Keeping the Feast

Metaphors for the Meal

MILTON BRASHER-CUNNINGHAM

Morehouse Publishing
NEW YORK • HARRISBURG • DENVER

Morehouse Publishing, 4775 Linglestown Road, Harrisburg, PA 17112

Morehouse Publishing, 445 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Morehouse Publishing is an imprint of Church Publishing Incorporated.

www.churchpublishing.org

Cover design by Laurie Klein Westhafer
Typeset by Denise Hoff
Back cover photo by Mark Branly

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Brasher-Cunningham, Milton.
Keeping the feast : metaphors for the meal / Milton Brasher-Cunningham.
p. cm.
ISBN 978-0-8192-2789-8 (pbk.) -- ISBN 978-0-8192-2790-4 (ebook)
1. Food--Religious aspects--Christianity. 2. Dinners and dining--Religious aspects--Christianity. 3. Lord's Supper. I. Title.
BR115.N87B73 2012
248.4'6--dc23

2012023814

Printed in the United States of America

for Ginger
who feeds my heart

Contents

Foreword

The first time I read Milton Brasher-Cunningham's recipe for strawberry shortcake, I knew he was preaching the Word. It wasn't just the intriguing idea of adding fresh chopped basil to the biscuits, but his instruction about how to do it: "A handful, I guess; I don't really measure how much."

Being a cook or a Christian is all about practice, though some would prefer it to be about rules. There are, to be sure, some bottom lines of physics and faith, as teachers from Harold McGee to St. Benedict make clear in their respective disciplines. You can't uncook a hard-cooked egg, for example, any more than you can become a monk without praying. And there are some important traditions that remain of use, whether you're following Escoffier or David Chang, the prophet Amos or the prophet Dorothy Day.

But you cannot measure your way to a perfect omelet, any more than you can study your way to grace. Beyond mastering the principles, it takes a lot of just plain doing the real thing over time: the repetitive chop and toss and sauté night after night that teaches what a "handful" means; the daily muttering over the well-worn pages of

the Psalter that teaches how to improvise a chant tone. Most skill—and even much Wisdom, as Scripture suggests––comes through practice. Especially, I think, the practice of failing: the broken Hollandaise, the broken vows, the inevitable mistakes that come when mortals attempt something that really matters.

As Milton Brasher-Cunningham knows, and tells beautifully in this book, practice isn't a solitary business. You can't have a restaurant, or a church, alone. You need to stand the heat with other people, listen to other people weep, let other people pop fresh strawberries or little pieces of communion bread into your mouth. And doing this takes practice, too. Sometimes you need to spatter your sauté guy with hot grease and step on your organist's toes and say *sorry*; sometimes you need to let the dishwasher teach you to poach fish or the teenagers teach you to do scriptural exegesis and say *thank you*. Always you need to cook for people you don't know, pray for people you don't like, and eat with whoever shows up.

Of course it's not convenient. Preparing and eating meals with other human beings is frustratingly messy and slow, whether you do it in a home or a restaurant or a church, and the meal won't always taste the way you expected.

But cooks and Christians know something that's far more important than convenience. Listen to the Word according to Milton Brasher-Cunningham: *don't eat alone*. He knows, through practice, why.

Don't eat alone, this book offers, because unexpected things happen when you prepare food and eat with others. The same old lunch rush with the same old fry cook can turn into a hilarious ballet of sweaty solidarity; the same boring breakfast bowl of Cheerios poured out for a little sister can allow a shy second-grader to share her lunch; the same sticky sip of sweet port handed to you by the same cranky deacon can blossom on your tongue like the crazy fruit of a living vine, and give you the blessed nerve to pass the cup on to a stranger.

Don't eat alone, because sharing food reveals the new thing God is always making. In its unpredictability, a meal cooked for and eaten

with others takes us beyond ourselves, to an experience that can't be mechanically reproduced, perfectly measured, or privately managed.

Don't eat alone, because the sacrament of communion reveals how the one who came to turn over the earth, plant a vine out of Egypt, thresh grain, fill new wineskins, and break the loaves is always extravagantly feeding the whole world. How the one who shares a table with beloved friends, with gluttons and drunkards, with unwashed sinners, is always inviting everyone to partake. And so whenever we remember him as we eat with friends, or whenever we ask strangers to abide with us and break bread, he is revealed.

