

The Perfect Meal

A Lenten Reflection



The Perfect Meal

The literal meaning of Mardi Gras in French is Fat Tuesday. It refers to a festive time when rich and fatty food is consumed immediately before the beginning of Lent. It has an analogue in the English celebration of Shrove Tuesday, a time when pancakes were eaten as a final splurge. The pancakes would use up remaining supplies of butter, eggs, and flour. During Lent the mood is restrained and penitential as Christians reflect on their own discipleship journey toward the Cross. At Easter, we celebrate once again, proclaiming the promise of new life in the resurrected Christ.

There are many themes that coalesce in this year's booklet, *The Perfect Meal*. This Lent we are invited to think about Commitment, Community, Nutrition, Sharing, Sacraments, and finally Generosity. These important aspects of our discipleship are illustrated by the types of meals in which we may partake.

This booklet is designed to aid your personal reflection. At AOA we hope that your times of prayer and Bible study will enrich your journey at this special time. Given our focus on meals, you may also want to consider fasting as a spiritual discipline this Lent. The strange irony

is that as you withdraw from eating for limited periods, this can provide nurture of a very different and more satisfying kind. Either way, let the meal begin!

Lent in the Anglican Church

The observance of Lent varies between church denominations. For the Anglican Church, the 40 days of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues up to Holy Saturday, with Sundays excluded. While the Bible does not mention the custom of Lent, its 40 days resonate with other special periods of 40 days recorded in Scripture (Matthew 4:1-11, Acts 1:3). Lent culminates in Easter, when all disciples of Christ celebrate new life in their resurrected Lord.

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Week 1: Commitment

The perfect meal is to do the will of the Father.

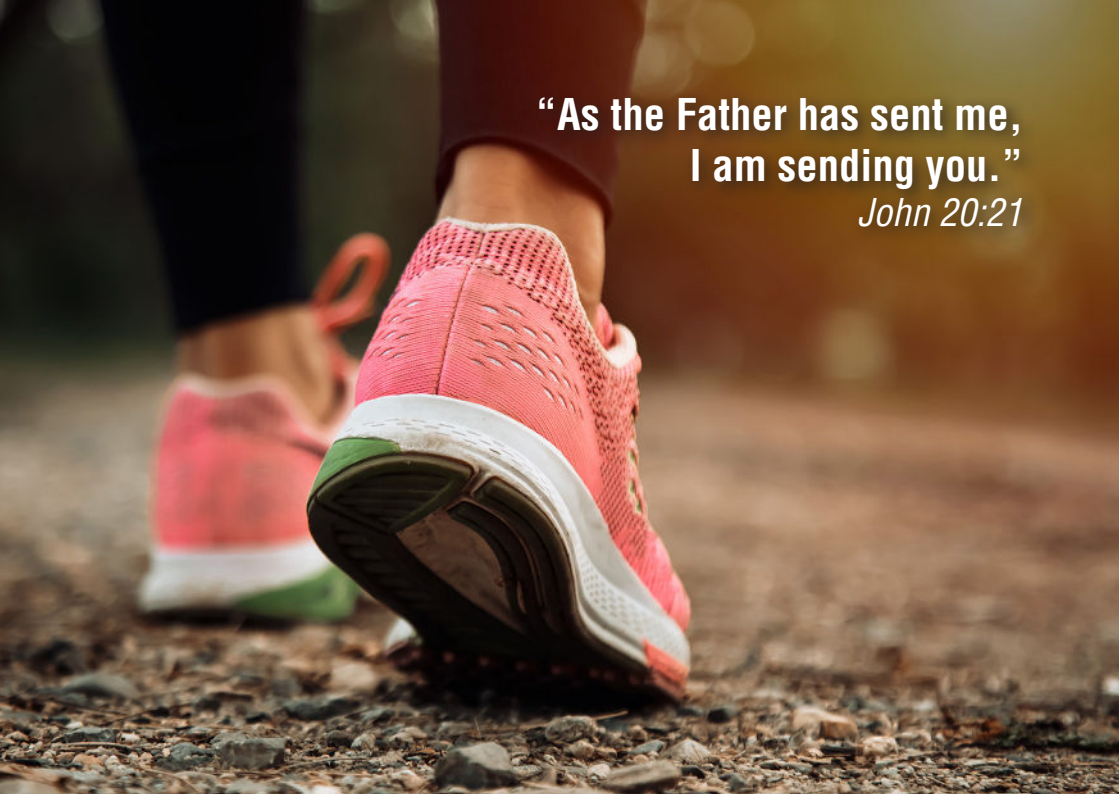
Jesus once explained that his food was do the will of his Father. This was his purpose and source of satisfaction. Jesus, in turn, also commissioned his disciples: 'As the Father sent me, so I send you.' The words are clear, but this commission can be very difficult to embrace.

Some argue that the problem with Christianity is that no one has ever really tried it. Many Christians do seem to live very differently from Christ's example. G K Chesterton put it this way: "The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult; and left untried."

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In the public mind, Christianity is viewed with increasing cynicism. The church has been beset by scandals that reveal a credibility gap. On the one hand are the ideals of Christ. On the other hand, is the feeble and sometimes shameful way in which they have been lived out.

Does serving the Lord provide our strength and energy? While we regularly let ourselves down, God always strengthens those who turn to him. Ask God this Lent to help you to do a better job. Do we truly hunger to serve Christ, just as he has served us?



**“As the Father has sent me,
I am sending you.”**

John 20:21

Week 2: Community

The perfect meal is a celebration of community.

