



Come to the
TABLE
— E A S T E R —

[MEDITATION ON COME TO THE TABLE' ∴ THOUGHTS ON COMMUNITY, FOOD, & THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TABLE]

"This is what I want you to do: I want you to tell someone you love them, and dinner's at six. I want you to throw open your front door and welcome the people you love into the inevitable mess with hugs and laughter. I want you to light a burner on the stove, to chop and stir and season with love and abandon. Begin with an onion and a drizzle of olive oil, and go from there, any one of a million different places, any one of a million different meals.

Gather the people you love around your table and feed them with love and honesty and creativity. Feed them with your hands and the flavours and smells that remind you of home and beauty and the best stories you've ever heard, the best stories you've ever lived.

There will be a day when it all falls apart. My very dear friend lost her mom this year. That same month, another friend's marriage ended, shot through with lies and heartbreak. A friend I haven't talked to in ages called late one Sunday night to ask me how to get through a miscarriage. 'The bleeding,' she said, 'has already begun.' As I write, a dear family friend lies in a coma in a hospital bed.

These are things I can't change. Not one of them. Can't fix, can't heal, can't put the broken

pieces back together. But what I can do is offer myself, wholehearted and present, to walk with the people I love through the fear and the mess. That's all any of us can do. That's what we're here for.

Not the battle lines, keeping people in and out. Not the 'pro' and 'anti' stances, but the presence, the listening, the praying with and for on the days when it all falls apart, when life shatters in our hands.

The table is where we store up for those days, where we log minutes and hours building something durable and strong that gets tested in those terrible split seconds. And the table is where we return to stitch our hearts back together after the breaking.

I want you to stop running from thing to thing to thing, and to sit down at the table, to offer the people you love something humble and nourishing, like soup and bread, like a story, like a hand holding another hand while you pray. We live in a world that values us for how fast we go, for how much we accomplish, for how much life we can pack into one day. But I'm coming to believe it's in the in-between spaces that our lives change, and that the real beauty lies there.

Most of the time, I eat like someone's about to steal my plate, like I can't be bothered to chew or taste or feel, but I'm coming to see that the table is about food, and it's also about time. It's about showing up in person, a whole and present person, instead of a fragmented, frantic person, phone in one hand and to-do list in the other. Put them down, both of them, twin symbols of the modern age, and pick up a knife and a fork. The table is where time stops. It's where we look people in the eye, where we tell the truth about how hard it is, where we make space to listen to the whole story, not the table sound bite.

They say the way to a man's heart is through his stomach. I believe that's absolutely true. Not that the way to land a guy is by baking him cookies, although it never hurts. But that if you can satiate a person's hunger, you can get a glimpse of their heart. There's an intimacy in it, in the meeting of needs and the filling of one's stomach, that is, necessarily, tied to the heart. I want you to gobble up life in huge bites, tasting everything, trying every new flavor, remembering every smell and texture like it's the best thing you've ever had. I want you to live with wild and gorgeous abandon, throwing yourself into each day, telling the truth about who you are and who you are not, writing a love song to the world itself and to the God who made every inch of it.

I want you to invest yourself wholly and deeply in friendship, God's greatest evidence of himself here on earth. More than anything, I want you to come to the table. In all sorts of ways, both literally and physically, come to the table.

We don't come to the table to fight or to defend. We don't come to prove our to conquer, to draw lines in the sand or to stir up trouble. We come to the table because our because our hunger brings us there. We come with a need, with fragility, with an admission of our humanity. The table is the great equalizer, the level playing field may of us have been looking everywhere for. The table is the place where the doing stops, the trying stops, the masks are removed, and we allow ourselves to be nourished, like children. We allow someone else to meet our need. In a world that prides people on not having needs, on going longer and faster, on going without, on powering through, the table is a place of safety and rest and humanity, where we are allowed to be as fragile as we feel. If the home is a body, the table is the heart, the beating center, the sustainer of life and health.

Come to the table."

(Shauna Niequist, author. "Come To The Table" chapter excerpt from Bread and Wine. | @sniequist)

INTRODUCTION TO LITURGICAL SEASON ::: EASTER I

Easter ˈiːstəʊ noun : 1. the most important and oldest festival of the Christian Church, celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ and held (in the Western Church) between 21 March and 25 April. 2. the weekend from Good Friday to Easter Monday.