God feeds all living things, testifies the psalmist. *On the holy mountain the Almighty is preparing a banquet of rich foods and well-strained wine*, proclaims the prophet. *All you who are hungry, come and eat without price.* And Christ Jesus, who repeatedly calls his followers to the practice of feeding others—a little girl, a huge crowd, his sheep, himself– prepares the supper, serves the supper, and himself becomes the supper for us all. *I am the bread of life*, he says. *Take it and eat.*

We never have to eat alone again.

Sara Miles

Summer 2012, San Francisco

Acknowledgments

The possibility for this book began because Nancy Bryan sought me out after reading my blog, *Don't Eat Alone* (www.donteatalone.com). She has been everything from encourager to editor in this process and I am deeply grateful for her tenacity and support.

I learned about church in Zambia, Kenya, and Texas—all the places I grew up. As an adult, I found community in University Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Texas; Royal Lane Baptist Church in Dallas; First Congregational Church UCC of Winchester, Massachusetts; First Congregational Church UCC of Hanover, Massachusetts; North Community Church, Marshfield, Massachusetts; and Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Durham, North Carolina.

Robert Ahrens, Tim Miller, and Amy Tourniquist are the chefs who hired me to work in their kitchens. Dave Alworth, Billy Keith, and Abel Guevarra top the list of many who made it both fun and meaningful to be in the kitchen.

The list of those who have contributed and continue to add

to the conversation of how we live our lives together includes Joy Jordan-Lake, who both writes and encourages wonderfully; Burt Burleson, who is my most enduring friend; David Gentiles, whom I still miss; Billy Crockett, whose friendship birthed some great songs, moments, and memories in my life; John Brashier and our "family line" of interns; Christy de Sisto, who grew from intern to friend; Ken Hugghins, for the song title and the tamale trailer; Ken Orth, for listening well and loving whole-heartedly; Doug Aaberg, whose friendship has travelled well; Don Remick, for our days in Hanover; Gordon and Jeanene Atkinson, whose connections with Ginger and me run on multiple levels; and Nathan Brown, who shares my love for reading and writing poetry. I am also grateful for the twenty-or-so years of youth camp with UBC, Wilshire Baptist Church, and the other camps that have graced my summers over the years.

In Durham, the most encouraging city in America, I am grateful for ties to Laurabelle Sacrinity and the staff at Watts Grocery where we hang out every chance we get, to Mike Hacker and Becky de Cascio for letting me hang out on the Pie Pushers truck since I can't afford one of my own, to Sarah Vroom and Keith Shaljian and the folks at Bountiful Backyards for filling our yard with stuff we can eat and share, to Peter Katz and the Old North Durham Neighborhood Association for helping us feel at home here in our neighborhood, to Sean Lilly Wilson and the folks at Fullsteam Brewery for creating the friendliest room in Durham and for making Working Man's Lunch, to Claudia Fulshaw for encouraging me to dream, and to the growing circle of people who make it meaningful to put down roots here.

For a couple who didn't feel called to have children of our own, we are fortunate to have a bunch of folks who find their way home to our house: Eloise Parks, Jay Blackwell, Cherry Foreman, and Julie Wisnia top the list. We are also blessed with a gaggle of godchildren: Ally, Julia, Samuel, Justin, and Jasmine.

My mother, Barbara, is the person most responsible for my being a cook, and she taught me how to be a fearless one, at that. I thank

my father, Milton, for teaching me how to dream big and love the world. My aunt Pegi was the one who taught me what it meant to be family. I am grateful for my brother, Miller, and my sister-in-law, Ginger, for loving me through lots of stages. My nephews, Ben and Scott, feed me with new musical selections and keep me practicing my guitar. My mother-in-law, Rachel Brasher, encourages me daily. I am thankful for all the ways my father-in-law, Reuben, loved Rachel, Ginger, and me. I miss him, too.

The most persistent and dependable invitation to love in my life comes from Ginger, my wife, who somehow never loses heart. I am loved, I am loved, I am really, really, loved.

