

**THE GREATEST MEAL YOU'VE EVER HAD.**  
**SERMON: NOVEMBER 25, 2012**  
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Close your eyes and think for a minute about the best meal you have ever had.

Remember the smells. Savor the taste. What was the meal like?

I know I am a blessed person, because this question is hard for me to answer. How can I pick THE best meal? There are so many options.... Would it be sitting on a dock overlooking the Chesapeake Bay eating blue crabs with college friends? Newspaper as a table cloth and a wooden hammer for my utensil, cracking steamed crabs for hours as the sun sets over the bay.

Or would it be the Thanksgiving when we didn't plan on a big dinner; but too many of our international friends had no place to go, so last minute I threw together dinner – including stuffing made from stale hot dog buns. When we sat down around our table, there was someone from Africa, Europe, Asia, Central America, and at least three states from the US. No, that isn't it either.

The greatest meal I've ever had was served to me at a widow's commune in Guatemala. My church supported the widows, and we had purchased a cow to help support them. We had traveled to deliver the cow in person, wanting to learn more about the women and to let them know that we prayed for them. Their commune was high in the mountains, and we traveled about 5 hours to get there by bus on a dirt road. When we arrived, we were welcomed into a grass building that normally had a dirt floor. The widows, however, had covered the floor with fresh cut grass. The smell in the room was magnificent. We sat and listened to each one of the 77 widows tell their personal story – stories of how guerrilla soldiers had stormed their village and murdered their husbands and sons just 15 years before (I had been in middle school). Each story was unique, yet each carried the same pain: senseless violence and total devastation of family. There were no words of comfort we

could share, we could only listen and say “Thank you for sharing your story with us.” The women spoke too, of their faith: of how their faith had kept them strong, and how their faith kept them together as a community. It was an emotional couple of hours. Our group stretched for a minute outside, and as we did the widows transformed their little hut yet again. We walked back in to a banquet set for royalty. They served us truly the best meal I will ever have; it was corn tamales and corn soup. Though it sounds like a meager dinner, the hospitality that our hosts showed us transformed the meal into a Psalm 126 celebration:

## **PSALM 126**

<sup>2</sup>Then our mouth was filled with laughter,  
and our tongue with shouts of joy;  
then it was said among the nations,  
"The LORD has done great things for them."  
<sup>3</sup>The LORD has done great things for us,  
and we rejoiced.

<sup>5</sup>May those who sow in tears  
reap with shouts of joy.  
<sup>6</sup>Those who go out weeping,  
bearing the seed for sowing,  
shall come home with shouts of joy,  
carrying their sheaves.

We shared the meal together with laughter and joy. The widows kept saying to our group, over and over, “We can’t believe that you came. The Christians at the bottom of the mountain have never come up to see us. But you came all the way from North America. We can’t believe that you came to see us.” The massacre of their village and the denial of it by the government had left them feeling like no one cared. They felt forgotten, like no one even knew that they were there – on top of that scarcely traveled mountain. The widows were transformed by the grace of the moment, not because of anything we did, but because we sat and listened to their stories, and because

we ate together, a meal that they had lovingly prepared for us. Our attentiveness reminded them that *God* had not forgotten them.

More importantly, we were transformed by the grace of the moment, in receiving their gracious hospitality and welcome. It was a meal that changed my life. The stories that the women shared were truly a gift that changed my worldview. God was at work in the lives of these widows; and despite what they had endured they were able to truly live in the joy of the Lord. The bus was full of silent contemplation on the ride back down the mountain. I thought deeply about how blessed I was, and how little I had to worry about. The words in Matthew 6 settled into me in a profound way:

### **GOSPEL MATTHEW 6:25-33**

<sup>25</sup>"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup>Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup>And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life? <sup>28</sup>And why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup>yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. <sup>30</sup>But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you — you of little faith? <sup>31</sup>Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' <sup>32</sup>For it is the Gentiles who strive for all these things; and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup>But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

There has rarely been a day when I have worried, *really worried*, about anything since dining with the Guatemalan widows. The smell of fresh cut grass will sometimes still remind me of their stories and their tears. I say that meal changed my life because I believe that is when I first began to have a heart for those who feel forsaken: for widows and orphans and those that our world has forgotten about. The paradox of that moment was that I learned from the widows that God does not forget anyone of us. Even though, the

widows felt forgotten by the way their government and their people had invalidated them. It took a group of New York women delivering a cow to remind them that God had not forgotten about them, that they were not alone. God had not forsaken them.

On this Thanksgiving weekend, we live in a world that is starving for this message. We do not have to even leave our community to find people who feel that the world has forgotten them. There are retirement homes full of grandparents and great grandparents who feel like their grandchildren have forgotten. I see children alone on the playgrounds near our home, feeling like their parents have forgotten them. There are youth at risk on the streets, believing they have been forgotten. Who do you know, who feels left out, left behind, marginalized or outcast? I'm sure we can each think of someone, at least one person, who spent Thanksgiving alone. There is a world out there, full of people feeling forsaken. But that is not the truth. God has not forgotten them, even if our society has.

As a Thanksgiving people, we can share the joyous celebration. We can sit and listen to the stories of others, to share a meal together, and be a reminder to them that God desires to be in relationship with each and every one of us. Like Timothy, we can be the heralds of the good news:

### 1 Timothy 2:1-7

<sup>1</sup>First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, <sup>2</sup>for kings and all who are in high positions, so that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and dignity. <sup>3</sup>This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup>who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>5</sup>For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human, <sup>6</sup>who gave himself a ransom for all this was attested at the right time. <sup>7</sup>For this I was appointed a herald and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

Ms. Linda Guy, a faithful member of an Episcopal church in Memphis Tennessee<sup>1</sup> tells a story of her son and her pastor, who recently became a bishop. A banquet was scheduled to celebrate his new Episcopal appointment. You had to buy a ticket to attend. Her thirteen year old son called her on the day of the banquet and asked if he could attend the banquet. She asked, "Do you have a ticket?" He said, "No!" She asked, "Do you have money?" He replied, "No!" She said, "Then, you're not going to the banquet." Her son hung up the phone. He called back a few minutes later and said he had talked to the bishop's son, and he was going to sit at his table for no charge. The bishop had given his own son a table of his own and had said that he could invite anyone he chose to invite. Ms. Guy told her son she didn't believe him. He said, "Okay" and then hung up the phone. A few minutes later, the Bishop's son called and confirmed with Ms. Guy that yes indeed his father had given him his own special table and that anyone he invited to sit at his table could get into the banquet free of charge. That night, Ms. Guy's son strutted to the front and sat at a V.I.P. table, not because he paid for a V.I.P. ticket, but because he had a relationship with the bishop's son.

We are truly a thanksgiving people, for God has prepared a banquet table for us. And the good news is: we get in for free because we have a relationship with the son. But don't forget to invite a friend, because we don't want anyone to feel like they have been forgotten. We will sit together, share our stories, and dine on generous hospitality of a God that loves us deeply, and it will truly be the best meal you'll ever have.

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<sup>1</sup> This story is an excerpt from the African American Lectionary website:  
<http://www.theafricanamericanlectionary.org>