

“A Five Star Church”
April 13, 2008
Rubrics and Sermon
Geneseo United Methodist Church
Pastor Craig Ferguson

Appetizer: - Welcome and Fellowship

Welcome to the fellowship of believers. I am your dinner host today. We are very glad that you could join us, and want you to know, if there is anything we can do to improve your dinning experience, please let us know. I would like to begin by introducing the first course for today, the first star of your meal, fellowship. Now, in silence let us invite the presence of the Holy Spirit into this place. Let us use this course of our meal to prepare our hearts, minds and appetites for the courses yet to come.

Salad: - Prayer

Wow, wasn't that first course just exceptional? Fellowship can really wet your appetite for the next course. I hope everything has been acceptable so far. Is there anything we can get you? ... Speaking of that, I think the next course may be arriving in short order. You see, when we enter into fellowship with God and each other, we begin a feast. The next course, and second star on our menu for today is prayer. In prayer we trust our lives into the hands of God, the master chef. What joys or concerns do we have today?

Soup: - Study – Scripture & Sermon

Things are sure starting to get good now. That last course convinced me that the master chef really cares about all our needs. Are you getting full yet? Yea, a five course meal gets to be a lot for some people. I even know a few who never get to the third course, or they skip, or sleep through it, afraid it will be more than they can handle.

Well, if your willing to give it a shot, let us see what the master has provided for us on the table. This course is meant to help us start growing deeper in our relationship with God our chef. Let us look in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:42-47

⁴²They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. ⁴³Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. ⁴⁴All who believed were together and had all things in common; ⁴⁵they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. ⁴⁶Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, ⁴⁷praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Have you ever been to a restaurant where everything was just perfect? I mean, where the waiter seemed to read your mind, was never in the way, but always there with just the item you needed when you needed it. Where the food arrived in a timely manner, and was cooked to perfection. Where the meal balanced itself in flavor, variety, and appearance? Maybe you would call it the perfect five star meal.

I seem to remember one of those on a mother's day. Jody and I had been invited out with another couple, and as the good parents that we were, we brought our child with us.

We had one of those neat front carriers so that the infant could just nestle in. I had the pack on, and our child was sleeping peacefully. The meal was going close to perfect; all the courses had been served, desert was in front of us, and all of a sudden I heard a noise, felt a great warmth running down my belly, and smelt a foul stench. That quickly, the meal lost its perfection as I excused myself wrapped my son and my front side in his blanket and exited the building so that every one else might not lose their appetite. As I neared the exit I moved toward the bathroom to amend the diaper and clothing that now carried an unspeakable color and odor.

While I would not trade that memory for anything, I found out that what I thought was going to be a perfect meal didn't quite turn out perfect. In fact, I don't think I have ever had that elusive perfect meal, have you? It seems like there is always something that prevents perfection.

Today, and in fact since 1867, Geneseo is practicing being a five star church. We are following in the example of the early apostles that we find here in Acts chapter 2.

For the disciples in this passage, we find 5 things that Luke lists as essential and daily practices. Today I am representing them as five courses of a meal: Fellowship, Prayer, Study, Communion, and Stewardship. These five elements are essential to being the church. And while some churches serve one course well, few practice all five with the same degree of diligence. So I would like to take just a few moments to talk about these five stars as they apply to our life and ministry, here at Geneseo. But as we do so, let us imagine that perfect family meal, and how quickly things can fall apart.

Fellowship: I think most of us would agree we do a pretty good job of that. We know each others names, we visit politely and we care about each other. But the second word of our passage is one that gets overlooked a great deal. Devoted! It says these early apostles devoted themselves to these five things. In the Greek that word means – literally to attach yourself to something or someone; to be faithful, to persevere, or to busily engage ourselves with another. Further more, if we look down to verse 46 we find that it was not only on the Sabbath that these disciples cared about each other, but it was “day by day.” Wow that would be like having appetizers in front of us every day.

Ok, so in all honesty for my family the hardest thing about a family meal is getting us all to sit down at the same time; fitting it in between soccer, basketball, dance, Bible study, choir, you name it. We all come running at the table from different directions, hoping not to collide and upset the food.

My guess is that your family is not all that different. But we make it happen don't we. Somehow we realize that fellowship around the table is an important part of being a family, and we make time for each other, time to fellowship every week.

The second course of a meal is the salad, today that is prayer. You know, growing up I always had a hard time eating my greens. I would whine, and complain, cry and throw tantrums just to get out of eating those lima beans. Of course it never worked for me, and I think after Thursday night my kids will tell you it doesn't work for them either. But the truth is that some people would simply prefer to skip the salad and move right on to the soup or main course. However there are some vital nutrients and minerals in those greens that we

need to maintain a healthy body. So just as I tell my kids they have to eat their vegetables, we must remind ourselves how important it is to pray.