Peace,

Milton

Preface:
Come to My Window

The desk from which I do most of my writing sits in the guest room of our two-story home in front of a window that gives me a view of our backyard and the houses behind us. It is the one window in the house that doesn't have a curtain or a shade. I can always see what's out there. The last time we were in Texas to see my parents, my mother told a story about me that Ginger had never heard, which, after twenty-two years of marriage, is no easy task considering my family's propensity for repeating stories we love to tell. My family moved to Africa when I was a baby. I turned one on a ship in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean on our voyage from New York harbor to Beira in Mozambique. I lived the first years of my life in Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia.

My room in our house had a window high above the crib that let in light but did not give me easy access to the outside. There were no screens on the window since there were no bugs to worry about. One afternoon when I was two or three, my parents put me down for a nap and decided they would lie down for a bit as well. Before too long, they heard me say, "Hi! How are you?" Mom said they smiled at each other and enjoyed the laughter in my voice. After a few moments, my father said, "Do you realize where he has to be to see outside?" With both a sense of urgency and an awareness that they didn't want to startle me such that I fell out the window, they crept around to see me perched on the window sill talking to whomever I could find.

Ginger said two things. First, she said, "I've never heard that story." Then she looked at me and said, "This explains so much." She's right. One of the things it explains is why I wrote this book.

My hunger to feel connected goes back as far as my family's stories go. I trust we were created to be community, to be "us." Come to my window; let me show you what I see.

West Trinity Avenue
Durham, North Carolina
April 2012

Introduction:
Family Dinner

As far back as I can remember, meal time has meant a gathering together. My family ate to be together as much as we ate to be fed. Meals were markers in the day, times to talk and laugh and time to enjoy our food. We were not a perfect family, but we ate well together morning and night, left only to fend for ourselves at lunch, whether at school or at work. Breakfast and dinner, however, were not to be eaten alone. As my brother and I moved into ninth and eleventh grades respectively, and my family moved back to Texas permanently after many years as missionaries in Africa, my mother cautioned us that our lives were about to face big changes. She then asked what we wanted most to stay the same. Eating together was our reply. Dinner, as a result, became a moveable feast time-wise because it mattered. We ate early before musical rehearsal or late after ball practice, doing whatever it took to keep the feast. In my twenties, when the relationship with my family was most strained, I remember calling my parents after we had managed to reconcile beyond a particularly dark and painful stretch.

"I was afraid, sometimes," my mother said with a break in her voice, "that once we hung up the phone we might never hear from you again."

As angry as I had been in those moments she described, that thought never crossed my mind. I believe it was the years of breakfasts and dinners stacked up in my soul like pancakes that produced an unflinching tether. Things were not perfect, and (not but) we were family. We took and ate and remembered even when it hurt to do so and we stayed connected even when we did not know how.

My fascination with food led me to the kitchen at an early age;

my mother's being a ferociously fearless cook coupled with my inherent inquisitiveness meant I became a cook as well. Though we ate well together, my family was not as adept at sharing feelings around the table. My father grew up in a house where anger was the loud and common currency and he was determined for our family to be more civil and loving, which we were. I, however, internalized his good intentions as a prohibition against anger, so I didn't always know what to do with the frustration and rage that came with growing up. The kitchen was, somehow, a safe room—an open room—that let me find freedom in the smells and sounds, in the work and wonder that is cooking.

"What are you making?" I would ask my mother as I wandered in from the backyard in the late afternoon.

"Here, let me show you," she would answer most of the time, often followed days later by, "You watched me do this the other day; you do it this time."

I learned how to cook and how to teach from her. I also learned to bask in the glow of a good meal. With all the confidence of one deserving of her own cooking show, she would take a bite of what she had made for dinner and proclaim, "Isn't this wonderful?" Paula Deen has nothing on my mother. Still.

Growing up in a family with Texas roots, even though I sprouted in Africa, we called the evening meal supper. Growing up Southern Baptist, I first learned of Communion as the Lord's Supper, so it was a meal to me before it was a ritual. Supper was to be shared and enjoyed. As a child, I thought of the Lord's Supper as dinner with Jesus, in a way, with food for whoever came, much like supper was at our house. As a young Baptist boy, I gave my heart to Jesus, as we said, and took my place with him at the Table for Supper.

