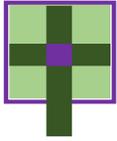


40 Flavors of Lent

Devotional and Cookbook





Lutheran Church of the

Redeemer

Gastonia, NC

Introduction

Focusing on Lent in the usual way is in fact a challenge this year. However, they say a way to the heart is through the stomach. Therefore, perhaps we can draw close to the season with a little extra motivation. We would normally distance ourselves from comfort food during Lent striving instead for discipline and self-depravity. Personally however, I think we could use a little comfort, along with a little centering, and some sense of togetherness.

Therefore, this devotional is given to help feed and shape us in our forty-day work to become better disciples. I hope that you will partake in this offering which is designed to be doable in our current situation. Each day there is a short, food-themed devotion to help us grow spiritually, think more like disciples, and pray. Plus, there are shared recipes (some Lenten approved, some not) from congregation members. These are given to inspire us to get creative in the kitchen. Cooking and trying new recipes is a great way to lift our spirits and connect with one another.

Please share these recipes and devotions. Make enough food to share with a neighbor. Cook together where possible to lift each other up and share in the moment. Eat and be full as Christ prepares the table.

Bon Appetit!

Pastor Jeff Lindsay

Day 1 Pancakes and Ashes

Shrove Tuesday is marked by a pancake feast whereby we purge the pantry of all extravagant ingredients. Things like flour, sugar and syrup that could lead to more indulgent foods are all used up. We literally eat all the temptations before Lent starts the next day.

The party is even more extreme down south with Mardi Gras celebrations and King Cakes that each have a little baby Jesus hidden in them. Perhaps this is a grand last-ditch effort before depriving oneself until Easter. Ash Wednesday is then like a funeral dirge in comparison. Drab and a little depressing. Then again there is a tremendous gift to be had this day. The gift is perspective. The beginning of a forty-day journey to humble ourselves to gain a greater appreciation for life and faith.

We go from stuffing our faces and partying like there is no tomorrow to hearing the sobering phrase, “Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return.” Dust? What can dust do? Dust can do nothing! That is right. It is a reminder that we have no power to create ourselves. No power to control our lives. No power to change the fact that we came from dust and that one day we will be dust again.

The beauty is that it reminds us what a gift our life is from start to finish. Our life has been given to us. When that fact sinks in, gratitude begins to form, directed toward one place only, God the source of life. We work toward being aware of this with praise and thanksgiving daily. Lest we arrive at the Easter feast and somehow think that it is a cute little holiday about bunnies, dressing up and being able to eat chocolate again without guilt.

¹⁹ *By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.’* **Genesis 3.19**

Day 2 Prep Work

Lent is a season set aside to help us get ready for the Easter feast that is to come. Just as a great meal takes work, organization, and time to transform from raw ingredients into a delectable delight, we too by the help of the God, need effort and time to become spiritually prepared disciples. Technically we have forty days because we do not count Sundays during Lent. Truth be told, we have a lifetime which apparently still isn't enough for some of us. Nonetheless God's grace abounds.

Approach Lent like you are preparing dinner. You must decide on what direction you are going in, what is in your ability level, what you will need, what you hope to end up with, etc. In essence you make a plan then commence to cooking. Having an effective Lenten season is no different. If you get drive-through for dinner, then that is what you end up eating. If you create a feast, well then, what would we rather have?

No need to be overwhelmed. Do what you can. If possible clear some of your calendar to give back to the Lord. If you are still too busy, make mini-meals of it. Listen to something in your car. Squeeze in some extra prayer time or find some way to multi-task. Spiritual growth does not really happen unintentionally, no more than a meatloaf cooks itself.

The thing is, all the while we are working so that we can feed someone else, Christ is feeding us. He has prepared a feast like no other that sustain even the weariest of us. A feast of forgiveness. A feast of hope. A feast of love. And a feast of life eternal. Amen

*Jesus said, strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. **Matthew 6:33***

Day 3 Give us this day our daily bread

“Give us this day our daily bread.” We all know this simple petition of *The Lord’s Prayer*. “Daily bread” of course alluding to the essential per diem sustenance that keeps our human bodies working. So why wouldn’t we pray for this unless we take it for granted or somehow think it as not a gift from God?

There is something else to notice here, however. It is more than just praying to be fed every day. We overlook the reference to a Christ centered community. Notice that Jesus uses “our” daily bread rather than “my” daily bread. “Our” food is given to us by God who creates it. Like a nest full of baby birds, we raise our mouths to the heavens to be fed by our parent who is greater than us.

This prayer teaches us to not lose sight in the fact that we need God who indeed gladly provides our daily food. We are collectively dependent on this same Creator God. No one little bird more important or more worthy than the next.

So, when we pray “give us this day our daily bread,” Jesus taught us to not only pray for ourselves but simultaneously to pray for our neighbors as well. We pray that we may all be fed. Prayer leads to action. Therefore, realizing this, why shouldn’t we share and work to help others be fed with food that is meant for us all?

*When you are praying, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do; for they think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. ‘Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread... **Matthew 6:7-11***

Day 4 We do not live by bread alone

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil first by food. Smart devil. That would have been tough to resist. I would have failed right out of the gate. Thankfully, Jesus was no ordinary person.

The way Jesus answered the devil however is important for survival and can teach us something. In that moment, Jesus must have been famished. Jesus however, redirected the temptation and focused on the greater picture.

Experts teach us to focus on what we have, rather than what we do not. In fact, this is a key element for happiness or at the very least, coping. Literally counting our blessings can change everything.

Temptations arise every day. “I need this.” “I do not have enough of that.” “I am not enough.” Jesus said it best, “We do not live by bread alone.” Indeed, God gives us so much more than just our daily bread. There is no single one thing we must have at any given moment. We have enough other God-given things to get through whatever trial we are facing.

So, what did Jesus have out there in the wilderness with him and we have also? Well, he had the Holy Spirit. He had the power of God. He had faith. He was beloved. He had the knowledge of God’s kingdom which is more vast and significant than that wilderness. We have all of these things too, even if we have nothing else.

*Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³The tempter came and said to him, ‘If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread.’ ⁴But he answered, ‘It is written, “One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. **Matthew 4:1-4***

Day 5 Community

It is Super Bowl Sunday as I write. Millions of people will have watched the big game and already forgotten it by the time you read this. It was different this year, nonetheless the event garnered plenty of gatherings with all our favorite game time foods.

Arguably, the party is as important as the game. I mean what's better than feeding your face in the middle of winter along with family, friends and pretty much the rest of the country? There is a whole lot of togetherness on that day no matter who wins.

I do have to admit though, I appreciate the athleticism and the teamwork demanded of a football club. There are the usual clichés. There is no "I" in Team. TEAM stands for "Together Everyone Achieves More," yada yada. Yes, these are cheesy, but they make a point. Getting to the Superbowl is a collective effort.

The adulation of shared victory at the end by the Tampa Bay team clearly showed an appreciation for shared experience. There is joy in the gift of community whether by teammates or by family and friends munching together on nachos.

Christian community is no different. The gift is the gathered and fed Body of Christ. We are blessed to do ministry together within and around our community. It is who we are and what we are called to do. A congregation is a gift from God whereby we endure together, we laugh together, we cry together and often eat together. We are a community called, gathered, nourished, and sent by God to be a place of refuge and share the adulation of Christ's victory over death with the world. What a privilege and blessing to be a part of such a community. Go TEAM.

*12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. **1 Corinthians 12:12-13***

Day 6 Breakfast on the beach

I absolutely love the addendum to John's Gospel which comes after the original ending of the book. Jesus returns to redirect the disciples for the final time. Honestly though, part of the appeal is the somewhat comical thought of Peter getting so excited about seeing Jesus that he jumps into the sea "naked" to swim to Jesus. Reminds me of Forrest Gump jumping overboard abandoning his shrimping boat at the excitement of seeing his friend Lt. Dan.

Peter's nakedness however is really a commentary on Peter being utterly unprepared to encounter Jesus again. He was lost after Jesus' execution and returned to what he knew best, which was fishing. It was as if he had forgotten all the Jesus had taught him. So, Jesus showed back up to give him a little refresher course on Church leadership. "If you love me, feed my sheep."

Jesus however did not scold Peter or the others. Rather he did what he always does. He fed them. Early in the morning unexpectedly, he fed them with a charcoal cooked breakfast of freshly caught fish.

Then he redirected them and helped them to collect themselves and continue the mission he had started. This is also exactly what he does to us when we lose our way as disciples. He feeds us at his holy table and redirects us to continue serving the Church.

*Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.... Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead. **John 21:12-14***

Day 7 Eating with Sinners

Back in Jesus' day, to share a meal with someone meant that they were now like family. This is something that was taken very seriously. So, when Jesus eats with Matthew the tax collector, the religious leaders of the day were appalled. They must have thought "how unclean of you to do that." They would have never stepped so low.

Tax Collectors by the way were universally despised. They received their pay by adding to the bill they collected for the government. They were notorious for taking more than their fair share. Thus, the disdain is easily understood.

Truth be told, Jesus was not becoming a member of that "sinner's" household. Rather he was inviting Matthew to be a member of his. Big difference. Jesus has a way of seeing past our uncleanliness, our unworthiness, our dastardliness and opens his kingdom wide for us. In doing so, he invites us to his dinner table and therefore, to be a member of his family. We are given a new life where we are fed by such good things as God's eternal love, forgiveness, and presence. Eating with Jesus is a life-changing feast.