(New American Oxford Dictionary)

My Uncle Michael loves starting family dinners with a toast (often, several toasts actually!). In a family where not every-one would consider themselves a practicing Jesus-follower, I guess it's our version of a family prayer, the inaugural event that begins almost all family meals.

Over the years, I've grown to love his boisterous, yet deeply heartfelt, toasts – to family gathered around the table or long-since passed on, to the skilled hands working magic in the kitchen, to the flavours steaming on our plates before us, to the occasion, serious or silly, that caused our family to gather together once again. In all likelihood, it's the most sacred ritual our family collectively participates in.

"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."

I'm reminded of Uncle Michael's love of toasting increasingly when I reflect on the season of Easter, and the "*unmitigated celebration*" (Joan Chittester) that this season is within the life of the Church. As Michael's toasts linger, allowing the family to settle into the rhythm of the family meal to come, the season of Easter creates space – expansive space fifty days in length! – for the Church to process and own the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. It's a truth – the truth, perhaps – that begs careful, unhurried consideration, for it forms in concert with the death of Christ the crux of the Christian faith.

[INTERVIEW WITH A TEACHER, MOTHER, AND DEEP FRIEND OF JESUS ::: WHY SHARE THE RESURRECTION AROUND A TABLE?]

Resurrection, my friends, is something worth celebrating, and celebrating over time. A dinner party without end? How memorable are those in your mind! So 3rd Place, welcome to the season of Easter, where we “Come To The Table” expectant – that death has been defeated, that life has begun anew, and that everyone – EVERYONE – is welcome at God’s table. Come to the table, friends, and pull out a chair of welcome for the person next to you. We’re going to be here for awhile!

(Chris Kamalski, Visual Liturgist |
Follow him @chriskamalski)

Q: Why share a table?

A: “Tables are round, square, and rectangular; they vary. But ultimately a table is intimate. Sitting at the table invites us to participate in real life face time and eye contact while stuffing our faces with Christ’s goodness and mercy in the form of wonderful meals prepared by humans through whose hands Jesus manifested himself while slicing, cutting, baking, and cooking. Around the table we share food, wine, and stories, and are reminded about our deep God-made desire to belong, to share Life itself.”

Q: How does the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus form us as followers of Jesus?

A: “The reality of the Resurrection of Jesus gives us the courage to be God’s fools in this world. We are foolish enough to live a Life of forgiveness, hope, and self-denial in a world where revenge, despondency, and climbing the ladder of wanting and gathering more and

more success, status, money and possessions for one’s self are the norm.”

Q: Why is it important to practice Resurrection regularly as a community?

A: “After an intense week at work, or the morning after a hectic night with sick kids and no sleep, I do not feel like community on a Sunday morning. I drag my feet to open my house for the first guests arriving, and my tired body wonders: ‘How am I even going to be hospitable today? Resurrection? What Resurrection?’

But the kids are over the moon to see their friends. Suddenly I smell coffee. More people come through the gates. We hug and exchange a few pleasantries. I taste the amazing coffee. Slowly, my whole body is waking up as The Body of Christ surrounds me.

Kids are playing. Dogs are baking in the sun, paws in the air. The fire is ready to braai the ‘more-than-enough’ meat present.

What began as just another day is transformed into community time where we are reminded of His Resurrection. Not just reminded, but our whole body awakens and tired human beings are once again Resurrected through the love of Christ, manifested through our friends.

That’s how we practice Resurrection when we get together – we practice true friendship and togetherness. Being One. And why is it important? It breathes Jesus himself into The Body and fills us with joy, spilling over to others in the world who hunger and thirst for the Bread of Life we have to offer.”

(Linda Rousseau; Teacher, Mother, and Deep Friend of Jesus, who facilitates the leadership of EPIC, a community of families within 3rd Place in Pretoria. | Follow her @linda_rousseau. Contact her for more info on EPIC by emailing linda@3rdplace.co.za.)