In Baptist life, that meal didn't come very often—usually once a quarter—for fear of being too ritualistic, as it was explained to me. But meals—good meals are rituals. We had taco salad at our house every Saturday at lunch and that didn't get old. I was youth minister at University Baptist Church in Fort Worth when I became friends

with Martha, the youth minister at the Episcopal church around the corner. She explained what Communion meant to her and I began to go, regularly and quietly, to evening prayer and Mass to eat This Meal That Matters Most regularly and ritually. I learned that ritual was a good and important word that meant "meaningful repetition" rather than a term of caution, and I learned a new name: the Eucharist—the Great Thanksgiving. Coming to the Table with intention and regularity was like Saturday taco salad, something to do repetitively, joyfully, and gratefully.

"Every time you do this, remember me."

A book, then, about looking at the different meals of our lives as metaphors for Communion feels natural to me. Though it has taken many years for me to actually sit down and write it, I've collected stories and carried snippets of chapters around for years, mostly in my heart and in small scrap journals, always managing to let the days slip away without writing them down. Until now.

Thanks to the unflappable encouragement of Ginger, my wife, I pushed past my who-knows-what and wrote. The metaphors that follow are invitations to supper, if you will: ways to think about The Meal. I intend them as poetry more than prescription: jumping off places for further conversation. Hopefully, over dinner.

Signature Dish

communion

we pass the silver plate
of broken bread with
less confidence than
we pass the peace
easier perhaps to hug
than to admit our hunger
we take and eat without
a word and wait for
the wine's weaker friend
shot glasses of salvation
we place the empties
in the pew racks causing
the clicking sound of
solidarity to rattle
our hearts and shake
awake the resonance
that runs through all
the saints and suppers
that we might remember
that we might be one

My first date with Ginger, who is now my wife, was a Lyle Lovett concert in a tiny club in Fort Worth, Texas. On our second date, I cooked dinner for her. It was a Saturday night and I put together a mixture of fettuccine alfredo and Cajun-spiced chicken that she thoroughly enjoyed. We fell in love with one another rather quickly, so we ate together most every Saturday night that spring and she asked for a repeat performance of the dish so often that we named it "Saturday Night Chicken." Though we do eat a variety of food, that is our signature dish: the one we most associate with us.

When people find out I have been a professional chef, they often ask, "What's your specialty?" or "What's your signature dish?" I suppose it's a fair question, though I don't think many chefs limit themselves to a particular plate other than for marketing reasons. Still, doctors and lawyers all have specific areas of expertise, so why not chefs? That said, I have never been comfortable narrowing it down to a dish or two, so I have struggled with how to answer because I didn't want to sound overly didactic ("Well, you see, that's not really how the restaurant business works") or dismissive ("I don't really think about it that way . . ."). I learned, therefore, to reframe the question in my mind by trying to hear what was behind their query, which I interpreted as asking what I most loved to cook.

I didn't go to culinary school. Instead, I came up through the ranks, starting as a dishwasher and then a prep cook, and was able to work my way up the cooking line because professional cooking is still a career where apprenticeship is an accepted and honored way to learn the craft. I started cooking for a living out of necessity.

After spending eighteen months wrestling with a severe depression that had left me unable to do much more than get up, take long walks, and write rather morose poetry, I had to do something to help make money. The hole I was digging had become more than emotional; I needed to make some sort of financial contribution to our marriage. I had worked as a minister and a teacher, but neither career offered many options. I spent a couple of weeks driving around seeing what I could figure out and then it hit me: I love to cook—maybe I could do that for a living. I found a small place that was opening and bugged the chef every day for two weeks until he capitulated and hired me. Over the next eight or nine years, I had a chance to work for and with some extremely talented and creative people who were more than willing to share their knowledge. I worked in restaurants ranging from a small breakfast place that taught me how to cook good eggs fast to fine dining restaurants where I was afforded ingredients like white truffle oil and fennel pollen. Over time, I have had a chance to refine my answer to the signature dish question, much as I had the chance to hone my cooking skills, and have come to respond in the following way:

My favorite thing to cook is comfort food. The fancy ingredients are fun, but if I can make mashed potatoes that taste so good you will leave your potatoes in your vegetable bin at home and drive to eat my cooking then I've done something special. I want to make food that makes you want to come eat with me. I want to make the kind of food that will make you remember our being together. The signature—the distinguishing mark—of a great meal is in the memory it creates.

