

## *‘A Bewildering Buffet’*

*Isaiah 49:1-6; Acts 11:1-18*

May 19, 2019

I enjoyed a wonderful trip back to Akron this week, when Mother and I went to Akron to attend her youngest granddaughter’s and my niece’s graduation from Medical School. The night before, this unique blend of four generations, two sisters, and others who had married or been born into the family comprised the group of 10 of us around the dinner table. There was also one new boyfriend.

We were: Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterian, Catholic, and Non-denominational; Democrats and Republicans, Progressives, Moderates, and Conservatives; Vegetarians, Carnivores, and the youngest member, who is almost 1, hasn’t claimed her preferred cuisine. For now, she will at least try most anything her parents put in front of her, because as my husband says, she doesn’t have taste buds in her eyes yet. Much to the credit of these young parents, their daughter’s diet includes plenty of fruits, vegetables, and protein, but she has not been introduced to any candy, cookies, or sweets. Pretty quickly the table conversation shifted into trying to suggest foods this child might NOT like. Chopped up broccoli? “Yes.” Sliced tomatoes? “Yes.” Mashed potatoes? “Of course!” Then her dad said, “I thought I would never eat cauliflower, until unknown to me, I ate some cauliflower pizza dough, and it was delicious!” Anyone here ever had cauliflower pizza dough? I didn’t know that existed. Google it. Cauliflower pizza is a thing.

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Borders, barriers, and identity seem to be prominent not only in recent news, but were questions even before the time of Jesus.

Today: Whether those convictions focus on borders that should be erected or maintained, or on borders that ought to be thrown into the scrap heap of history, any action which challenges those convictions seems guaranteed to get a strong reaction. Which is precisely what Peter got from the church in Jerusalem.

Sharing a table with others holds great power. It can, and maybe always does, indicate some level of acceptance, support, and partnership with them. Perhaps that is why family gatherings around holiday tables can be so profoundly rich and so profoundly difficult. For Jews within the Roman Empire, practices of food and table had been an important part of maintaining identity within a context which included constant pressure to assimilate to the majority culture. To those serious about Israel’s covenant, eating with Gentiles carried a whiff of idolatry.

It might have been understandable to preach the good news to these Gentiles. It might even have been acceptable to baptize the household, especially if the Spirit was as evident as Peter alleged. However, those in Jerusalem apparently did not agree with Peter in how to interpret, and even more importantly how to embody, what this event meant.

How are we at sharing table hospitality here at Cook’s Memorial? We have had plenty of table experiences recently: from the extreme of sitting together with the people we know as we celebrated the days of Rock N Roll, and intentionally invited a wider circle of guests to the great Cinco de Mayo Party. Those were a little like eating cauliflower pizza and being pleasantly surprised at how good it was or how much fun we had together.

What about those occasions when welcoming someone different to the table causes some added tension, people are uneasy about what to say, or the food smells funny? What about those times we need to stretch ourselves into a different conversation, consider some challenges, or let go of some presumptions to allow ourselves to see a new way forward?

I came across a prayer of Sister Teresa of Avila that might give us some strength for these times of transition. See what you think...

May you trust God that you are exactly where you are meant to be.

May you not forget the infinite possibilities that are born of faith.

May you use those gifts that you have received, and pass on the love that has been given to you. . . .

May you be content knowing you are a child of God. . . .

Let this presence settle into your bones, and allow your soul the freedom to sing, dance, praise, and love.

It is there for each and every one of us.

St. Teresa of Avila

“May Today There Be Peace Within”