

Rev. Lynne Ogren                      Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT  
November 4, 2018    Service of Remembrance  
Isaiah 25:6-9; Matthew 11:28-30

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

When my brothers and I were all newly married and starting to have children my parents took on a major remodel to their house. What was once a living and dining room became just the dining area, so Mom and Dad went shopping for a new table. They found a lovely oak set with an extendable table complete with a china hutch and a matching cabinet to hold the 8 leaves for the table! We have had as many as 21 people around that table.

When the grandchildren were little and having a hard time getting through a meal without spilling or arguing about eating their vegetables my brother would say, "Tell me again why we don't have a kids table?" But my dad didn't want that. He wanted everyone together around the table at our family meals.

After Dad died and Mom was ready to downsize, we needed to decide what to do with the dining table and cabinets. When we asked the grandkids if there was anything they wanted from Grandma's house a few of them quickly said, "The table!" Even though they all live in dorms or barracks or apartments and don't have the space for the dining set, the table was the place where family memories were made.

We sat around that table and played games, shared important news, discussed the state of the world, and listened to the stories that formed us as a family. Often, after a death it is the holiday meals that bring back our grief that we thought we had gotten a handle on but now seems raw once again.

Look again at the passage from Isaiah. In this vision of God's eternal and promised future, God is the cook for the family meal! All peoples are included at a table with enough leaves to seat everyone all together. Imagine the ultimate Thanksgiving dinner with turkey and ham and roast beef and salmon; mashed potatoes and gravy and sweet potatoes with marshmallows, and green bean casserole with extra cream of mushroom soup! Whatever you imagine, God will put out the best feast we've ever had.

But we aren't the only ones eating at that glorious meal. Isaiah says God will swallow up death forever. Death was the power that once separated us from God and now death seems to separate us from our loved ones who have gone before us. By the death and resurrection of Jesus, God's own Son, the power of death has been swallowed up and we are forever reconciled to God and with the saints of God we remember today.

Isaiah goes on to say that God will wipe away our tears and remove the hard feelings that often accompany our grief. We will no longer be angry that our loved one left so soon. We will no longer feel guilty for the things we said when we didn't realize it would be that last things we said. We will no longer carry the burden of grief that can weigh us down.

Jesus tells us in our gospel reading, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Jesus accompanies us in our grief and sadness and lightens the load we are left to bear.

My parents' table now lives at my house. We don't have very many family meals now that we all live all over the country, but the memories of those earlier days give us a glimpse of what God has in store for us. My dad will be at God's dinner table and with the promise that God has set that table for all peoples we live with the hope that your loved ones will be there, too.

In the meantime, we can gather with the people God continues to place in our lives. Maybe we can be the new host or to welcome someone else to our tables who is in need of some family time. Let us be glad and rejoice in the salvation we have by the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. May God's promise of eternal life lift our grief and guide us into the light of a new day.

Thanks be to God. Amen