10 And as he sat at dinner in the house, many tax-collectors and sinners came and were sitting* with him and his disciples. ¹¹When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax-collectors and sinners?' ¹²But when he heard this, he said, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. **Matthew 9:10-12***

Day 8 Fasting

I am the last one who should be talking about fasting. My wife says I am on an infant feeding schedule. You know every two hours. But this passage from Matthew about fasting is loaded like a baked potato with spiritual nourishment (sorry, couldn't resist).

In general fasting is used to mourn or to takeaway temptations that preoccupy us and get in the way of focusing on our faith. There is a true purpose to it. Therefore, some fast during Lent.

The religious leaders in Jesus' day however, used fasting to promote themselves. They used it to elevate their own status and to invoke awe on themselves. Jesus knew their schemes and used this as an opportunity to teach. He was asked "why his disciples did not fast?"

Jesus said to them, "The wedding-guests cannot mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them, can they? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast. ¹⁶No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak, for the patch pulls away from the cloak, and a worse tear is made."

Jesus was alluding of course to his crucifixion and death that would come later. Then the disciples would have something to truly mourn about. Until then, there was work to be done. There would also be work to be done after they realized Jesus had been raised. There would not be a fast but rather a feast to prepare for. Amen

Scripture Reference: Matthew 9:15-16

Day 9 New wine

There are parties and then there are parties. The Wedding at Cana as told in Chapter 2 of John would have been a three day throw down of epic proportions. That is just how they did it. So, when the steward talks about serving the cheap wine last, it was because by then no one would care or know the difference.

At any rate, they ran out of wine and Jesus' mother was concerned, perhaps about the host being embarrassed. She gets her very special son to "do something." Jesus resists at first but eventually relents to his mother. The result was six jars of purification water turned to the best wine.

This miracle is the first of what John calls "signs" in his Gospel. A sign that Jesus has come to bring something very new and good to this world. A sign that has something to do with purification. A sign about new and abundant life. A sign that you and I are made new every day in God's eyes. Yep, new, acceptable, and loved. I don't know about you, but I'll drink to that.

*"...the steward called the bridegroom and said to him, 'Everyone serves the good wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good wine until now.' Jesus did this, the first of his signs, in Cana of Galilee, and revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him." **John 2:9-12***

Day 10 You are what you eat

The slogan, “you are what you eat” was popular when I was a kid. It was rather abstract to me at the time and I was not sure what it really meant. Yet I knew it was about eating healthy foods. It is still a powerful statement today.

The premise holds true for spiritual food as well. What we take-in whether through our mouths or through our psyche affects us greatly. If I eat Twinkies all day and neglect my fruits and veggies, well I become a giant pastry. Likewise, if I consume unhealthy ideas and emotions such as hateful rhetoric, anxious reactions, or toxic views, then I become such things. Effort is required to stay healthy be it physical, mental, or spiritual. If you are looking for good spiritual food, Jesus is the best we have. Take time to read the Gospels, Paul’s letters, and the Psalms. In addition, there is a host of good devotional material out there. Such a diet will have a lasting impact. It will nourish not just an inner spiritual life but our whole life. It will change how we interact with others as well as how we view the world and how we deal with what confronts us.

We are what we consume. Therefore, consume good stuff. Consume Jesus.

*Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you that have no money, come, buy, and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and eat what is good... **Isaiah 55:1-4***

Day 11 Bread of Life

John is arguably the most “spiritual” of the four Gospels. The writer uses wonderful imagery for us to sink our teeth into, no pun intended. Imagery such as Jesus being “The True Vine,” “The Light of the World” or “The Way the Truth and the Life,” all provide a deeper more intellectual and personal way of knowing Jesus.

Another such image in John is Jesus, “The Bread of Life.” This is a powerful way to think about Jesus especially if your daily meals center around bread like most meals in the middle east. Every delectable dish comes with a variety of hummus and other spreads for dipping bread into. Bread indeed is the anchor of the whole meal. It would be unthinkable otherwise.

A Christian feast then centers around Jesus, the Bread of Life. His teachings, his love, his forgiveness, his very being anchors our lives. That is if we believe him. Yet so often we leave out that foundation as part of our daily lives. This is likewise unthinkable if we call ourselves Christians.

*“It is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’ ³⁴They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’ ³⁵Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. **John 6:32-36***

Day 12 Salt

Have you noticed that many if not most recipes include salt as an ingredient? Salt is a popular seasoning, but salt is also an important substance for life. It even has a place on the Periodic Table of the Elements (NaCl aka sodium chloride). You won't find paprika there.

Consider this, roughly a 110 lb. person has about 40 teaspoons of salt in her body. This is about the same consistency as sea water. Why is this important? Because salt maintains fluid levels that regulate the heart and other organs and keeps blood pressure under control. Point being, salt is important.

Therefore, when Jesus calls his disciples "salt of the earth," I think he is saying, that they are important when it comes to God's work. Put another way, disciples have the power to add so much to the lives of others.

Hear Jesus now. You are salt. You are important in God's work. You have status. You have usefulness. You can make all the difference in the world in the life of someone else.

'You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything but is thrown out and trampled underfoot.

Matthew 5:13

Day 13 Olives

If you travel to the Holy Land, there is an amazing sight in the Garden of Gethsemane. Two-thousand-year-old olive trees still stand in the place where Jesus went to pray before his crucifixion. Jesus himself could have leaned against those very trees.

The other thing remarkable, is that one of the common things unearthed by archeologists in Israel are olive presses. Every village had at least one. These ancient machines utilized a large stone wheel to press the olives which are abundant in the middle east.

Olives would go through three pressings yielding different grades of oil each time. The first brought the best oil for cooking and eating. The next for anointing and finally the third brought forth the crudest used for lamp fuel and such.

Pressing Olive Oil was like pressing money. It was highly valuable and extremely useful. It was and is their “bread and butter.” Olives were and are an incredibly versatile, life sustaining gift of the Promised Land.

The next time you cook with olive oil or eat olives, ponder the gifts of God. Remember the witnessing trees of Gethsemane who provided solitude for Christ on the night of his betrayal. Give thanks to our sacrificing God who provides food, blessing and light.

*I gave you a land on which you had not labored, and towns that you had not built, and you live in them; you eat the fruit of vineyards and olive groves that you did not plant. **Joshua 24:13***

Day 14 Yeast

Yeast, as you know, is an agent that causes bread to rise. If you want round, puffy bread you use yeast. If you want flat bread you do not. Simple enough.

Jesus referred to yeast in some of his parables as a metaphor for affect or change in our lives. Interestingly, he used the term positively and negatively. For instance, when he said, “beware the yeast of the Pharisees...” this was obviously a warning to avoid their influence. The Pharisees were short-sited, self-serving, and refused to listen to Jesus. They plotted, schemed, and allied with others to get rid of Jesus. Their yeast was anti-Jesus.

He also talked about yeast regarding the Kingdom of Heaven. *“He told them another parable. The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened.”* The Kingdom of Heaven has changed our life forever.

There are people who work to affect positive change in the world. There are also those who affect negative change. It is imperative that we recognize the difference. Thankfully, it is not up to me or you to change the whole world, however. Jesus’ yeast and the Pharisee’s yeast are not equal. One has the power to cause tension, schism, and strife to arise. The other has the power to raise the dead.

Scripture Reference: **Matthew 13:33**

Day 15 Good Fruit

There are a ton of references to fruit in the Bible. There is the “forbidden fruit” in Eden (not necessarily an apple), “fruit wisdom” in Proverbs and multiple references in the Gospels using fruit as figures of speech. Perhaps the most powerful image for discipleship is John the Baptist’s mandate to “bear fruit worthy of repentance.”

The thing about fruit is that it is a generic term for the many kinds of sweet nourishment God gives to this world. It is mind boggling in fact. Oranges, apples, bananas, mangos, grapes, strawberries, pineapple, and the list goes on and on. But “fruit” is also a verb covering all kinds of ways to do something nourishing.

We belong to Christ’s Church; therefore, we are asked to bear fruit. It is as if God is saying, do as many healthy, tasty, and good things as you can for this world. Fruit indeed comes in all shapes and sizes and so does good works. You and I who are baptized, are given the ability to nourish the world around us in the name of Christ with the fruits of the spirit. Just as you and I delight in the many fruitful good works of others. What a cornucopia of grace we share.

*Jesus said, ‘No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; ⁴⁴for each tree is known by its own fruit. Figs are not gathered from thorns, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. ⁴⁵The good person out of the good treasure of the heart produces good, and the evil person out of evil treasure produces evil; for it is out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks. **Luke 6:43-45***

Day 16 The view from the pig pen

The parable of the Prodigal is one of the best illustrations of “Grace explained” that we have in the Bible. A young man coming of age takes his inheritance, and quickly squanders what had been given him in “dissolute living.” Then he finds himself with the “unclean” pigs, starving. Now in extreme hunger and poverty, he decides to return home hoping for the chance to at least be treated as one of his father’s hired hands who have more than enough to eat.

His father sees him coming back, while still “far off.” His dad is so excited in the sight of his boy returning home that he orders a celebration feast. Not just any feast mind you but an extravagant feast like no other. The reason of his return is unimportant. He is simply happy to have his beloved family member back.

The Prodigal’s brother however is jealous and becomes angry when he hears about the party. He does not share in his father’s rejoicing. All he sees is someone being undeservingly rewarded. But that’s grace. The rejoicing is not meant as a reward. The rejoicing is an expression of love. It is a celebration of repentance whereas repentance leads to reunification.

If done right, Lent informs us of our own jealousies and self-serving ways and/or gives us a view from the pig pen, where we long to be fed. All the while a feast waits for us. A feast like no other.

“Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.” **Luke 15: -32**

Day 17 Harvest Time

Pentecost was originally connected to the harvest celebration called the *Festival of Weeks* which occurred fifty days after the Passover. Harvest time was like “payday” if you will, hence the celebration. By Jesus’ time Pentecost was also related to the idea of the Jubilee year when debts were forgiven and wiped clean every fifty years.

In Acts Chapter two, on the “Day of Pentecost” fifty days after Jesus’ resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended upon the disciples after Jesus ascended to heaven. The Church was officially born, birthed into the world to proclaim God’s Jubilee message. Our debts are wiped clean therefore repent and believe in God.

Pentecost then is a time for reaping and feasting. A time to rejoice and send out workers into the harvest for the sake of the Gospel. We reap reclaimed people rather than wheat.

Lent is therefore a time to sow seeds and prepare the soil for good things to come, figuratively speaking. Let us now work to plant within ourselves and others, things that will spring up in time to bring joy, peace, and inspiration. Dig in the dirt and do the work of forgiveness, hope and reconciliation.

*When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. ²And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. ³Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. ⁴All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit... **Acts 2:1-3***

Day 18 Mustard?

Are you a “mustard only” person? I suppose it depends on where you were raised. In the South, ordering a hot dog “all the way” includes chili, slaw, mustard and yes ketchup.

“Mustard only” people find this appalling and a nuisance and even say it is a mortal sin! Ironically, in biblical times, mustard plants were considered a nuisance. These overgrown bushes would sprout up in inconvenient places, especially in the middle of other crops. So, when Jesus used the mustard seed as a reference to the Kingdom of Heaven, it probably had several meanings.

The apparent meaning was that faith is like a tiny seed that grows into such a large bush that it provides much refuge. The hidden meaning however was that for some, the Kingdom of Heaven is a great nuisance, especially for people like King Herod or the Pharisees who thought they had privileges over others. Jesus’ teachings contradicted them and so was a nuisance.

Therefore, when it comes to matters of faith, being a nuisance is not such a bad thing. Indeed, love those who some say are “unlovable” or “an abomination” or “unworthy” etc. Be an inconvenience to those who refuse to share the love of God with all people. And eat your hot dog any darn way you please.

*31 He put before them another parable: ‘The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone took and sowed in his field; ³²it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.’ **Matthew 13:31-42***

Day 19

In and Out

I love the discourse between Jesus and the Pharisees where he tells them, “it’s not what goes into a person that defiles but rather what comes out!” It puts hateful, know-it-all, controlling people in their place. And when we ourselves are those hateful, know-it-alls, it shuts us up and gives us perspective.

The religious leaders of Jesus’ day used laws that often centered around food to elevate themselves. They got rather snooty about it to Jesus and his disciples who did not follow the strict rules they had set up for their club. Jesus then spoke the truth about defiling words which come from the heart. Indeed, we attack each other and somehow think it has no bearing on them or the world we live in. Truly we defile ourselves with our hateful thoughts and words for others.

If we want to give up something for Lent, I can think of nothing better than giving up defiling thoughts and actions that hurt or repress others. Instead, it would be much better to work at lifting others up. And if we pay attention to what Jesus is saying after all, at the same time we can eat all the cupcakes and ice cream we want. They never defile.

*Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth enters the stomach, and goes out into the sewer? But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this is what defiles. For out of the heart come evil intentions, ... These are what defile a person, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile. **Matthew 15:17-20***

Day 20 Grapes

I know little about grapes and even less about wine. I know I like seedless grapes. I know wine is made from grapes. That's about the extent of it. I am more of a doughnut connoisseur myself.

I do know one interesting fact. Apparently, the oldest living grapevine in North America is on Roanoke Island right here in NC. The "Mother Vine" as it is known is estimated to be 400 years old. It is believed to have been planted either by Croatan Native Americans or the settlers of the Lost Colony. Anyway, the vine still exists today. You can even buy Mother Vine wine complete with "The Mother Vine" label.

Wine labels by the way, are important if you think about it. They tell us where the wine came from and who the wine makers are. It is the way in which we identify our favorite wine. I don't know much but I do know that taste and quality in wines vary greatly. One is as distinct as the other. Indeed, labels stand for something in the wine world.

You and I also have a label and it stands for something. That label is "Baptized child of God." The identifying mark is an invisible cross upon our foreheads. It lets us and others know where we come from and who our maker is. It says that you are valuable. Let's make sure we taste good to the world around us.

*Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. ²He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit. ³You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. ⁴Abide in me as I abide in you." **John 15:1-4***

The eyes of all wait upon
you O Lord, and you give
them their food at the proper time.
You open your hand
and gratify everything that lives by
satisfying them.

Table blessing by Martin Luther

Day 21 Diets

Some people go on diets and some are put on diets. Some are fortunate to eat what they want unless it eventually catches up to them. Regardless, paying attention to what we eat is never a bad thing.

In a recent discussion about her book, “Holy Envy” Episcopal Priest Barbara Brown Taylor asked a rabbi, “what do you envy about Christianity?” His answer, “You can eat any darn thing you want.” His envy of course stems from the requirement to follow Kosher laws rather than worrying about calories.

I love this concept about “holy envy.” The term comes from a Lutheran pastor who coined it during a news interview about Mormons moving into Scandinavia where Lutheranism is the state religion. There was a lot of anxiety about the new neighbors. He reminded everyone that Lutherans are about grace and that there is always something to appreciate about those different from us.

Sometimes the best diet is that of humility, perspective, and grace. There are certainly no calories in those things, but they sure nourish our well-being. So, rather than being suspicious of new people/other people, maybe we should search for something to be envious about. Then let that envy turn to appreciation and perhaps even admiration but at the very least tolerance. By the way, I highly recommend feasting on Barbara Brown Taylor’s book, “Holy Envy” if you get the chance.

*4 Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶it does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. ⁷It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. **1 Corinthians 13:4-7***

Day 22 Grains of Wheat

More than 500 home bakers are giving back to their Seattle community during the pandemic. “We’re Breader Together,” is the slogan for *Community Loaves*, a non-profit led by college administrator and avid baker Katherine Kehrli. The effort has grown from a small initial donation to the local food bank to over 1,300 loaves of bread a week.

“Bread’s been around for a long time,” Katherine said. “It’s four simple ingredients: flour, water, salt, yeast. But each time someone discovers it for the first time, it’s like magic.”

Katherine simplified a recipe for Honey Oat bread and simplified the process for making it all happen. The result was that several hundred folk who were home feeling useless or trapped, now help to feed many others who are hungry. One lady even coached her dad, whom she had not seen in months, to buy a mixer and some bread pans. Now they bake together each week over Zoom.

It strikes me that Katherine’s statement about bread can also be said about love. It’s been around a long time. It’s simple. But each time someone discovers it, (or rediscovers it), it’s like magic. Serving God is as simple as baking bread and giving it away. It is sharing love where we can. A hungry person’s day is changed when you feed them. A person’s life is changed when you love them. We are definitely breader together. Amen

²⁴*Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.* ²⁵*Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **John 12:24-25***

Day 23

Heart shaped cookies

Collette Divitto, is a 30-year-old woman with Down Syndrome from Boston. She is also the owner/operator of *Collettey's*, a bakery best known for her cookies. She opened it after she had trouble finding a job. Life is much different now and business is booming.

Collettey's however is much more than great cookies. Collette believes in hiring and inspiring people of all abilities to help them find purpose. She also wants to help others see abilities rather than disabilities. The company's motto is "Changing the world one cookie at a time" and they now ship cookies and dog treats across the nation.

One of her employees is Derrick Thomas a Veteran with anxiety. Another is Rangel Aley, a young man who is homeless. Her crew is more like a newly formed family than a group of employees. They have a place of belonging.

During the pandemic, she even donated cookies to nursing homes, healthcare heroes and first responders. She simply loves baking. Perhaps she said it best herself. "Do not focus on your disabilities. Focus on your abilities. Always, always be who you are." Personally, I think that is one of the greatest gifts of faith. We are loved for exactly who we are. This Lent hopefully we are working at allowing others to be who they are. And to take a cue from Collette, I hope we are focusing on abilities rather than disabilities. www.colletteys.com

*Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. ⁹God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him....¹¹Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. ¹²No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and his love is perfected in us. **1 John 4:7-12***

Day 24

O shopping of mercy

Officer Matt Lima responded to a typical shoplifting call at a Massachusetts *Stop and Shop*. Two women accompanied by a couple of kids had slipped some groceries in a bag at the self-checkout without paying for it. A loss prevention associate put two and two together and called the police. When Officer Lima questioned one of the women, she told him that she had a job, but the mother of the children did not. It was 5 days before Christmas.

Officer Lima who has two small children at home himself, knew that he had to help the women. He made sure the groceries were restocked and convinced the store manager not to press charges. Then he bought a \$250 gift card for the women so they could buy Christmas dinner at a different *Stop and Shop*.

Compassion and mercy feed us every bit as much as meat and potatoes. If Jesus taught us anything, he taught us that. We have an unfortunate tendency to rush to judgement. Seeing ourselves in others certainly helps. Perhaps that should be our prayer today. Lord help us to see through compassionate eyes and speak with mercy on our lips, that no neighbor ever goes hungry.

'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 'Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 'Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 'Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

*8 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. **Matthew 5:3-8***

Day 25

No Eggscuses

It has been said, “if you want to bake a cake, you have to break some eggs.” I love this because it inspires us from idleness to action. It helps us put aside our reservations about getting messy and helps us delve into the process of making something happen.

Following Christ is no different. Love of Christ translates into active love for others. If we truly know Jesus and strive to follow him, then our hearts and minds move toward connecting with those around us to make a difference in the world. Indeed, a recipe that includes prayer, study, open hearts, and open minds, mixed together with God’s love, forgiveness, mercy, and grace make a pretty awesome cake.