In biblical times, hospitality was a very important aspect of Middle Eastern culture. Anyone who has travelled in this part of the world knows that it still is. There are many occasions when Jesus is involved in meals with all sorts of people. These include significant meals with his own disciples, but also meals with those lacking respectability, such as tax collectors and sinners. There are also meals which point toward the coming kingdom: the story of the king who fills his banquet halls with outsiders, the feeding of the 5,000, and the banqueting table in heaven filled

with guests from east and west, north and south.

Every Sunday in Holy Communion we are reminded that Jesus died for us all. Different groups gather as this sacred meal is repeated, all bound together in the spirit of the Risen Christ. Diversity and inclusion sound like very modern concepts, but Jesus' example suggests a much older pedigree. The perfect meal is about building community and finding places at the table for those who have none. Let us reflect this Lent on how hospitable we are we. Is there someone we should be finding a place for in our home or at our table?

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People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God.
Luke 13:29

Week 3: Nutrition

The perfect meal provides the best nutrition.

Jesus describes himself as the Bread of Life on more than one occasion. This is such an apt metaphor. It is a reminder that there is a spiritual dimension to our life that also requires nurture. The source of that nurture is Jesus. To eat of the Bread of Life is to walk in the way of Jesus and to be fed by him along the way. When we partake of this Bread from Heaven, our inner hunger is truly satisfied.

In this world there are many sources of nutrition on offer for our physical bodies. Some of these possibilities do more harm

than good. Doctors regularly warn us about the dangers of fad diets, and the benefits of regular exercise. When it comes to our spiritual lives too, there are also many possible sources of nutrition, and not all of them are good. Some lead us astray, a poor substitute for the Living Bread.

Just as physical exercise is important for the body, we should learn to feed on Jesus, the Bread who leads to Life. What would a more healthy spiritual diet look like for you this Lent?

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“I am the living bread that came down from heaven”

John 6:51

Week 4: Sharing

The perfect meal feeds those in need.

As disciples of Christ, we are invited to share what we have. This may include our knowledge of the Good News, our physical and financial resources, and the gifts that we have been blessed with. Food is for sharing, for both good hospitality and also for justice. Matthew's teachings make this point.

In the Beatitudes Jesus tells us that those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied. The word 'righteousness' in that verse is perhaps better translated as 'justice', unlocking new meanings. In this light, the verbs 'hunger' and 'thirst' may suggest a call to very practical

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action towards those needing food or water. Hunger and thirst are also daily human experiences for us. This creates an opportunity to shape a mindset about justice for others. Towards the end of Matthew's teaching there is an echo of this Beatitude. The vindicated in the Great Judgement include those persons who have fed the hungry and given water to the thirsty and yet are completely unselfconscious about their actions. In doing so, they have served Christ himself.

This Lent, think about how we can share with those in need, and make this a part of our everyday experience.



“You’re blessed when you’ve worked up a good appetite for God. He’s food and drink in the best meal you’ll ever eat”

Matthew 5:6 (Msg)

Week 5: Sacrament

The perfect meal sustains every day.

To live in fellowship with the Risen Lord is an incredible blessing. This gives our life completeness, assurance, and purpose. And as we walk the journey with the Lord, sacraments are given to equip and strengthen. They feed us on the inside so that we can better live out our faith in the world.

Jesus, the Risen Christ, is Living Bread. This wonderful analogy reminds us that Jesus is present to feed us each day. Bread is a staple, and it is usually consumed in one form or another in many cultures. The Hebrew word *lehem* not only means bread, but also means food more generally.

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The sacrament of Holy Communion is a sacred time of fellowship with the Risen Lord, and with each other too. This holy meal sustains us, as the death and resurrection of Jesus is relived. This special time of fellowship foreshadows the banqueting table in the kingdom of God. As we gather around the communion table Jesus is present to us, and gives himself for us, perfectly and fully. The question is, do we give ourselves to him?



“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

Hebrews 13:5

Week 6: Generosity

The perfect meal is extraordinarily generous.

The creator of the universe dies a sacrificial death, as a humble servant. His actions are the epitome of grace. Jesus enters his own creation and is rejected by it. He pours his life out for us, his body broken and his blood shed in the most cruel way. We do not deserve the generosity of God, but it is freely given.

Lent is a time for penitential reflection, beginning with Ash Wednesday. Celebration has been muted during the solemn journey to the Cross. But on Easter Sunday the Hallelujahs ring out! He is

risen! He is risen indeed! This is a cause for great rejoicing.

The season of Easter includes celebratory foods. Easter eggs and hot cross buns are shared with family and friends, recognizing the gift of hope and new life in Jesus! We feast on the generosity of God in so many ways. On this side of the Cross we cry out in joy at the promise of new life. Paul says, without the resurrection we are to be pitied. But with it, we are a people of profound hope! How do we bring hope to others through our own acts of generosity and service?

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“he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!”

Philippians 2:8



LIFE.
ABUNDANTLY.
FOR ALL.

In the New Testament, many important times of hospitality and teaching were centred around mealtimes. This year the theme for our Lenten reflection is The Perfect Meal. We hope that this booklet enriches your discipleship as you approach Easter once again. It contains important themes for spiritual reflection that may help us to feast on the goodness of Jesus.

Our work at Anglican Overseas Aid is an attempt to live out the hope of Jesus in response to the brokenness of the world. At Anglican Overseas Aid we strive for a just, peaceful and sustainable world. Inspired by the Gospel of Christ our work is an important ministry of the church.

We hope this booklet will nourish you on the journey of Lent.

Find out more at: www.anglicanoverseasaid.org.au or call us on 1800 249 880