

The world begins at a kitchen table
Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost
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The Rev. Katherine M. Bush

Former Poet Laureate Joy Harjo muses that the world might just begin and end at a kitchen table. She writes of these tables, "It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be / human. We make men at it, we make women." In recognizing the centrality of these kitchen tables, she helps us see these humble places as so much more than coffee-cup littered, homework and bill paying stations, as more than places of quick, harried meals. It doesn't really matter if that table is a countertop or an heirloom that seats 12, around the table is where the world begins and ends. And it doesn't really seem to matter if you're serving breakfast, lunch, or dinner - nor if any of those meals came from your own oven or the delivery guy. Around the table, while we eat, the world begins and ends. It does seem to matter who you're eating with and to seek out companions when your meals can include others. As Joy Harjo suggests, we make men and women and we raise our children at the table, and none of this can happen in isolation - it happens in fellowship.

In Luke's story of Jesus this all bears out, this business of the world beginning and ending - and spoiler, beginning again at the table. Theologian and scholar, Fred Craddock (no relation to our own theologian and scholar Bill Craddock) says, "nothing can be for Luke more serious than a dining table." Luke tells us about ten different meals that Jesus ate. And as he eats these meals, Jesus is creating a new world at those tables. He is giving instruction to God's children, and he is making and remaking women and men at each table. Throughout Luke, while we hear scant information about menus, we do hear about the wide spectrum of companions, the reaches of whom Jesus broke bread with: Pharisees, sinners, tax collectors, disciples, women, even five thousand or so strangers at an impromptu picnic. Jesus is beginning and ending worlds, beginning and building a kingdom, and ending and breaking down old worlds and ways of being.

He eats on the road, on the way, in friends' homes, in enemies' homes. He sits down at table early in his journey, the night before he is killed, and shares meals in the afterglow of the resurrection. It starts to seem like every time we turn around, Jesus is leaning into a conversation over bread and wine, until the meals themselves become the chief memory and memorial of his time on earth.

Sometimes the discussions are friendly, sometimes heated. He tells stories and offers challenging rebukes. Today he sits around a Sabbath meal at the invitation of a Pharisee, and there he challenges the posturing and false etiquette that goes on as we circle around an event, suggesting that arranging the place cards is akin to arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic; we're missing the whole point. The world of ego is a world that must come to an end. Where we sit and who we sit with are markers of what kingdom we wish to be part of. These meals with Jesus are not just an occasion to learn about the world as God desires it to be, but to live for a moment in that world, to inhabit the kingdom right alongside "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind," *and* the Pharisees, the tax collectors, the disciples, and other friends.

So what about our tables? What worlds are beginning and ending when we pull up chairs around our kitchen tables? What worlds are beginning and ending when we gather around this table? What worlds are beginning and ending when we put a burrito in the hands of someone, when we make the list of who should come to the party, when we decide to linger a while after the food is finished but the conversation is not.

We all have ideas and even rules about our own tables, acknowledged or not. Years ago, I read Barbara Kingsolver's memoir [Animal, Vegetable, Miracle](#) in which she shares her journey about food, its sources, and her hopes. She also shares that her daughter decided that she would not eat standing up anymore, and this small almost trivial decision would help her reshape her relationship with food and fellowship. I have friends who swore they would never feed their children in the car, who now in the throes of soccer and theater rehearsals, still insist on at least pulling the car over and parking to eat the fast food meal so that they're not moving while they do it. There are folks who try very intentionally not to eat alone whenever and however that's possible. Thinking about the rules, spoken and unspoken, that shape our tables might take us into some interesting places, to imagine and re-imagine what is being shared besides the food, who is included, how this thing we do three times a day, every day, can form us and reform our communities.

We are all creating little worlds all the time, deciding what it means to be human, making men and women, ourselves and our little corners of the kingdom. We are beginning and ending our lives through the meals we share, and reshaping ourselves and God's world by the choices we make about how big the table is and who all is invited. It isn't easy. It's inconvenient and there are more dishes and distractions. It is harder to live humbly and to make space for people who smell. It's uncomfortable to kneel down - at all, and all the more uncomfortable to kneel next to someone whom we know we don't see eye to eye with. And all of that is why Jesus kept showing up at dinner parties and keeps showing us how to gather here. As Li-Young Lee says, "I am letting this room / and everything in it / stand for my love and its difficulties." Christ is letting the table and everything about it stand for love and its difficulties. Because it is difficult to love in such a way that widens circles and lengthens tables and expands guest lists.

Christ is beginning and ending worlds, and we are too with small choices that actually are not so trivial. This story is not light fodder about social p's and q's, this is the kingdom itself. It is about love and its difficulties, and it is about our lives in this very world.

"The world begins at a kitchen table," Harjo writes. "The gifts of the earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has / been since creation, and it will go on... It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be / human. We make men at it, we make women." We gossip and dream and remember and take shelter and grieve and celebrate. "At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and / remorse. We give thanks. / Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing /and crying, eating the last sweet bite."

And Jesus will be there with us at that table.