

July 17, 2022 – Genesis 18:1-14 & Luke 10:38-42

Our Old Testament and Gospel lessons have something in common. You may not have noticed it. I didn't catch it the first time I read them either. But it's definitely there.

You see, these are both stories about people trying to make a good impression using food. And not just a good impression on anyone. They are trying to make a good impression on God himself. Now that is quite a feat.

As a pastor – and as one who appreciates a good meal a little too well – I have frequently had people try to make a good first impression on me using food. My first visit to my first call in Michigan was a veritable whirlwind of local restaurants and fine dining. My first visit here to Boonville was a similar experience, punctuated by a pot luck dinner that proved the culinary capabilities of our Fellowship Committee. And, of course, my installation dinner here was simply massive.

So I can appreciate what these two individuals were thinking when they prepared the meals they did. It's a technique imbedded in our culture. And has been for thousands of years. A good meal makes a good impression.

The first one is Abraham. God comes to Abraham along with two angels in the form of human beings. And somehow, somehow, when Abraham sees these three men, he knows that there's something special about them. He knows that he is speaking to God himself.

Now, Abraham was a good, righteous man. And it was considered common courtesy back then to show hospitality to guests in your home. To offer them a meal and even a place to sleep for the night. But Abraham goes a lot farther than common courtesy. He calls the meal he prepares “a morsel of bread.” In reality, it was a feast. A huge, elaborate feast.

Three seahs of flour is enough for 28 loaves of bread. And to that he adds an entire calf that he slaughters just for the occasion. Probably around 300 lbs of meat. And then, of course, some milk and cheese on the side as well. 28 loaves of bread, 300 lbs of beef, milk, and cheese, for... 5 people. Actually, not even 5 people. Abraham himself doesn't eat. It's an obscene amount of food. And a massive production.

I don't know if Martha's meal in our Gospel lesson was quite that impressive. But it was clearly a pretty big preparation. She was feeding more people of course. At least 15: Jesus, the 12 disciples, Mary and Martha themselves.

But Martha wants to do it. This is the reason she invited Jesus into her home, after all. Jesus didn't force his way in there. He didn't even ask to come to her home. She welcomes him there. Invites him to dinner. Knowing it would mean feeding 15 people. Knowing that it would be a ton of work.

She wants to do it. Because, like Abraham, she knows there is something special about Jesus. She confesses it just before Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead. Jesus tells her that he is the resurrection and the life and she replies, *“Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.”* She knows that she is speaking to the Messiah.

Two people: Abraham and Martha. Both of them putting on huge feasts for God himself. Both of them going to tremendous efforts to impress their Lord. Both of them trying to serve God. Serve him a literal meal.

Is there anything wrong with that? Is it wrong to serve God? Especially if you've got the opportunity. How often do you have God incarnate standing in front of you? How often do you have the opportunity to show off your culinary skills to the Lord Almighty? Is there anything wrong with serving God?

Well, no, but... yes? You see, the main thing we need to ask ourselves in both of these lessons, and the thing we can easily miss, is, “Why was God there?” Why did God visit Abraham and Sarah? Why did Jesus go to the home of Mary and Martha? And in both cases it is to deliver a message to them. A message of very good news.

To Abraham and Sarah, this good news was the birth of a son: Isaac. Born to them after so many years without a child of their own. Born to them in their old age. So old, the thought of having a child made Sarah laugh.

But most importantly, born to fulfill God's promise to Abraham. You see, God had already promised to make Abraham into a great nation. God had already promised to make Abraham the father of the Savior of the world, one day. That promise would never, could never be fulfilled if he didn't have a child. So this was extremely good news to Abraham.

Likewise, Jesus came to do deliver the message that he is that promised savior. That God kept his promise to Abraham and to a thousand more generations after him. Jesus sat in that home and taught them about God's Law and Gospel. About God himself. In the way that only Jesus could. And Mary sat at his feet listening to every word of this good news.

That was why God had come to each of them. Not to receive, but to give. Not to eat, but to speak. Not to be served, but to serve. These great, impressive feasts that Abraham and Martha put together missed the point entirely. Because God doesn't come to us to receive our gifts. He comes to us to give us his gifts.

Gifts like his Word. Spoken by pastors and teachers. Gifts like his Sacraments. Offered from this font and this altar. We come to church not to give God something of ourselves, but to be given something by God himself.

Something more impressive than 28 loaves of bread and 300 lbs of meat. Something more impressive than a meal for 15 people. Something more impressive than we could ever cook up. He gives us his very Body and Blood. He gives us the wedding feast of the Lamb. He gives us the very Bread of Life come from heaven. He gives us the good news of his salvation.

So, does that mean we should do nothing at all? Does that mean that we shouldn't bother with all the various acts of service that we do around this church? Does that mean Jesus is telling us, like Martha, to leave the kitchen, abandon dinner, and simply sit at his feet while our bellies growl?

No. Service is a good thing... put in its proper place. When Abraham served that great feast, God and the two angels with him ate it. They accepted Abraham's service.

When Martha invited Jesus and the disciples to her home for dinner, Jesus said yes. He knew that it was going to be a lot of work to serve all of them. He accepted Martha's service.

Why did God accept their service? Because it gave them joy. You can almost feel Abraham's excitement in the lesson. *"Abraham went **quickly** into the tent to Sarah and said, **"Quick!** Three seahs of fine flour! Knead it, and make cakes." And Abraham **ran** to the herd and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to a young man, who prepared it **quickly**."* Abraham is bursting with joy.

Martha is the same way. She welcomes Jesus into her home. She gets tied up in knots trying to make the very best dinner she can for him. Martha is bursting with joy.

There is joy to be found in serving God. There is excitement to be found in giving him your very best. These are not bad things in and of themselves. But they are not worship.

There are many things we want to do as a Christians. There are many things we want to do as a church. But only one thing is **necessary**.

To sit at Jesus' feet and hear his Word to us. To sit at Jesus' feet and hear his good news. The good news that he promised a savior. The good news that he fulfilled that promise and sent a savior. The good news that he is still your savior. And has promised to come again. Come again and give to us a feast of victory that will never end. Amen.