LITURGY FOR THE SEASON ::: SCRIPTURE TO READ TOGETHER]

For hundreds of years in the life of the Church, Easter was not crammed into a pastel-filled Sunday, but allowed to fill out an entire liturgical season within the rhythm of the church year, 50 days (!) in length, stretching from Easter Sunday through Pentecost, 7 weeks later. It's as if early Christ-followers were unwilling to move on from the Resurrection of Jesus, desiring to linger in its delicious goodness as one wishes an amazing meal would never end. Joan Chittester writes that "it is a period of unmitigated celebration. There is a sense of holy abandonment to this space between the already-but-not-yet feel of life, a kind of reckless giddiness in the church year. For fifty great days, the heart of the Christian community has a sense of ultimate fulfillment. At the First Coming, at the Incarnation, we know possibility. After the Resurrection, till the Second Coming, we know the power of the presence of God in the midst of us. From now till then, the early church taught, the Spirit would companion us home"

(The Liturgical Year, p. 174).

This year, the season of Easter culminates with Pentecost on Sunday, May 24th, 2015. How could you posture your liturgy this season to celebrate the Resurrection throughout Easter, crescendoing with Pentecost, often called 'the Church's Birthday Party?'

Easter Liturgy to Read Each Week

- **Easter Sunday (Sun, Apr 5th)**
Isaiah 25:6-9; Psalm 118:1-24; 1 Corinthians 15:1-11; John 20:1-18
- **Easter Week 2 (Sun, Apr 12th) :::** Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31
- **Easter Week 3 (Sun, Apr 19th)**
Acts 3:12-19; Psalm 4; 1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48
- **Easter Week 4 (Sun, Apr 26th)**
Acts 4:5-12; Psalm 23; 1 John 3:16-24; John 10:11-18
- **Easter Week 5 (Sun, May 3rd)**
Acts 8:26-40; Psalm 22:25-31; 1 John 4:7-21; John 15:1-8
- **Easter Week 6 (Sun, May 10th)**
Acts 10:44-48; Psalm 98; 1 John 5:1-6; John 15:9-17
 - **Ascension of the Lord (Sun, May 17th)** Acts 1:1-26; Psalm 47; Ephesians 1:15-23; Luke 24:44-53
 - **Pentecost (Sun, May 24th)**
Acts 2:1-21; Ezekiel 37:1-14; Psalm 104:24-35; Romans 8:22-27, John 16:4-15

"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 Bahnsen, Soil and Sacrament)

1 DINNER PARTY RECIPES ::: ENCOURAGING LIFE AT THE TABLE I

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 recipes themed in the spirit of the season. Bon Appétit!

Chicken Livers – Community Style!

“Chicken livers are cheap but very, very tasty and filling!”

(–Linda Rousseau)

Ingredients

125 ml flour (half-cup)
1 teaspoon salt + 1 teaspoon white pepper
500 grams chicken livers
Cooking oil
1 onion, chopped
1 teaspoon dried chili flakes
1 can (410 gram size) tomatoes, chopped and peeled
1 tablespoon peri peri powder
125 ml (half-cup) cream

Directions

Cut chicken livers into smaller pieces.
Mix flour, salt, and white pepper together and pour into a large plastic bag.
Add chicken livers to the bag and shake until all the livers are covered thoroughly with the flour mix.
In a frying pan, heat oil and fry onions until they are caramelised, light brown in color.
Add chicken livers, chili flakes, and peri peri powder and fry until golden brown.
Add tomatoes and let simmer for 10 minutes.
Add cream.
Serve with bread to scoop up the extra sauce.

Let the whole community, young and old, dig in together, eating out of one large pot communal style!

Nigella's Flourless Chocolate Brownies

(Recipe contributed by
Linda Rousseau)
Adapted from Nigella Express

"I have a serious thing for Nigella Lawson's cookbooks. I read them like novels, and at the end of especially long days, I read them in bed before I go to sleep – comfort food for my brain. She writes about food in a way that connects with me, that captures appetite and passion and celebration and flavour in a way that moves me. Back when I couldn't admit my own hunger, Nigella's books became very dear to me because she did just that in a way that I wasn't yet able to do. She's not at all daunted or afraid of her appetites, and she has been a guide for me along that path.

I'm not always wild about flourless chocolate cake, and it's not for lack of trying. Because Aaron eats gluten-free, we've tested lots of flourless chocolate cakes and tarts and brownies, and often they seem kind of egg-heavy to me, kind of like a not-so-good custard. But the almond meal in these brownies makes them heavy and dense in such a good way, and the addition of almond extract makes them even more fragrant and rich. I cut them into quite small pieces, almost like fudge. Heavenly.