Now I know we pray and that we are praying for each other. But the big question in my mind is; are we devoted to praying for each other, for the community, and for the church every day?

This summer we are going to focus on praying for our church and community as we walk, ride, drive and pray over our prayer map. I hope you will take seriously this course of devoted praying for each other. For some of you it may be like eating your vegetables, but it may also be the best thing for you.

Finally we get to the soup, or Study, which is what we are now doing. Reading the Bible and asking God what it has to do with us. How do we apply it, and how it should shape our life? Now as the pastor I hope to say that we do a decent job of that in our weekly worship, but I will leave that to your own estimation. I guess whether good or bad, at least we open the word and make an attempt, but those two phrases keep catching me at every turn; devoted, and day by day.

Hmm, maybe we should be asking ourselves how we do at studying the master chef's book on Monday through Saturday. Are we dining every day, or only eating this third course of the meal once a week?

Yesterday myself and several leaders of the church met in Waverly for a seminar on intentional faith-development. One thing that hit me for the tenth time lately is the need for more small group Bible studies. I would like to start several groups in homes, bars, or restaurants in the next couple months. I am also confident that God has been speaking to some of you about the same thing, and I need to know who has felt that nudging. Please talk to me so we can begin to discuss what that may look like. We need to take this biblical emphasis on study and make it a "devoted" part of our daily life.

Shortly we will be able to finish our five course meal with our two final courses; communion and offering. Communion we know is not just a simple breaking of bread, but a reminder of the covenant that Jesus gave to his disciples. When we break the bread together, we remember that Jesus broke his body and shed his blood for us. It is something that we must recount on a daily basis so that we can faithfully respond to his love.

Have you ever known someone to refuse an invitation to a meal, or a family member who avoided every family event? Usually it is because they don't feel like a part of the family, or because they are rejecting someone. I hope none of you have to experience that kind of rejection.

Just like the main course is the focus of attention at a meal, so the covenant of communion should be the focus of worship. As we talked about last week, the table is open for anyone and it represents those who by faith are a part of the family of God.

Finally, the waiter comes to the table and asks if you saved any room for desert. Now I don't know about you, but often by this time in the meal I am full, I can't take any more, and although I always want some, I often decide I just can't afford eating that last course in the meal.

Unfortunately, as I read in our passage for today, I am reminded that there is a reason for the practice faithful stewardship. As it says, some had a need. Even in the abundance of our society, some today still have needs and the United Methodist Church is committed to meeting those needs across the globe. Next week specifically you will hear more about the nothing but nets campaign, where \$10 can save a life.

That is our fifth star as we give to meet the needs of a broken world. The early disciples did it every day, and they did it with "glad and generous hearts." So I guess if you hear nothing else in the sermon today, you can say that the pastor told you to make sure you eat your desert!

So we have our five courses; Fellowship, Prayer, Study, Communion, and Stewardship. These things make the church a five star church. But as I pointed out at the beginning, every meal has the potential of shortcomings. As members of Geneseo who participate in a Five Star Church, we are called to serve in this congregation and this community daily and with devotion in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot skip a course in the meal. And by being disciples, through Fellowship, Prayer, Study, Communion, and Stewardship, we will find that God will, as he did with the early disciples, add to our number daily.

Brothers and sisters, which course have you become lacks in? Let us seek to restore our devotion in that area.

Main Course: - Communion

Well now, are you still doing ok at your table? How was your (sermon) soup? Mmm, a little to cold huh, and it didn't have enough spice? Would you like me to take it back to the chef and ask him to heat it up a little? Or I can always bring you another bowl? Oh, you're ok for now, that is great to hear, but I will pass your comments on to the chef.

Next up on the menu is the main course. I want to make sure that everyone here today knows that we have enough for everyone, and that the chef himself invites you to join us. Come let us remember the covenant that Christ established in the upper room.

Desert: - Offering

Glad to see you have enjoyed your meal thus far. The chef produces an exquisite meal that will satisfy the most demanding dinner guest. Well, might I ask if you have saved room for desert? After all, it is only in completing this final course of the meal that we can experience the fullness of joy and gladness that comes from a generous heart.

Therefore, with all that we have received from the father, following the example of the early disciples, let us with joy graciously provide for the needs of others as we return to God his tithes and our offerings.

Benediction: -

May God instill in you the five star qualities of the early disciples.

1. May you abound in fellowship and unity with all believers.
2. May you persevere in prayer for all people.
3. May you maintain diligence in the study of God's word.
4. May you daily claim the covenant of communion as God's promise and your connection to the family of God.
5. May you give generously to those in need and find in yourselves the glad and joyful heart of a five star disciple.
6. And by your faithful actions may God extend His Kingdom at Geneseo and add to our numbers daily.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Amen.