Martin Luther said it like this, “It is just as impossible to separate faith and works as it is to separate heat and light from fire.” It is kind of like trying to separate eggs back out of a cake after it has baked. Love of God and love of neighbor are the same thing. It becomes a part of us. I suppose you could mix metaphors here and say, “If you want to follow Christ, then you have to break some eggs.” Or maybe just stick to what Luther said.

I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’ **John 13:34-35**

Day 26 Clean out your fridge.

Ever take inventory of your pantry or refrigerator? Let's face it, occasionally we need to throw out some things that have "gone to the bad" as my mother used to say. Out of date lunchmeat, rotting vegetables, and spoiled milk, are the usual suspects at my house.

It is a good idea for us to take inventory of ourselves as well. This includes our emotional selves, our physical selves and our spiritual selves. You know, "clean out our fridge" metaphorically speaking. This is a great discipline for Lent. We work on becoming more self-aware and maybe even get rid of some spoiled emotions or attitudes so that we can grow in our faith.

Some great spiritual questions for taking inventory are: Do we encourage anyone? Do we create anything positive? Do we help anyone? Do we inspire hope? Do we share the love, grace and forgiveness Jesus gives to us, etc.? If we have trouble answering these questions, maybe there is some spoiled food in the way such as anger, fear, anxiety, hate, etc.

This is not a contest mind you and there is no quota for being a Christian. The idea is simple. Let Jesus feed us first and then we feed others. If we do this, perhaps we will have more good, fresh things to share and less to spoil and less to throw out.

*¹⁶You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus you will know them by their fruits. **Matthew 7:15-20***

Day 27 Comfort food

When you hear the term “comfort food,” what pops into your head? Mac-n-cheese? Pizza? Krispy Kreme? Whatever it is, it is related to our coping mechanism. Our stress level goes up and we deal with it by eating those things that produce dopamine, the chemical in our brain that temporarily makes us happy (unscientific explanation).

God also provides comfort mind you but in the deepest, truest, and most profound ways. It is possible to sink fully into Christ, who enfolds us like a giant spiritual pillow. Ironically, this comfort is derived from Jesus’ complete depravity and sacrifice on the cross. It is in his fully giving of himself in pain and death that we learn the depths of his love for us. That self-giving love from God is comforting like nothing else.

Humans have longed for God since the beginning of the ages, especially in times of persecution or other great suffering. The passage from Isaiah 40 below was inspired by the deportation of Israelites to Babylon after they were defeated. They were assimilated for several generations and were in danger of losing their own identity which was excruciating to those who lived prior to exile.

Comfort came through words of the prophet and through reconciliation and restoration. Israel eventually returned home and reclaimed their identity. God’s promise is that all things will be reclaimed and reconciled. That is the promise that reassures us and gives us comfort as well. The promise is that we always have a home, a place where we belong and an identity to claim. That home is Christ.

*Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD’s hand double for all her sins. **Isaiah 40:1-2***

Day 28 Forbidden fruit

Is there something that you are forbidden to eat? Something so utterly taboo that the consequences of eating it are, unthinkable? Perhaps something you are allergic too like shellfish or peanuts? Or something spicy that disagrees with you to the point of agony? These are the things you stay clear of. Then again, maybe on occasion, you just cannot resist the temptation and you give it a try anyway, hoping your body will let you get away with it.

The temptation of the “forbidden” is powerful. The last thing you tell a child is “no, you can’t do that.” It is the sure-fire way to ensure that the child will do exactly the opposite.

This temptation is as old as time. It shows up as early as the second chapter of the Bible when God tells Adam he can eat anything in the garden except the fruit from “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” Yet despite the promise of death, he and Eve cannot resist the temptation of the forbidden.

The real temptation here, however, is to “be like God.” Arguably this is the truer message of “The Garden of Eden.” Humans were meant to be human. We are not the Creator or anywhere near the same as God. Yet, we want to be in control of the world around us including other people. We want others to act the way we think they should act. We want them to look the way we want them to look. We want them to think the same way we think. Perhaps, this is why that fruit was forbidden. We cannot handle that kind of power.

We talk about giving up things during Lent. Perhaps a good thing for us to give up this season, is the desire to be in control, especially if that control affects others adversely. Instead, maybe we should have a slice of humble pie. Unless of course you are allergic to it.

...the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’

Genesis 3:4-5

Day 29 Water

Recently I saw a viral video of a squirrel begging for a drink of water from a guy in a park. The little creature desperately wanted a drink. He all but speaks his desire. Finally, the man compassionately lowers his bottle allowing the bushy tailed rodent to quench his thirst. The poor, little thing must have been parched because he drinks for what seems like a half a minute or more. He returned happily to the trees when he was done.

Sometimes our needs rule our lives. Circumstance often determines our needs. A refugee may be just as desperate as that little squirrel for water. Many school kids are desperate for meals over the weekends. A young person or maybe even an older person is desperate for meaning in his or her life.

We are all desperate for love and connection however, no matter our circumstance or stage in life. That love and connection we need is both human and divine. We need good, loving relationships from friends and family. We also need a loving relationship with God just as we need water. In the Gospel of John, Jesus calls this relationship “living water.”

The thing is, we forget about this need, and many do not even perceive it or believe it. Jesus set the Church up to be a place where all people, regardless of their circumstances (think about the woman at the well), can receive this living water. We are called to be a well of love and mercy as disciples. The world around us is thirsting to death for it and we hold it in our hands. Therefore, let us share compassion, mercy and understanding to help quench the thirst of all those who are thirsty for the love of God. Amen

*Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water...¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. **John 4:10-14a***

Day 30 Manna

People who have served in the military know the pleasure of eating K-Rations aka C-Rations or in more modern times MREs (Meals Ready to Eat). This is basically a compact meal in a brown plastic pouch that needs no refrigeration and can therefore be carried into the wilderness. You simply stuff them into your cargo pocket or rucksack (backpack) to pull out later. Most are not bad although it is amazing how good McDonald's sounds after a week or more. Still, it is comforting to know you have the rations. They help shift focus from personal need to the mission at hand.

The Israelites complained to Moses and Aaron about being hungry in the wilderness after leaving Egypt. It is no fun to be hungry and it can be quite anxiety producing. The Israelites thought they would die of starvation.

God's answer was Manna, a fine, flaky, bread that "rained down from heaven" each morning along with quail for protein that appeared in the evening. I think it was God's way of reassuring them that they would be provided for during their forty-year plight. God patiently worked with the people to help them prepare for the Promised Land. This included learning to trust and to let go of anxieties and doubts. God taught them to live in the wilderness with faith before taking them to the Promised Land, where they would serve as God's priestly people for the sake of the world.

Lent is intended to be a mini-wilderness experience. It is a time to work on trusting God more. A time to reclaim our baptismal calling whereby we work at shifting focus from personal need to that of the mission at hand. It is a time to share some manna.

The LORD spoke to Moses and said, 'I have heard the complaining of the Israelites; say to them, "At twilight you shall eat meat, and in the morning, you shall have your fill of bread; then you shall know that I am the LORD your God."' Exodus 16

Day 31 Loaves and fishes

We could have endless discussions about the implications of Jesus feeding the five thousand who had come out to hear him. We could talk theologically, spiritually, and even ecclesiastically (fancy word for the Church) about it. There are two specific things however that I want to point out. First, there is the perspective of “abundance vs scarcity.” We tend to live life from the viewpoint of “there’s not enough.” The disciples demonstrated this especially when it came time to feed all those people. Jesus on the other hand had no worries. “You give them something to eat,” he said. He meant every one of them mind you. And they did it!

The other thing is we simply do not fully trust Jesus and are utterly amazed when God does something miraculous. In both cases Jesus pushes the disciples to stretch beyond their understanding and belief. He demonstrates how faith works.

If we operate in our comfort zone all the time, we leave little or no room for God to work miracles. Being a disciple is to believe in the impossible and expect miracles. Perhaps most importantly, it is reaching for that which is difficult so that the multitudes can be fed physically, theologically, spiritually, and ecclesiastically.

...taking the five loaves and the two fish, he (Jesus) looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke them, and gave them to the disciples to set before the crowd. ¹⁷And all ate and were filled. What was left over was gathered up, twelve baskets of broken pieces.

Luke 9:16-17

Day 32 Locusts and wild honey

So, was John the Baptist weird or eccentric? I mean he “ate locusts and wild honey” the scriptures say. I suppose those things could be considered a delicacy. Uh, no thanks.

Truth be told, it is more likely that he lived a life of depravity, dedicating himself to the priesthood. Some believe he was a member of a sect of the Essenes community who lived in the wilderness, perhaps in caves. It has been suggested that he was part of the Qumran community of the famed *Dead Sea scrolls*.

They would have been a lot like what we think of monks today. Although it was a bustling community with as many as eight hundred members. They disciplined themselves to not need much so that they could stay as faithful as possible. If you visit there today, you can still see the dugouts they used for ritual baths. Further evidence that John “the Baptist” was from there.

Indeed, John was faithful. He gave his whole life for the benefit of his Lord’s mission. God sent him to prepare the way for Jesus to come after. He ended up himself as the main course at a banquet for the rich and powerful who rejected his call for repentance. His head literally brought out on a platter for their prideful pleasure.

Nope, I don’t think John was weird or eccentric. I think he was selfless. Like Mary, his soul magnified the Lord. And you and I are better off for it. He is a reminder of what it means to be a disciple. We are called to help prepare the way so that others may learn who Jesus is. Lent is our time to prepare our own selves for the mission. But maybe find biscuit or something better than a grasshopper to pair with your honey.

*Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, ⁶and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. **Matthew 3:4-6***

Day 33 Breaking bread together

Having a meal together in Jesus' day was a sacred and intimate event. Breaking bread with someone even if that person was a stranger, meant that you were now like family. So, when Jesus ate with "tax collectors and sinners" it was a highly offensive thing according to religious law. In doing so however, Jesus changed the law forever. His daring act to eat with those who were "unclean" made a bold statement. These people would now be part of God's family. The idea however would not go unchallenged.

Much of Jesus' ministry centered around meals, as if to remind us that faith is an intimate relationship between God and neighbor. Faith begins with believing that we are claimed as God's children and therefore part of the family. We are appreciated, loved, known, listened to, fed, cared for, forgiven, and included. We in turn are asked to invite others to the table and therefore into the family.

When we break bread together at the communion table, we do so as brothers and sisters in Christ regardless our situation. I am reminded of a favorite communion hymn. "Let us break Bread Together on our Knees," which is an African American Spiritual most likely from the Geechee culture born from former slaves found on the coast of South Carolina. The hymn is simple and beautiful and captures the reverence and thanksgiving for this sacred holy meal we share. A particular line is poignant, "when I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun, O Lord have mercy on me." It is believed that this alludes to the light that first hits Africa. Thus, they look west toward home. It is a reminder that we trust in faith wherever we are and whoever we are with.

Communion is a meal with Christ's entire risen self that connects us, saint and sinner, the so called clean and the so called unclean. We are family, therefore. We belong to God. We belong to each other. Amen

³⁰When he (Jesus) was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. ³¹Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. ³²They said to each other, 'Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?' Luke 24:30-32

Day 34 Portable food

The thought of not having something to snack on brings a lot of anxiety for me. In fact, I tend to “over-snack-pack,” if I am going on a trip. I rummage through the pantry throwing in whatever I can find. Chips, Little Debbie cakes, granola bars, peanuts, cheese crackers. You name it. Half of which I will bring back home after the trip. Thankfully, snacks travel well.

Likewise, faith is something that also travels well. In fact, I suppose there is nothing more portable. It takes up no room in a suitcase. It cannot be confiscated at Customs. It knows no boundaries. There are no laws that can take it away, even if there are such laws. If the situation becomes, uncertain, dangerous, or volatile, faith is handy to comfort and guide us wherever we may be.

When Jesus sent out his disciples to do ministry, faith is the only thing he sent them with. He basically said, take nothing with you. Indeed, faith is a gift like no other, but we so often leave it tucked away like a suit we never wear. It is the thing we should be most anxious to make sure we have.

Faith though is somewhat abstract and therefore difficult to possess. We can't see it or touch it, so then how do we hold on to it? Jesus as always is the answer. Faith is the awareness that Jesus is with us. It's not necessarily a “thing” but rather a person. Like a dear friend who is never far away. A friend who assures us that nothing in this world will ever change or take away the promise made at our baptism. I love you forever.

*See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. ⁴Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road. ⁵Whatever house you enter, first say, “Peace to this house!” ⁶And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you... ⁹cure the sick who are there, and say to them, “The kingdom of God has come near to you. **Luke 10:3-11***

Day 35 Milk and honey

I am not sure if there are any good recipes that use milk and honey as ingredients. Although they say warm milk and honey helps soothe a sore throat. But when God promised the Israelites a land flowing with “milk and honey,” it was a reference to having an abundance of livestock and plenty of crops to attract fertilizing bees.

This must have sounded good as they wandered around in wilderness eating the same thing all the time. Sort of like the Skipper and Gilligan dreaming of eating steak after being rescued from their island. Bananas and coconuts would surely get old after a while.

“Milk and honey” and “The Promised Land” are symbols for prosperity, freedom, and an end to waiting and wandering. It is the result of God’s deliverance from suffering and loss of identity. It is having a place of your very own where you know you belong and can thrive even. It is a place of comfort and peace.

Our faith teaches us that the Kingdom of God is such a place even if we do not feel that way in our physical space. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom of God is near or at hand. God’s love flows like milk and honey in this kingdom. We have been promised this kingdom as followers of Christ. Indeed, this is our Promised Land, and it is at hand.

Our work then, is to heap mercy, love, acceptance, grace, and the good news of Christ whenever and wherever we can, so that others who otherwise only know suffering, fear, pain, and oppression, may enter God’s gracious kingdom themselves. Milk and honey may not actually be a part of this kingdom. Yet deliverance tastes every bit as sweet.

*Then the LORD said, ‘I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings,⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey... **Exodus 3:7-8a***

Day 36 Figs

Fig trees grow abundantly in the middle east. It is one of those crops like olives and date palms that thrive in the arid climate. The only figs I have eaten however, are those of the Newton variety.

Jesus rarely got angry. But there is an interesting story just after his “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem. He is hungry so he goes over to a fig tree only to find it has no fruit, just leaves. He curses it and it eventually withers. The thing is, it was not the season for figs so it is curious that he would expect to find any fruit. Still angry, he then goes to the temple and overturns the tables of the money changers and drives them out, making an undeniable point. He is not happy that they are there.

Perhaps Jesus was anxious about the upcoming events that involved his trial and death. The text does not say. However, he is clearly upset over the misuse of the Temple for personal gain. Arguably, he is also angry about God’s people not producing fruit due to self-serving attitudes and he therefore takes it out on the fig tree.

I suppose he could have taken his anger out on others who deserved it. Those who mocked him, those who betrayed him, those who rejected him. Instead, he let them take out their anger on him. So much anger and fear that they did not flinch at having him nailed to a Roman cross and hoisted up to die.

There is no one church season set aside for bearing fruit. That is an all-season event. The problem is we tend to become so focused on self-need and desires that we rarely produce any fruit. It is like we never bloom. Lent is set aside to help us become aware of those short comings, so that we may prepare ourselves to blossom when Easter arrives. Then perhaps when Jesus checks, he will find something more than tree full of leaves.

*On the following day, when they came from Bethany, he was hungry. Seeing in the distance a fig tree in leaf, he went to see whether perhaps he would find anything on it. When he came to it, he found nothing but leaves, for it was not the season for figs. He said to it, ‘May no one ever eat fruit from you again.’ And his disciples heard it. **Mark 11:12-13***

Day 37 Lamb

Lamb is not an everyday menu item in America. It is more of a delicacy for occasional consumption. In the middle east however, lamb is consumed regularly. Sheep are life sustaining livestock that produces not only meat but wool and milk. To have sheep is to have life. This was especially true in Jesus' time. No wonder there are so many references to sheep in the Bible.

Lamb was also the centerpiece of the Passover meal, celebrating God's liberation of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. It was eaten as a remembrance of the sacrificed lamb that provided the door post blood identifying the household as Hebrew. This mark was a signal for the Angel of Death to pass over that house during the final plague God brought upon Egypt. Pharaoh thereafter relented and released the Hebrew slaves.

Jesus being a "good Jew," made the annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem along with his disciples to celebrate the Passover. Jesus secured a room for them to share the Passover meal. This would become the Last Supper and the Institution of what we know as the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's supper consists of bread and wine which is Christ's body and blood. Roman Catholics believe that the bread and wine actually become Jesus' body and blood. This is known as Transubstantiation. The substance transforms. Lutherans believe that Christ is fully present in the meal which is known as consubstantiation. It is important to note that the Lord's Supper is never just symbolic. Christ is fully consumed, but in a way only God can explain or facilitate.

Keep in mind that lamb is also a part of this sacred meal. Not prepared and set out by humans but rather by God. Christ is the lamb whose blood was spilled and then became a signal for the Angel of Death to pass over. We who partake in this meal, partake in Jesus' own dying and rising are marked with the Lamb's blood. The Angel of Death sees this and passes over us.

St. Paul writes, *So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, ¹⁸because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.* **1 Corinthians 4:16-18**

Day 38 Sour wine

Have you noticed that there is usually an entire aisle in supermarkets for wine? There are so many kinds to choose from. Red wines, white wines, dry wines, sweet wines and on and on. We would be hard pressed however, to find sour wine there.

Sour wine in Biblical times, was an inexpensive wine used by laborers and soldiers to quench their thirst in the heat of the sun. It was “common” and therefore not used by royalty or the wealthy. It would have been readily available at Jesus’ crucifixion as Roman guards stood by.

When mixed with myrrh or gall, sour wine was used as a mild narcotic. This was offered to Jesus in Mark’s Gospel, but he refused it. Instead, he endured the full pain of crucifixion. Adding insult to injury, in Luke’s Gospel, the Roman soldiers mocked Jesus as he was hanging on the cross. Taunting him as a disgraced king. They offered him the commoner’s sour wine that complimented his mockery of a crown made of thorns.

In John’s Gospel, the sour wine is nearby in a jar. A sharp contrast to what Jesus offered in the jars at the wedding at Cana. Indeed, this is how it goes. Jesus gives us the absolute best he can offer. This includes his own blood which becomes the sweetest wine on earth. In return we typically give him the very least we can offer. Our sour wine.

Jesus said, “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing. And they cast lots to divide his clothing.”³⁵ And the people stood by, watching; but the leaders scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself if he is the Messiah of God, his chosen one!’³⁶ The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine,³⁷ and saying, ‘If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!’ “

Luke 23:34-37

Day 39 Spices and herbs

One of the first things I ever learned to make in the kitchen was good ol' fashioned cinnamon toast. I must have been about ten. I still make it from time to time. There is nothing better than butter, cinnamon and sugar spread out on a slice of bread and toasted up nice and brown. It smells and tastes terrific.