And I've found that almost any good chocolate works for these – semisweet chips, a dark chocolate bar cut into chunks, anything. You really can't go wrong."

(~Shauna Niequist, *Bread and Wine*, pp. 38-39)

Ingredients

1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
1 cup butter
1 cup sugar
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon almond extract
3 eggs, beaten
1 1/2 cups almond meal or ground almonds
1 cup walnuts, chopped

Directions

Preheat the oven to 325 oF (160 oC). Melt the chocolate and butter over low heat in a saucepan, stirring until glossy and smooth.

Take the pan off heat, mix in the vanilla, sugar, and almond extract, and let it cool for just a few minutes.

Stir the eggs into the saucepan, then add the ground almonds and chopped walnuts and stir again. The batter will be a little grainy at this point because of the almonds, but don't worry a bit.

Pour batter into an 8 by 8 pan, and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until the top has set but the brownies are still a little wiggly. Let cool completely, then cut into 16 small squares.

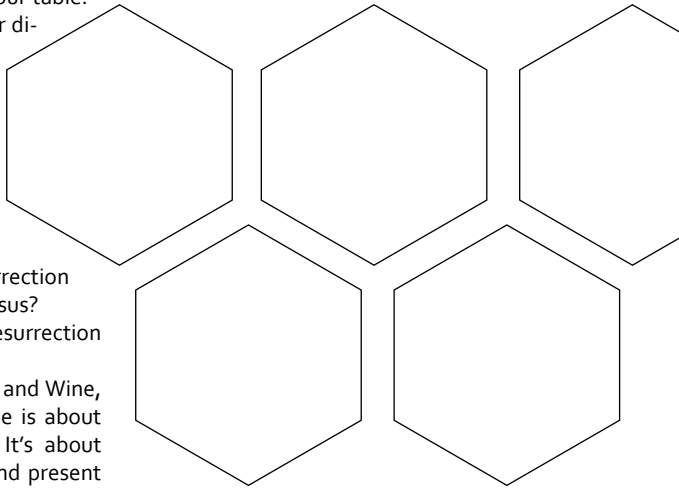
TABLE TALK ... QUESTIONS THAT SPARK CONVERSATION!

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?
- How does the reality of the Resurrection of Jesus form us as followers of Jesus?
- Why is it important to practice Resurrection regularly as a community?
- Shauna Niequest writes in *Bread and Wine*, "I'm coming to see that the table is about food, and it's also about time. It's about showing up in person, a whole and present person, instead of a fragmented, frantic person, phone in one hand and to-do list in the other. Put them down, both of them, twin symbols of the modern age, and pick up a knife and a fork. The table is where time stops. It's where we look people in the eye, where we tell the truth about how hard it is, where we make space to listen to the whole story, not the textable sound bite." Why is

this slowing so difficult for most of us to do? What do we fear in sitting at the table with others?

- Shauna Niequest concludes *Bread and Wine* by pleading with her readers to come to the table, for "the table is a place of safety and rest and humanity, where we are allowed to be as fragile as we feel. If the home is a body, the table is the heart, the beating center, the sustainer of life and health." How is this a powerful metaphor describing both the gospel of Jesus, and the resurrected community imagined for the Church itself?



["COME AS YOU ARE" ... A SONG TO ANCHOR EASTER]

Verse 1

Come out of sadness from wherever you've
been Come, brokenhearted let rescue begin
Come find your mercy, O sinner, come kneel
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven can't heal
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven can't heal

Chorus

Lay down your burdens
Lay down your shame
All who are broken
Lift up your face
O wanderer, come home
You're not too far
So lay down your hurt, lay down your
heart Come as you are

Verse 2

There's hope for the hopeless
And all those who've strayed
Come sit at the table
Come taste the grace
There's rest for the weary
Rest that endures
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven can't cure

Bridge

Come as you are
Come as you are
Fall in His arms
Come as you are

Verse 3

There's joy for the morning
O sinner, be still
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven can't heal
Earth has no sorrow that Heaven can't heal!

(Crowder, Come As You Are)

this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.' With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:36-47, NIV, describing the Jesus community that arose out of Pentecost, within and quickly beyond, Jerusalem).

"Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.' When the people heard

