

Monday evening,
while Tripp and the girls were at NETworX,
I found myself watching
cooking shows on PBS.
I lead a terribly exiting life
when left alone.



I really liked this rather flamboyant guy
who calls himself the Storyteller in the Kitchen,
mostly because
he embodies his appearance pretty well.
This is someone I'd want to sit next to
at a dinner party.

But in between Storyteller Kitchen
and Confucius Was a Foodie,
a segment called The Bite,
with chef Mike Colameco came on.
*You know how PBS
does its own commercials.*

Well The Bite 2 minute segment
taught me this;
The FDA does a type of food census
every couple of years
on what Americans are eating these days.

Do you know what foods are on the rise?
Sweet potatoes and kale.
And the lima bean demand is falling.
This is because lima beans
are primarily canned or frozen,
and Americans are eating less
canned and frozen vegetables.



We care about what we eat.

Like a lot.

We don't hear much about

SlimFast and Dexatrim these days;

even Weight Watchers has taken a popularity dive.

Today the focus is on Keto,

Whole 30 or *whole 5*

if you are like me

and didn't even attempt 30 days of clean eating.

Buzz words like *all-natural* and *organic*

(Tripp would argue that organic is not a buzz word),

non-GMO, gluten free,

dairy free, soy free, taste free

...we pay attention to the food we eat.

We care about the food we put in our mouths.

Peter isn't any different.

I want to make an argument

that Peter and Jews in general

aren't snobbish about the ritual uncleanliness

of certain foods;

he, like his fellow Jews—like us,

he cares about the food he puts in his mouth.

Foods define us in a way.

Ask New Yorker and Chicagoan about pizza.

Talk to anyone in the south about BBQ.

Ask someone from Ireland

how they like our French fried potatoes.¹

Remember when David Young

was here from Scotland a few years ago?

He couldn't get over

how available half and half was

and that some of us drink our coffee black.

¹ Rev. Hardy Kim, Food and "Them and Us." <http://day1.org/8371-hardy-kim-food-and-them-and-us>

I've never been to China,
but some of you have
—the food we pick up at Wild Wok on 127
is different than food
we'd pick up in Shanghai.
A taco in Mexico City
is different than our beloved El Paso.
The foods we eat,
even shape our ethics.
Here recently we've changed the way
we feel about the food available
in low income areas.



We've realized that just because
you experience financial poverty
or you are on limited income
doesn't mean you shouldn't have
access nourishing, fresh and healthy options.

Food agencies and food charities are changing.
We use phrases like food deserts
to describe neighborhoods
where there is no place
to buy fresh, wholesome foods.
Community gardens are popping up
and local co-ops are replacing food pantries.
Towns all over the country
will boast that the Farmer's Market
is one of the best things about their Saturday.

Food is important culturally.
We've realized that cheap, processed food
isn't *good for you* food.
Walmart carries a variety of organic options

—and I wish it was because
they as an industry cared about food
and how it is grown and distributed.
But it is simply because
there is consumer demand for it.

Food is important;
well not just important,
it is necessary to survival.
Our attitudes about food change over time.
How many of us
grew up eating Hamburger Helper,
or the equally enticing, Tuna Helper?

And how many of us
would serve that to our families now?

The foods we like to eat
speak to us emotional level.
Bonding can take place over food.
I can remember as kid,
going to visit my grandmother and cousins in Texas,
and feeling like Texas was so foreign
—it still is in way.

Our accents were different;
our current fashion of Umbros looked odd
...but my cousin liked Honey Bunches of Oats
just like I did.
And it tasted the same
in my grandmother's kitchen in Texas
as it did in my kitchen in South Carolina.



Think about when you travel
and how welcoming it is
to have food you recognize.

Last week I read the obituary
for Andi Teeter Bank's grandmother,
Mary Elizabeth Frans Teeter,
or Mef as she was known,
and I was struck by the mention food.

The obituary read,
"On her own, Mef frequently delivered care packages
to friends and other people in the community
who were ill, moving to a new home,
or even welcoming unexpected guests.
Often people would return home
to find a case of Pepsi
and one her legendary pound cakes
waiting at their front door."²

Isn't amazing, the power of food?

We actually hear a lot about food
in the book of Acts.

Table fellowship is one of the new defining features
of this new Way of followers.

It's not that people didn't eat together before
—it is just that this new Way of being together
that Christ taught,
centered around a redefinition of identity,
a redefinition of family
and that involved what people did at the table.

I mean eating together
is what some families do best!

Remember the crazy things

Jesus said about redefining ourselves
by redefining who is our family?

*Those who do the will of God
are my mother and brothers...*

Or what about when he said,

² https://www.hickoryrecord.com/obituaries/teeter-mary-elizabeth-frans/article_4596c7ad-2b26-5d72-81a1-605d40e71428.html?utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook&utm_campaign=user-share&fbclid=IwAR2Q0mMGU6mdogzmzaeCvFgenINCdG6FmJj_2whnhZTQyudjlcY1I6hlOC8

“And everyone who has left houses
or brothers or sisters
or father or mother
or children or fields,
for my name’s sake,
will receive a hundredfold,
and will inherit eternal life.”

This new aspect of the faith for Israel
that Jesus pushed for,
involved redefining who we are
by how we relate to each other.



The second chapter of Acts tells us
that the new community of believers
that formed after Pentecost,
“devoted themselves to
the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship,
to breaking bread and the prayers
...day by day as they spent
much time together in the temple,
they broke bread at home
and ate their food with glad and generous hearts...” (2:42, 46)

According to Jewish law and custom,
any time bread is eaten
it is considered a meal.³
Jesus, made it clear
that eating together was really important
—a way to bring people,
the new community,
the family together
and remember what is most important.