In Old Testament days, cinnamon was an expensive commodity. In fact, at one point it was more precious than gold. Cinnamon oil extract was used to make lots of things including perfume and oil for anointing. It has medicinal properties that are still sought after. Cinnamon lifts the spirit. I mean who doesn't feel good when they smell a house full of that spicy aroma at Christmas time?

Many other herbs are mentioned in the Bible and are often associated with healing as well. We anoint the newly baptized with scented oil as a reminder that they have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. We also use it in ceremonies for spiritual healing.

Spices and herbs are symbolic of things that improve or elevate our lives. One might say, "variety is the spice of life" for instance or "let's spice things up a bit." Spices and herbs make things better, tastier, and more interesting.

I think the use of spices and herbs in a religious way, reminds us of the richness of God. Imagine not cooking with them. No self-respecting cook would ever think of it. Even a ten-year-old knows better. Indeed, there is no greater additive to our lives than Christ and the faith he brings. It is more precious than gold. In fact, Christ gave everything that we may have it.

The LORD spoke to Moses: ²³Take the finest spices: of liquid myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet-smelling cinnamon half as much, that is, two hundred and fifty, and two hundred and fifty of aromatic cane, ²⁴and five hundred of cassia, measured by the sanctuary shekel, and a hint of olive oil; ²⁵and you shall make of these a sacred anointing oil blended as by the perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing-oil.

Exodus 30:22-25

Day 40 Table crumbs

There was an invisible culture that played out in the school cafeteria when I was in high school. Popular kids ate with other popular kids. Athletes ate with other athletes. Marching band members ate with other band kids, etc. There were also the unpopular kids that gravitated to the available leftover tables. You did not dare mix it up or change anything.

In Matthew's Gospel, there is a curious story about a Canaanite woman who comes desperately looking for Jesus in hopes that he will heal her daughter. Jesus at first ignored her which was customary to the rigid, male dominated, religiously entitled culture that Matthew was writing to. She persists and he finally answers her. "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Needle scratch! What? Did Jesus just call her a dog?

This is baffling to most scholars and to be honest there is no really good answer to Jesus' behavior. Once again however, this would have been read by those in the aforementioned culture. Up until this point, they would have been reading along nodding their heads because Matthew is speaking their language.

Then the woman quips back with a sharp, direct, and clever answer. "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." She displays trust and faith the religious leaders of the day seemed to be void of. That is when Jesus gives them a turn around so abrupt it should have given them whiplash. "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." "And her daughter was healed instantly," the scripture says.

I believe all of this was a literary tactic by Matthew to drive home his message. The Canaanite woman was shown disrespect because she was a foreigner, and because she was a woman. Looked down upon by self-elevating men who dominated their society.

Jesus dared to mix it up and change the culture. This without question helped get him crucified. He dared to share holy crumbs with those the culture had forbidden it to. So, who sits at our table? Who does not dare sit with us or who do we not dare sit with? Who is desperate for holy crumbs?

Scripture Reference: Matthew 15:21-28

40 Flavors of Lent

Rev. Jeff Lindsay

Cookbook Contributors

We wish to thank all those who contributed recipes for our cookbook.

Special thanks to Liz Elkin for compiling the cookbook.

Angie Alexander

Brad Alexander

Anita Bersticker

Liz Elkin

Eileen Field

Lynn Glover

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Sue Keller

Chuck & Lynn Lifford

Donna Marquardt

Carolyn McGinnis

Kay Rhyne

Effie Rogers

Helen Salsburg

Marguerite Taylor

Doris Vlaservich

Ashley Whitener

Corky Wells

Lydia Woody

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Appetizers

Lynn Lackey's Cheese Ball

Family recipe, origin unknown

This appetizer is a holiday party favorite. Not only is it tasty, but it reminds us of good times and good cheer with people that we love.

Ingredients

2 packs (containers) of cold pack cheese (I use Kaukauna Port Wine Spreadable Cheese, 6.5 oz. units, but any cold pack cheese would work.)

2 8 oz packs cream cheese

1 Tbsp bacon bits

1 tsp lemon juice

2 Tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 Tbsp onion chopped

1 dash red pepper sauce

1 Tbsp pimento

Top with pecans

Directions

Bring cheeses to room temperature.

In a small bowl combine the bacon bits, lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce, onions, red pepper sauce, and pimentos. Set aside.

Mix the cheeses together in a large bowl. (Though messy, I use my hands to squish the cheeses together until thoroughly blended.)

Once blended, use a spoon to make a crater in the middle of the cheese and add the small bowl's contents. Mix with a spoon.

Shape mixture into ball and wrap in plastic. (I usually line a round bowl with plastic, spoon all the cheese mixture onto the plastic film, fold the plastic "tails" on top of the cheese, then press down into the mold.)

Chill in the refrigerator for 1 hour.

Top the chilled cheese ball with pecans (either whole or crushed) on all sides. Cover with fresh plastic wrap and return to the refrigerator.

Remove from refrigerator 30 minutes prior to serving for best flavor.

Chuck & Lynn Lifford

Warm Bacon Dip

Serve with crackers or veggies.

Ingredients

8 oz. cream cheese, softened
2 cups sour cream
1-1/2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
6 slices cooked bacon, crumbled
1-1/2 cups green onions

Directions

Cook at 400 degrees 25-30 minutes until bubbly.

Ashley Whitener

Cheese and Sausage Balls

Our family has a tradition of family bridal showers (the guys are included) with each bride getting a recipe book from any family member or friends who care to share. This recipe was given to Debbie by my future sister-in-law (still sister-in-law today). This is a family favorite at all family gatherings as an appetizer, while the family gathers before a meal, or as a mid-afternoon snack.

Ingredients

1 pound Sharp Cheese (shredded)
2 pounds Hot Sausage (mild is fine)
1 cup Flour

Directions

Hand mix well and roll into small balls.
Bake at 350° for 5-10 minutes - until golden brown.

May be frozen ahead of time.

Brad Alexander

Soups

Bear's Potato Soup

Ingredients

6 medium russet potatoes peeled and cubed
1 stalk of celery peeled and chopped
1 medium carrot peeled and chopped
1 small onion peeled and chopped

Directions

Cook in 2 quarts of water with 2 to 3 teaspoons of salt and 1/2 teaspoon of pepper until potatoes are tender.

Add 1 can of evaporated milk, 1 cup of potato flakes, 1/4 lemon to soup.

Simmer for 10 minutes stirring occasionally. (Before serving remove the lemon).

When serving, garnish with grated sharp cheddar cheese, chopped cooked bacon, and chopped green onions.

Serve with corn muffins, or toasted baguettes, or crackers, and slaw or pickles on the side!

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Homemade Chicken Noodle Soup

Ingredients

32 ounces chicken broth
1 medium carrot, sliced
1 rib of celery, diced
2 cups chicken, cooked, diced or shredded
1 16 ounce bag wide noodles
salt, pepper, butter to taste

Directions

Cook carrots and celery in broth, add chicken and noodles. May need to add a little more broth or water. Cook until noodles are done. Serve.

Lydia Woody

Taco Soup

M-m-m!

Ingredients

1 1/2 pounds ground beef
1 red onion, chopped
1 can Furmano's diced tomatoes (I use petite diced)
1 cup Goya pinto beans
1 can Goya black beans
1 small can Goya flavored tomato sauce
1 can Ro-tel (I use mild)
1 can Mexicorn
1 packet Hidden Valley "Fiesta Ranch" Seasoning
1 packet Old El Paso Taco Seasoning (I use mild)

Directions

Combine all ingredients in crock pot for 3-6 hours on low.

Helen Salsburg

Cheesy Broccoli Soup

I'm serving with cheddar bay biscuits!

Ingredients

2 cans cream of chicken (or mushroom)
2 bags of broccoli
2 cans evaporated milk
1 block cream cheese
1 Tbsp minced garlic
Sprinkle onion salt to taste
2 cups sharp cheddar cheese
1 bag bacon bits

Directions

Cook on low for 4 hours

Helen Salsburg

Creamy Chicken Noodle Soup

Ingredients

1 can Cream of Chicken Soup
2 cans of water
1 can chicken (10 or 12 oz)
10-12 oz mixed frozen vegetables
1 package Ramen Chicken flavored soup
Pepper to taste

Directions

Whisk soup, flavor packet and water together until blended.
Break up chicken and add to the above, do not drain.
Stir in frozen vegetables.
Bring to boil and cook on medium heat for 10 minutes.
Break up Ramen noodles and add to soup. Add pepper.
Cook for 10-12 minutes until noodles soften.

Prep and cook time - 30 minutes

Marguerite Taylor

Entrées

Limpin' Susan

Ingredients

1 onion, diced
3 slices bacon, diced
2 lbs medium shrimp, tossed with salt and pepper
2 Tbsp butter
3 Tbsp vegetable oil
2 cups okra, sliced in 1/2 inch pieces
Juice of 1 lemon
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 cup long grain white rice
2 cups chicken stock
1 tsp kosher salt
1/2 tsp ground black pepper

Directions

In a skillet, cook the bacon over medium heat until crisp, 5 to 7 minutes. Remove the bacon to drain on paper towels.

Add the shrimp to the bacon fat and cook until just barely seared, about 4 minutes. Remove to a separate plate.

Melt the butter in the skillet over medium heat and add the oil. Stir in the onion and garlic. Cook until starting to soften, 2 to 3 minutes, then add the okra to the skillet and cook for 5 minutes. Stir in the lemon juice (this will help cut the slime).