Communion is the signature dish of our faith. Sharing the bread and the cup is at the core of who we are together. It is the meal around which we build our identity, our defining ritual.

One May evening a year or two after we moved to Durham from Boston, we sat with two friends around an iron table on the patio of La Hacienda, a Mexican restaurant in Chapel Hill, and shared an evening filled with wonderful food, frozen margaritas, friendship, laughter, and stories—all a part of our celebration of Ginger's

birthday, which had several food stops along the way in keeping with our traditions. During our time in New England, one of the rituals for her birthday was a trip to the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston to wander and wonder among the paintings and then to share the cheese plate in the museum café. Though that particular item was a little out of reach on that birthday, we did end up at Six Plates, a wine bar owned by a new friend here in Durham, for their great cheese plate in order that we might keep our birthday tradition. As Ginger told of our travels from cheese plate to queso and chips, our friend Lindsey said, "Y'all are such creatures of ritual."

Yes, we are. On purpose. Ritual is best defined as "meaningful repetition"—repeating those things that help you remember, as the old saying goes, who you are and whose you are. So we end up in a Hard Rock Café on our wedding and engagement anniversaries, we chase down a good cheese plate on Ginger's birthday, and we keep repeating any number of little sayings and actions that remind us of the promises we are committed to keeping, transforming daily doings into something sacred. The repetition is a stacking of time, each experience laid one on top of the other, so that when we return to repeat it again we do so from a new perspective. All the years of cheese plates give us a different view of what it means to be together, to be alive in this world. One of my favorite Bible stories is that of Joshua telling the people of Israel to stack up the stones after they had crossed the Jordan so that in the years to come when the children asked what the stones mean they could tell the story, over and over again, of what God had done.

If ritual is meaningful repetition, habit is the opposite—repetition that grows out of convenience, compliance, or just because: unexamined repetition. Where habits grow like kudzu, rituals have to be cultivated and nourished. We have to keep stacking up stones and slicing cheese if life is going to mean something. When Jesus first passed the bread and wine, he said, "As often as you do this, remember me." One of the ways I like to interpret his words is to think he was not so much envisioning a Communion service at church as much as he was talking about mealtime in a more general

sense: every time you break bread together, remember. Let all our meals be rituals and not habits.

Ginger and I married in April of 1990. Four months later, we moved from Texas to Boston. The story of how we ended up packing ourselves into a Hertz-Penske rental truck (I still can't say or write that name without shivering just a little) and driving from Fort Worth, where I had lived longer than anywhere else in my life, to make our home in the Charlestown neighborhood of Boston, which is one square mile populated by sixteen thousand people who were all anonymous to us, so we could try to start a church is a story to tell, but not right now.

About a year after that move to Boston, we purchased our first home. It was a row house—fourteen hundred square feet on four floors—that was built somewhere around 1850. It had "good bones," as our realtor liked to say, and it needed a lot of work, which we did mostly ourselves. The big project was the kitchen. Our friend J. T., a contractor with a heart of gold, was the lead on the project and I was his second. J. T. was built like a lumberjack, thought like a theologian, and worked like he was on commission. We took the room out down to the floor joists and wall studs, even taking out a dead chimney along one wall. For that, J. T. and I climbed up on the roof and dismantled the bricks above the roof line, lowering them to the ground one five-gallon bucket at a time. Then he proceeded to knock out the chimney from the top down, standing on one side and dropping the bricks down the flue where I retrieved them in the kitchen and carried them outside. He came all the way down through the middle of the house, kicking the bricks, and finally emerging in the kitchen like some sort of dust-blown Santa. The trash guys hauled off over a ton and a half of bricks when it was all over and we ended up with an extra sixteen square feet of space in our fourteen-by-ten-foot room.

