assured shout of cosmic hope – an apt description of the Advent season indeed. Come, thou long expected Jesus. Come, Lord Jesus. Come.

*Chris Kamalski, Visual Liturgist | Follow him @chriskamalski*

## Interview with a Chef ::: Why Gather Around the Table?

Q: Tell us about eating..

A: "About eating? Hmmm. I don't know what it is, but *I often feel a sense of significance when I dine with people. Maybe it's just that it highlights the common thread between us and our neighbour. Whether rich or poor, educated or not – free or enslaved to some or other vice – we all need to eat. Primordial, perhaps, that eating makes us vulnerable as we let down our guard and feast. (Lions don't keep a look out when they tuck into their prey, do they?) And so when we gather around a table and share food, a 'breaking*

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*open' seems to occur and that's what I love about hosting people. Dinner tables are catalysts for change, and so I am somehow deciphering how God is going to be using the talents he's given me in the kitchen to bring people together around my small dinner table and ignite revolutions of love, selflessness and sustainable change. I get so excited when I think about it."*

*Leandri van der Wat, Disciple, Roast Republic Director, and that girl from MasterChef South Africa Season 2. Follow her at @This\_Is\_Leandri*

# **Liturgy for the Season ::: Advent 2014 Scripture to Read Together**

Each week, gather family and friends around your table. While sharing a fresh cup of coffee or tea, prepare for the coming celebration of the birth of Jesus, and his eventual 'coming in fullness,' through immersion, reflection, and thoughtful discussion in the Scriptures.

### **Advent Week 1 (HOPE) :::**

*Isaiah 64:1-9; Psalm 80:1-7, 17-19; 1 Corinthians 1:3-9; Mark 13:24-37*

### **Advent Week 2 (PEACE) :::**

*Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8*

### **Advent Week 3 (JOY) :::**

*Isaiah 61:1-4, 8-11; Psalm 126; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-24; John 1:6-8, 19-28*

### **Advent Week 4 (LOVE) :::**

*2 Samuel 7:1-11, 16; Psalm 89:1-4, 19-26; Romans 16:25-27; Luke 1:26-38*

### **Christmas Eve (GOD BECAME FLESH) :::**

*Isaiah 9:2-7; Psalm 96; Titus 2:11-14; Luke 2:1-20*

*"The music, the prayers, the bowing and rising, the incense – all of it was breaking down my defenses. That's what good liturgy does. It breaks your heart open and turns you towards God." (Fred Bahnson, Soil and Sacrament)*

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## Dinner Party Recipes ::: Encouraging Life at the Table

As Julia Child (!) writes in *My Life in France*, "No one is born a great cook. One learns by doing." Even the most natural chefs will admit to you if pressed that their skill and passion was almost always first borne out of repeated exposure learning in the kitchen with someone they loved. It's as if the creation of gourmet dishes takes place most naturally in the company of community, belying the mythical image of the solitary chef slaving away in front of the stove. To spur the deepening of community (and incredible shared meals!), each liturgical season will feature several recipes themed in the spirit of the season. Bon Appétit!

### Whole Roast Duck with Cherry, Cinnamon and Nutmeg Sauce

*This dish is a real labour of love. It takes a long time to make, but is worth the effort! Sounds just like Advent!*

Serves 4

Preparation: 20 minutes

Cooking: 1 hour, 10 minutes

#### Ingredients:

- salt 1 t
- pepper 1 t
- cinnamon 1/2 t
- star anise 2
- whole duck 1

For the honey glaze, mix:

- honey 1 T
- apple juice 1 T
- olive oil 1 t
- salt 1/2 t

For the cherry, cinnamon, and nutmeg sauce:

- cherries 460 g, stoned
- Port 2/3 cup
- cinnamon 1/2 t
- nutmeg, a pinch
- red wine 3 T
- sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- butter, 2 T, cubed and chilled

