

CHURCH WITHOUT WALLS

The Table Within the Meal

Luke 24:28-31 (ESV)

As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus continued on as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, saying, “Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over.” So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight.



Meals being the place of worship

In the story of the Road to Emmaus, two followers of Jesus walk with a stranger who speaks with them about scripture and the events that had just shaken their world. They listen, ask question, and share their confusion and grief. But it was not during the conversation that they recognize who was with them.

Recognition comes later

It happens when they sat down at a table together. In the simple act of blessing and breaking bread their eyes were opened and they realized that Christ has been with them all along.



Meals in the Early Church

For the earliest Christians, shared meals were central to community life. Believers gathered in homes where they prayed, listened to the teachings of the apostles, and shared food together. These gatherings were not elaborate ceremonies. They were ordinary meals where people brought what they had and shared it with each other.

The meals were often called *Agape* meals, meaning “love feasts”. They reflected the belief that faith was not only something to be learned or believed, but something to be lived together.

Within these gatherings the pattern of Jesus’ final meal with his disciples was remembered. Bread was taken, blessed, broken and shared. Wine was poured and given in remembrance of Christ. Yet these moments were not separated from the rest of the meal. They were woven in to the rhythm feasting, conversation, and fellowship.

In a world where social status determined who could eat together, the Christian table was something unusual. Rich and poor, slave and free, men and women gathered as part of the same community. The table became a place where values of the kingdom of God were practiced in everyday life.

Ordinary Food

One of the striking features of the earliest Christian meals was their simplicity. The food mentioned in the scripture was not luxurious or rare. Bread and wine were everyday staples across the Mediterranean world. They were foods that both the wealthy and poor would have recognized.

This simplicity mattered.

The meal that Jesus shared with his disciples, and the meals that followed in the early church, were not built around special ingredients or elaborate preparation. They were built around presence, gratitude, and community. What made the meals sacred was not the food itself, but the people gathered and the faith they shared.

The table reminded believers that the sacred could appear within the most ordinary parts of life.





Why is this a protected role for the minister and priests, and not open to all?

There are many conversations ongoing about who has the right to lead this part of a worship service. Depending on which tradition you are part of, there are different theologies about what the meal means.

This simple meal has become the dividing line between churches, and between those who welcome women to leadership and those who do not.

The historic answer is in some places people got carried away and lost the meaning of community in the shared meal, turning it into a party. Bishops stepped in to make sure people understood that this was a sacred act of worship, and these leaders never gave the power back to the people.

Community at the Table

Sharing food together has always been one of the simplest ways humans build connection. A meal slows people down, it creates space for conversation, storytelling, and listening. Around a table people become more than individuals passing through the same place. They become a community.

For the earliest Christians, this mattered deeply. Their gatherings were not just about worship in a formal sense. They were about learning to live differently together. Meals allowed people to practice generosity, hospitality, and care for one another.

Food was shared so that no one would go hungry. Stories of faith were told. Prayers were spoken. New believers observed and learned what it meant to belong to a community shaped by the teachings of Jesus.

The table was not simply where people ate. It was where faith was practiced.

Elements of the Early Christian Meals

- Shared food brought by members of the community
- Praying and thanksgiving
- Teaching and storytelling about the life of Jesus
- Caring for the poor and distributing resources
- Fellowship and conversation
- Learning and mentorship among believers
- Remembering Jesus through the breaking of bread

Living it today

In many parts of modern life, shared meals have become less common. Busy schedules, long work hours, and constant movement often mean that people eat quickly and alone. Meals become something we fit into our day rather than moments where we gather together.

Yet the simple act of sharing food still carries powerful meaning.

A meal can become a space where relationships deepen and where people who might otherwise feel isolated are welcomed into community. For many widening the table may mean inviting neighbours, friends, or members of the church community to share a meal. It may mean remembering those who are homebound or living alone and finding ways to include them.

Hospitality does not need to be complicated. The earliest Christians gathered around simple food and ordinary tables. What mattered was the willingness to share life together.

This week consider:

When was the last time you shared a meal intentionally with others? Who in your life might benefit from a place at your table? How could the simple act of sharing food become a practice of faith?

THE TABLE WAS NEVER JUST ABOUT FOOD. IT WAS A PLACE WHERE STRANGERS BECAME COMMUNITY, AND IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD THE ORDINARY BECAME HOLY.



Defending Agape

The early Christian “love feast”, or Agape Meal, was sometimes misunderstood by outsiders. In the second century, the writer Tertullian defended these gatherings in his work *Apology*, explaining that the meal was meant to express charity and fellowship rather than excess.

He wrote:

“Our feast explains itself by its name. The Greeks call it agape, that is, love. Whatever it costs, our outlay in the name of piety is gain, since with the good things of the feast we benefit the needy.”

Tertullian described meals that began with prayer, were shared with moderation, and included conversation, teaching and songs of praise. The gathering ended with prayer again before people returned to their homes.

Even critics of Christianity could see that these meals were meant to reflect a simple idea: faith was lived together, not alone.