³ <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/birkat-hamazon/>

But guess what?

There was this pesky thing
about eating together.

The Jews didn't know what to do
about the fact that the gentiles
brought BLT's to dinner.

The gentiles hadn't really thought
about cooking their bread
without letting it rise first.

When they gathered,

the Jews and gentiles of this new Way,
half of them didn't know what to do
with the shrimp cocktail that Bob brought,
and the other half didn't want to try
the chickpea, artichoke, date salad
that Naomi brought.

All of the sudden,

being together at the table
was bringing up some serious issues
about the food we put in our mouths.

Peter's aversion to the lowered sheet

of unclean animals isn't a rejection of gentiles;
it isn't a superior air of Jewish faith
that can't be around certain 'uncleanliness.'

His aversion is visceral reaction
to something that ties him to a Jewish identity.

This caution came from
a deep place of reverence for the divine.

The God who taught him to love creation
and respect all that God made
and called good.

This reaction came from

a deep respect for creation
and all its creatures
—how they display God's wonderment.

I don't know how many visions
you've had in your life.
I don't know how many trances
you've fallen into
while you've been praying.
But if my whole life,
I'd been taught something
and then I had a vision
that plainly told me I'd been wrong
—that my religion and faith
had been wrong for thousands of years of tradition—
well it would probably take me
more than three times to be convinced.



Peter's resisting
of the heavenly sheet of wild animals,
beast and reptiles and his confusion over
the voice that commands him to kill and eat—
well I would have chalked up
that first vision time as
a bit of undigested humus.
The second time I might have wondered
what strange spirit world
had my prayer life tapped into.
Just what exactly was in those brownies?

God's appeal to Peter's gut
may have been the only way
to really get the point across:
that a healthy sharing of cultures,
a redefining of families and therefore identity,
and a breaking down of barriers
is the only way
to move this Christ thing forward.

The Jewish leaders and apostles in Jerusalem
want to know why Peter
is including the gentiles
in this new way of being;
this new identity within this Jewish family.

They want to know
why are they included
and why are you eating with them?
Food is powerful.
Table fellowship is important.

But Peter doesn't launch into a sermon.
He simply retells his vision,
and that the Spirit of God
told him not to make a distinction
between us and them.
He simply tells them
that the Spirit fell on all of Cornelius' household
the same way it fell on the 12
in that locked room on Easter morning.

Peter, can say this,
but not just because of a vision or voice.
In fact it seems
he isn't convinced of it
until he goes with the men sent from Caesarea
and meets Cornelius' household in Joppa.
The vision of food isn't enough
until **Peter the Jew**
goes to meet **Cornelius the gentile**
and the text says that Peter
baptizes all of Cornelius household
and then is invited to stay
for several days.



I have no doubt that bread was broken;
that a meal was shared;
that Peter may have tasted things
he never would have expected to taste.
And that might be important for us to hold onto.

This sharing of food and therefore cultures,
which means a sharing of our identities;
a reframing of who we allow ourselves to see
when we look at each other
—who we consider taking care of—
that is worth grasping tightly.

Because history is shared
when your grandmother's corn pudding
is placed on the table.
When you have your first taste
of real paella with muscles from the Mediterranean,
you can taste the distant uncle and cousins
who fished for them.

Sharing our food with each other
Might open up new ways
of being together for us today.

Too many of us eat alone.
Too many foods are packaged up
to be eaten by an individual.

**Table fellowship is worth reclaiming and reconnecting to
—a place not only to eat,
but a place to be fed.**

A place at the table
where there is a rich tapestry
of spinach quiche and roasted pork;
cornbread with jalapenos and kimchi.

A table spread with burritos
drenched in mole sauce
and a dish of smoked salmon;
borscht and pecan pie.

Rev. Hardy Kim asks,
“What if the role of food in the story
was not simply to serve as an allegory
for divisions and distinctions?

Perhaps sharing food—
accepting and sharing things
that are deeply meaningful
to different cultural origins
and ethical perspectives,
to different regions and households—
maybe it could play a critical role
in binding us together
as a spiritual community.

Food has the power to connect us
to stories and history;
and it can bind us together with others.
The foods we love best
can evoke a sense of home
and love that few other things can.”⁴



For Mother’s Day I got myself, Vivian Howard’s cookbook,
Deep Run Roots—stories and recipes
from her corner of the south.
Y’all know who she is, right?
The host of a Chef’s Life, on PBS.
(I’ve come full circle.)

⁴ Rev. Hardy Kim, Food and “Them and Us.” <http://day1.org/8371-hardy-kim-food-and-them-and-us>

She and her husband have a restaurant
in Kinston, NC, Chef and Farmer.
Well in her cookbook,
I've loved reading her stories
About the importance of food
as much as I love her recipes.
So let's share some culture.
We have a pecan tree right here
on the church property;
right near the new porte cochre
so I have violated and broken copyright laws
and made copies of a pecan recipe called,
Viv's Addiction.

Vivian writes,

"I think people...would be better off,
more informed, and less angry
if we took the time
to actually talk to one another,
maybe break bread,
because I think food really is the one connector

...If you look around the world,
you notice that we all eat the same things.
Every culture has its own hand pie,
its dumpling, its noodle,
its broth with healing powers,
and we all want the same thing
for our loved ones.

I think that if there is a language
that we all speak, it's food.

And I think if it is possible for us to heal
and not hate one another
it will be through food."⁵

"The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between us
and them.

⁵ Vivian Howard, <https://www.saveur.com/vivian-howard-interview#page-3>