Stir in the rice and saute until the onion is lightly browned, about 3 minutes more. Add chicken stock, salt and pepper and bring to a boil over high heat, stirring to loosen any browned bits in the bottom of the skillet.

Reduce the heat to low and add the shrimp back to the skillet. Cover and cook until the rice is tender and cooked through, about 20 minutes.

During the last 5 minutes of cooking time, use a fork to stir the bacon into the rice. Fluff and serve.

Helen Salsburg

Crockpot Chicken and Dumplings

Ingredients

4 boneless skinless chicken breasts
1 can chicken broth
2 cans cream of chicken
sliced carrots
sliced celery
1/2 can peas
1/2 onion
crumbled bacon
parsley
garlic powder
salt and pepper
1 can flaky biscuits

Directions

Place chicken breasts in bottom of crockpot.
Pour chicken broth and both cream of chickens over it.
Add in carrots, celery and onion, however much you prefer.
Add in garlic powder, salt and pepper and parsley flakes over it, how ever much you prefer.
Cook on high for 3 hours.
Remove chicken and shred. Add the chicken back in with some crumbled bacon and the peas, stir together.
Break up the flaky biscuits, uncooked, and put in the crockpot. I break each roll in about 3 parts and just place them on top.
Remain cooking for another hour or so on high or until done. Enjoy!

Helen Salsburg

Stuffed Shells (Italian origin)

One of our favorites.

Ingredients

1 box large pasta shells
2 pkgs creamed spinach
15 oz. ricotta cheese
2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
1 tsp garlic salt
1 jar spaghetti sauce
Parmesan cheese

Directions

Cook pasta shells according to directions. While they are cooking combine spinach, ricotta cheese, mozzarella cheese and garlic salt. Spoon 1 and 1/2 tablespoons cheese and spinach mixture into each shell. Avoid overstuffing. Cover bottom of 13 x 9 inch dish with sauce. Place shells side by side in dish. Cover with remaining sauce. Sprinkle with Parmesan. Bake at 350, covered, for 45 minutes.

Lynn Glover

Chicken and Rice from Mrs. H.

Serve a bowl with crackers and a lettuce, tomato, green onion salad on the side.

Ingredients

Two quarts water

Two tsp salt

½ tsp pepper

½ tsp dried thyme

½ tsp garlic/herb powder

One 10.5 oz. can cream of chicken soup

1 to 1(1/4) cups Uncle Ben's Rice

One 12.5 oz. can chunk chicken breast. (We use Sam's Members Mark Brand)

Directions

Add salt, pepper, thyme, garlic/herb powder to water and bring to a boil.

Add rice and soup, and simmer for 30 minutes.

During cooking process break up the chicken chunks with a spoon and stir mixture every 5 to 6 minutes.

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Linda's Comfort Casserole

This recipe is from Linda Starnes. I am unsure where she got it - or if she came up with it on her own. This is a favorite dish of mine not only because it is incredibly tasty, creamy, and filling, but because it reminds me of Sunday dinners after church with her and Clarke. Often she would serve it up with angel biscuits and her own coleslaw (another recipe I still use). I very much miss having Sunday dinner with those two - the food and the company.

Ingredients

1 lb. ground chuck, browned and seasoned with salt and pepper
approx 4 large potatoes, sliced thinly
1 can cream of mushroom soup
8 oz. sour cream

Directions

Mix together the soup and sour cream. In a greased 8" square baking dish (or the equivalent), make layers of potatoes, ground beef, and soup mixture. You should have two layers of each. Cover with foil. Bake 350 degrees about 1 hour or until potatoes are tender. Remove foil last 10 minutes of baking. Some potatoes may take longer to cook through.

Angie Alexander

Chili

Comfort food from Iowa!!

Ingredients

2 lbs. ground beef, browned
1 lg onion, chopped
1 cup celery, chopped
1 medium can of Hormel chili with beans
2 cans tomato soup
2 cans chopped tomatoes
1 can chili beans
2 Tbsp chilli powder

Directions

Brown hamburger with onion and celery. Mix remainder of ingredients together in either crockpot or dutch oven. Cook until hot. The longer it sits the better!

Corky Wells

Lasagna

This recipe is special to me, growing up in the 50s, 60s, in a structured house. Dinner was always meat and potatoes, and ready at 5:15 every night. (In fact, to this day, every time I make a pot roast I have to figure out the time from 3:30 to 5:15. Being the youngest, I was often asked to “start dinner” as both my parents worked, and my older siblings were in high school). After graduation from nursing school in 1972, I returned to my parents’ home for 3 months before my wedding in September. I was so surprised when my mom served this lasagna. It was delicious, tasty, and not “meat and potatoes!!” I’ve made it often for family and friends. I even served it for a farewell dinner for 40 when I was a Navy Wife. I hope that you enjoy it as much as I do. Bon Appetit!

Ingredients

1 lb ground beef	8oz lasagna noodles
2 cloves garlic	1/2 lb sliced swiss cheese
1 8oz can tomato sauce	3/4 lb cottage cheese
1-1/2 tsp salt	1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese
1/4 tsp pepper	
1/2 tsp oregano	

Directions

In a medium-large skillet, brown ground beef and garlic.

Add tomato sauce, salt, pepper, and oregano.

Simmer for 20 minutes (do not cover).

Boil noodles.

Butter 9x13 casserole dish.

When meat sauce and noodles are ready, make layers of noodles, swiss cheese, cottage cheese, meat sauce, and parmesan cheese. Repeat x1.

Bake uncovered 375 degrees for 20 minutes.

Anita Bersticker

Chicken Tetrazzini

This recipe is a favorite in our family. I got it from the recipe section of the Gaston Gazette many years ago. We used to live a block from the high school that our kids attended, and since our three boys played sports, our house became the gathering place before home games. I would feed the team and coaches on occasion before the games, so I needed a recipe that would feed a crowd, which this dish does. The kids would swear that loading up on carbs before the game made them play better, but I'm not sure the ingredients in this dish qualify as healthy carbs! However, with butter, sour cream, and pasta, how can it not be a comfort food? Serve with your favorite tossed salad and garlic bread.

Ingredients

4-5 boneless, skinless chicken breasts
2 cans cream of chicken soup
1 stick melted butter
1 cup sour cream
1 16-oz pkg. of noodles (use any type of pasta you prefer)
parmesan cheese

Directions

Cook chicken breasts until done. Cut into small chunks. Cook the noodles according to package instructions; drain. In a large bowl, combine chicken with soup, butter, sour cream, and noodles. Spread in a greased 10x13 casserole dish. Sprinkle parmesan cheese over top. Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes.

Liz Elkin

Chicken Pie

We call this "Carleen's Chicken Pie." She was a dear friend's mother, and both are now deceased. It's a good, easy, never-fail recipe. After the chicken has cooked, it's quick to put together. I make gravy with the remaining chicken broth, have rice, and a green vegetable or salad.

Ingredients

3-4 chicken breasts (cooked and chopped)
1 can cream of chicken soup
1 can chicken broth
1 stick margarine
Salt and pepper
1-1/4 cups Bisquick
1-1/4 cups milk
(optional) 1 can peas and carrots (drained)

Directions

Preheat oven to 350.

Add soup and broth to chopped, cooked chicken. If using, add the peas and carrots. Place in 9 x 11 baking dish.

Mix Bisquick and milk thoroughly.

Then add melted margarine, salt and pepper to batter, which will be very thin. Pour this over the chicken mixture.

Bake about 50 minutes or until crust is lightly brown.

Doris Vlaservich

Easy Chili

This is a "go to" because it's tasty, easy, well balanced and requires very little clean up.

Ingredients

1 pound ground beef - browned and drained
2 cans Pinto Beans drained
1 large jar Pace Picante Sauce

Directions

Mix all of the above & cook in crock pot 4 hours on low heat

Serve with slaw and cornbread.

Marguerite Taylor

Pan-seared Salmon

It's one of my go-tos!

Ingredients

4 pieces of salmon
1 Tbsp paprika
2 tsp fresh thyme
1 tsp cayenne pepper
salt to taste

Directions

Sprinkle seasonings on each side of salmon. Heat 2 Tbsp oil in skillet (I like to use my cast iron skillet). Add salmon and brown on each side for about 3-4 minutes until desired doneness.

Eileen Field

Country Style Steak

Back in the early 40s during World War II, we had our own beef and made cube steaks out of a piece of "round" steak. We tenderized it by pounding with a mallet or side of a saucer until thin. This was our "Sunday" dinner. We saved the chickens for our eggs or for funerals.

Ingredients

4 pieces of cube steak
1/2 cup regular flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 tsp. pepper
dash of garlic
3 Tbsp oil divided
3 cups water
1 tsp Kitchen Bouquet

Directions

On a plate, mix flour and seasonings. Coat each piece of cube steak on both sides. In large skillet add 2 T oil. Once oil is heated add meat and brown on both sides, approximately one minute per side. Remove and set aside. Add 1 T oil, when hot add remaining flour. Stir until brown, add water and Kitchen Bouquet to make a gravy – needs to be thin. Add meat to the crock pot then pour gravy over meat. Cook for 1 hour on low – check to see if you need to add more water or spices. Continue to cook for 2-1/2 hours. Check the thickness of gravy for it will thicken.

Effie Rogers

Tortellini Alfredo

Ingredients

1 bag 15 oz cheese filled tortellini
1 Tbsp butter
1-1/2 cups heavy cream
1/8 tsp black pepper
pinch of ground nutmeg
2/3 cup grated parmesan cheese
1 Tbsp chopped fresh parsley

Directions

Cook tortellini in a large pot of lightly salted water until al dente (firm but tender). Drain well. Heat butter in a medium skillet over high heat. Add cream, pepper and nutmeg. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, simmer 7 minutes. Add parmesan cheese, cook 2 minutes or until sauce thickens. Add tortellini and cook, stirring 1 to 2 minutes until heated through. Sprinkle with parsley.