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## Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 140°C. Place the spices and seasoning in a mortar and pestle and crush until fine.
2. Wash the duck, pat it dry and then score the skin. Truss it (tie the drumsticks together) and place it breast side up on a rack in a roasting pan. Rub the spice mix into the duck.
3. Pour 3/4 cup warm water into the bottom of the pan and cover the roasting pan with foil.
4. Roast for 50 minutes. Turn the duck and poke the skin with a sharp knife. Roast for a further 50 minutes. Remove the duck from the oven, remove the foil and baste with the honey glaze. Turn the oven up to 200°C and return the duck to the oven and roast for a further 10 minutes. The skin should crisp up nicely. Remove from the oven and allow to rest for 10 minutes before carving. Serve with the cherry, cinnamon, and nutmeg sauce.
5. To make the cherry, cinnamon, and nutmeg sauce, halve the cherries and cook in the Port until soft, about 10 minutes. Add the spices, wine and season to taste. Reduce the sauce by half. Add the cold butter cubes one at a time until combined.

(Carb-conscious, wheat- and gluten-free | Pairing Wine: De Grendel Merlot 2012)

*(Recipe from Woolworths Taste magazine, December 2013. Recipe by Seline and Leandri Van der Wat).*

## Christmas Shortbread

*"Maybe add in some all-spice shortbread too? That's nice and Christmassy ;)" -Leandri van der Wat*

Makes about 20 fingers

Preparation: 30 minutes (including 20 refrigerated)

Cooking: 15 minutes

## Ingredients:

butter 125 g  
castor sugar (plus extra for dusting) 55 g  
plain flour 180 g  
mixed spice 1/2 t  
dried cherries, chopped 2 T

## Directions:

1. Preheat the oven to 190°C. Beat the butter and sugar together until smooth, then add the flour, spices and cherries. Don't overwork it, gently turning out onto a surface. Roll out to a 1-1.5 cm thickness.

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2. Cut, dust with castor sugar and place on a baking tray. Refrigerate for 20 minutes.
3. Place straight into the hot oven and bake for 15 minutes until golden.

*(Recipe from Leandri van der Wat).*

## Table Talk ::: Questions that Spark Conversation

Think back on a few of the fondest family memories that you have in your past. Chances are high that a portion of this cherished memory takes place at or near a dinner table, in close proximity to a shared meal. What is it about tasty food shared around a common table that lends itself to transformative questions, challenging discussion (spilling over to argument!), and hilarious laughter? It almost feels as if good dialogue is *only* sparked in the midst of filling bellies and common shared space. Thus, our hope this liturgical year is to deliberately engage shared conversation – at least one per season – together, seated around your table. Here's a few questions to spark your dialogue:

- *Why gather around the table at all? Why not simply eat in front of the TV or kitchen sink?*
- *What is it about shared food and common space that lends itself to great discussion?*
- *What are your hopes and fears as you prepare to enter into 2015?*
- *What are you proud of accomplishing as you turn the page on 2014?*
- *What are some words that describe this past season in your life?*
- *What does the season of Advent and Christmas mean to you as you seek to follow Jesus in your life?*
- *What is a holiday tradition you wish to start in your family this year?*

*"All great change begins at the dinner table."  
Ronald Reagan*

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## "The Table" ::: A Song to Anchor Advent 2014

### Verse 1

I will feast at the table of the Lord  
I will feast at the table of the Lord  
I won't hunger anymore  
At His table (x2)

### Chorus

Come all you weary, come and find  
His yoke is easy; His burden light  
He is able; He will restore  
At the table of the Lord

### Verse 2

There is peace at the table of the Lord  
There is peace at the table of the Lord  
I won't worry anymore  
At His table

### Verse 3

There is healing at the table of the Lord  
There is healing at the table of the Lord  
I won't suffer anymore  
At His table

### Bridge

I know He has a place for me  
Oh, what joy will fill my heart  
With the saints around the mercy seat of God

### Tag

I'm invited to the table of the Lord  
I'm invited to the table of the Lord  
He says, "Come just as you are"  
To His table

*Chris Tomlin, "The Table" (Click to Listen)*