Sue Keller

Easy Brunswick Stew

Serve with corn muffins and slaw

Ingredients

2 cups diced potatoes
2 15 oz cans cream–style corn
1 15oz can of sweet corn
2 14oz cans diced tomatoes
1 15 oz can of small lima beans
2 12.5 oz cans premium chunk chicken breast
1 16 oz package cooked pull pork (your choice from the grocery store)
1 small onion, diced
1 tsp garlic powder
2 tsp salt
1 tsp black pepper
1 8oz can tomato sauce
1-1/2 cups ketchup
2 cups water (May need to add additional water as stew cooks)
1/3 cup hickory smoke-flavor barbeque sauce
2 tsp Worcestershire
2 tsp hot sauce (optional)

Directions

Place ingredients in two-quart pot, bring to a boil, reduce heat to low and cook for 30 minutes or until potatoes are soft.

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Weeknight Pasta with White Tuna

Makes 4 to 6 plates

Ingredients

2 cups elbow macaroni
6 cups water
1 tsp salt
1/3 tsp black pepper
15 oz. canned Albacore Tuna
1/2 cup chopped onion
1/2 cup chopped kosher dill pickle
1/2 cup chopped celery
2 Tbsp mayonnaise
Bed of lettuce
Sleeve of crackers

Directions

Cook pasta in boiling salted water for 7 to 10 minutes. Drain pasta. Add pepper, mayonnaise, onion, pickle, celery and drained tuna to pasta and mix. Spoon onto plated lettuce and serve with crackers.

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Puff Pastry Pizza

Serve with a simple salad of lettuce, tomato, sliced carrots.

Ingredients

1 puff pastry sheet
1 cup of shredded mozzarella
1 cup of sharp cheese
1 Tbsp parmesan cheese
2 cups chopped asparagus
1/3 cup chopped onions

Directions

Line baking pan with parchment paper. Spread puff pastry sheet onto parchment paper. Distribute asparagus and onions over the pastry. Sprinkle the three cheeses over the pastry. Bake at 400 degrees for 20 minutes. Allow to cool for 5 minutes, slice and serve.

Note: Double the ingredients, spread over both pieces of pastry and bake at 400 degrees for 20 minutes for each pizza.

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Desserts

Cheesecake in a Cup

Ingredients

1 packet Stevia
1 Tbsp butter
2 Tbsp cream cheese
1 tsp coconut oil

Directions

Stir it until consistency of cheesecake.

Ashley Whitener

Super-Easy Peanut Butter Cookies

Yummy!

Ingredients

1 cup Kraft smooth peanut butter
½ cup sugar
1 egg

Directions

Heat oven to 325 degrees.
Mix all ingredients with a large spoon until well blended.
Roll into 24 balls; place 4 inches apart on baking sheet. Flatten with fork.
Bake 20 minutes or until lightly browned. (Do not overbake.)
Cool 5 minutes on baking sheets, transfer to wire racks.
Cool completely.

Kay Rhyne

Pecan Pie

Don't know if you call this "comfort food", but I do because it is dessert!!! As for the origin, well, I found this recipe in a Southern Living magazine back in the 70s, so I will say it is southern! Also, my daughter-in-law, whose family is from Vermont, had never heard of pecan pie (and to this day, she still hasn't tried it) so I am assuming it is not a northern thing!! It is requested that I bring this to every holiday meal we gather for.

Ingredients

uncooked pie shell
3/4 cup brown sugar
1/4 cup white sugar
1/3 cup butter (softened)
1 Tbsp flour
1/8 tsp salt
1 Tbsp lemon juice (from a bottle is fine)
1/2 cup dark corn syrup
3 eggs (well beaten)
1/4 cup milk
1 tsp vanilla
1 cup chopped pecans

Directions

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.
Cream sugars, butter, flour, and salt.
Add in order the remaining ingredients.....stirring each one in individually.
Pour into uncooked pie shell.
Bake 7 minutes at 400 degrees.
Reduce heat to 350 degrees and bake 35 more minutes.

Carolyn McGinnis

Brownies

Three ingredients to upgrade your box brownie mix.

Ingredients

1 box brownie mix
zest of one orange, plus the juice of half
1/2 cup coarsely chopped cherry pie filling
1 cup coarsely chopped walnuts

Directions

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees and prepare a 13x9 baking dish with cooking spray. Make the brownie mix according to the directions and stir in the walnuts, orange zest, and juice. Pour the mixture into your prepared baking dish and drizzle on the cherry pie filling. Using a knife, swirl the cherries into the brownie mixture, then bake until a toothpick inserted into the brownies comes out clean, about 35 minutes.

Effie Rogers

Breads/Other

Banana Nut Bread

I like to eat this for breakfast or a snack.

Ingredients

1/2 cup butter
1 cup sugar
2 eggs
3 ripe bananas
1/4 cup nuts chopped
1 cup plain flour
1 cup wheat flour
1 tsp. soda
1 tsp. salt

Directions

Cream butter, add sugar. Beat in eggs one at a time. Blend well. Add bananas and nuts. Sift together dry ingredients: add to banana mixture. Pour into greased pan, bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes. Cool in pan.

Donna Marquardt

Pimento Cheese Sandwiches

Ingredients

1 lb grated sharp cheese
1 small jar of pimentos (We actually use 1/2 (cup) of finely chopped red or green bell peppers)
2 Tbsp diced dill pickle
1 tsp garlic powder
1/3 tsp black pepper
1 tsp salt
2 Tbsp mayonnaise

Sandwiches and sides:

2 slices of toasted bread per sandwich
1/2 greenhouse cucumber, sliced
several radishes, sliced
several baby carrots per individual

Directions

Add cheese spread to toasted bread, slice sandwich, and add raw veggies to plate. Makes 4 to 6 sandwiches.

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Corn Muffins

Ingredients

2 cups self-rising buttermilk corn meal
3 Tbsp mayonnaise
2 eggs
1 cup milk
1 tsp salt
1/3 tsp black pepper

Directions

Spray muffin tin for 12 with vegetable oil.
Mix ingredients and spoon into the muffin tin.
Bake at 400 degrees for 17-19 minutes.

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Banana Nut Bread

Ingredients

2 cups of all-purpose flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1/2 tsp. salt
1/2 cup butter
1 cup sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp. vanilla
3-4 small bananas mashed (I use frozen ones, thawed and use juice and banana both)
1 cup chopped nuts (I use 1/2 cup nuts and 1/2 cup raisins)

Directions

Sift together flour, baking soda and salt. Set aside. Cream butter, add sugar, eggs and vanilla. Stir until thoroughly mixed. Stir in mashed bananas. Fold in dry ingredients.
Bake in well-greased loaf pan or 8 inch square at 350 degrees for 1 hour or until toothpick comes out dry. Note: I sometimes used four 3x5 pans and bake for 45 minutes. I've also used three 6x8 pans and bake for 50 minutes (and text with toothpick).

Effie Rogers

Slaw

Ingredients

2 cups of cabbage
1/2 tsp Rice vinegar
1/3 tsp sugar
2 tsp mayonnaise
1/2 tsp salt
1/4 tsp black pepper

Directions

Thinly slice and chop cabbage. Mix remaining ingredients and sprinkle paprika on top.

Dave & Sandi Henderson

Sausage and Spinach Quiche

I know breakfast casseroles are pretty popular at the holidays, but this simple and delicious quiche is a yummy alternative for breakfast, brunch, lunch or dinner with a side of fruit or baked apples. Enjoy!

Ingredients

1 lb. sausage
1 small to medium sweet onion, chopped
2 eggs
1 cup cottage cheese
2 cups mild cheddar cheese
2 Tbsp. Parmesan cheese, grated
2 cups baby spinach, torn into small pieces (see photo)
1 deep dish pie crust
*spinach is optional- can leave out

Directions

Brown sausage and onion and drain.
In a large bowl, combine cooked sausage with remaining ingredients.
Pour into a deep dish pie crust.
Cover edges of crust with foil or pie crust shield (see photo).
Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.
Allow to sit for 10-15 minutes before serving.
Enjoy!

Helen Salsburg

Sausage & Cheese Muffins

Easiest recipe ever

Ingredients

1 cup bisquick mix
4 beaten eggs
1/2 tsp salt, (less if you wish)
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1/2 lb ground cooked sausage.

Directions

Mix all together, put in sprayed muffin pan. Bake 20 minutes at 350.

Helen Salsburg

Sunday Night Scrambled Eggs

Within minutes, you can have several servings ready!

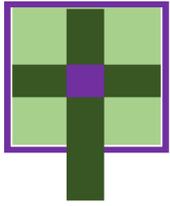
Ingredients

Vegetable oil spray
2 large eggs
1Tbsp of grated sharp cheese
Salt and black pepper to taste

Directions

Spray a semi-flat bowl with vegetable oil. (An individual large salad bowl that is microwaveable works fine for us) rack and empty two eggs into the bowl and beat slightly with a fork. Add cheese on top of the eggs with salt and pepper to taste. Loosely place wax-paper over the bowl and cook in the microwave for 1 minute and 10 seconds. Stir the mixture with the fork and cook for another 15 seconds. Remove from the microwave and sprinkle with a few chopped chives and bacon bits. Serve with toast and a small salad of lettuce and sliced grape tomatoes.

Dave & Sandi Henderson



Lutheran Church of the

Redeemer

Gastonia, NC