I then got to design the kitchen I wanted to cook in, which meant it needed to be both a public space and one that allowed me to get my job done. We put the sink in the farthest corner of the room, with cabinets and countertops going along each wall. On one

side was the stove and refrigerator; on the other side was the dishwasher along a half wall with a raised counter that faced the dining room. In the middle of the room I mounted a deep cabinet with pot drawers to serve as an island and braced it with another raised counter with bar stools where people—namely, Ginger—could sit and talk while I cooked. To complete the dining room, we found a furniture company in Boston that built new things out of old wood, so we had them build a four-by-eight table out of recovered barn wood. It filled up the room—a room that begged to be filled with people, and we did our best to comply by inviting folks to what became known as Thursday Night Dinner. The name pretty much explains it. Ginger's day off was Friday and I was at the end of a school week, so the night was relaxed for us. We invited folks whenever we got the chance and we made place cards for those who showed up. The rule became once you had a place card, you no longer needed an invitation. All you had to do was let us know by Thursday noon that you were coming and we would have a place for you. We have been married twenty-two years and still have all the place cards of everyone who has sat around our table. The rule still stands, even though we've moved to Durham.

"Works of art," said Albert Camus, "are not born in flashes of imagination, but in daily fidelity." Though I had to take those words to heart to get this book written, the truth is even more profound when I think of what it has to say about being at the table together. On any given Thursday, we had anywhere from four to fourteen people around the old farm table in our tiny urban dining room. Over time, we had a rotating group of regulars. One woman, whom we met on the street in Charlestown as she was moving into the neighborhood, was a Southern-born pharmaceutical salesperson with a wide and welcoming smile who drove all over western Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Vermont to serve her accounts. She quit taking appointments after noon on Thursdays so she had time to get back for dinner. Around the table, we healed each other, laughed together, challenged each other, helped raise our foster

daughter, listened to one another, and ate well. The bonds formed around those meals are still strong.

At the church Bible study we hold at our favorite brewery, Fullsteam (the friendliest room in Durham), we were talking one night about the stories in the Gospel of Mark, and noticing that he moves from one "immediately" to another without much regard for any kind of back-story; we wondered what he might have left out. Jesus walked up to James and John as they were getting ready to go fishing with their father and said, "Follow me," and immediately, Mark says, they dropped their nets and went. And that's all he says. No negotiation. No Zebedee fuming in the streets as his sons walked away from the family business. Jesus called. They left. Over time, I've come to think that what Mark didn't tell us was they already knew each other. Daily fidelity was at work in the building of trust and relationship. Even Zebedee knew what was coming when Jesus stopped that particular day. Mark just cut to the climactic scene.

What the gospel writers don't seem to skimp on are stories of Jesus eating. Or at least stories of Jesus and food. He eats, he feeds, he talks about food, he even calls himself the Bread of Life, and on the last night around the Table he wrapped it all up with a meal—The Meal—as the ultimate metaphor of what it means to be together. After the resurrection, he walked with the two along the Emmaus Road, talking and listening and remaining anonymous because they didn't recognize him until they sat down for dinner and the stories came alive again when he broke the bread. Even on the nights that Ginger and I sit down at the table by ourselves, I feel surrounded by the cloud of witnesses that have sat there with us all the days. I think of the hands that have touched the wood, the glasses that have been raised, all the bread broken and wine poured in our legacy of fellowship and community. It is Communion.

In my youth minister days at University Baptist Church in Fort Worth, Communion took a central place in what we did. I wanted the kids to grow up knowing more about the Lord's Supper than I had, so we shared the meal together in our mid-week youth worship even though the church only shared the meal quarterly on Sunday mornings. We also had Communion at Youth Camp, which was the centerpiece of our year together. We went off for a week with about a hundred kids and as many adults as I could get to go, and we spent the days singing and playing and hanging out and eating in Jesus' name. The closing experience on the last night of camp was Communion. We served each other in several different ways over the years and took time to talk about what we found in the meal. One year, we set up a long table in the middle of the room with several pitchers of grape juice and loaves of bread and invited people to bring someone to the Table and serve them. They began to go up in twos and threes, most going more than once; for over an hour we shared in the Great Banquet.

Somewhere in the midst of the meal, my friend Reed, who was one of the musicians for the week, invited me to eat with him. Reed was an amazing keyboard player with the self-confidence to match. His sometimes overpowering presence belied the sensitivity with which he paid attention to what was going on around him and who was there with him. We sat facing each other. He tore off a big piece of bread, held it up at eye level, and said, "You know what blows my mind, man? Everyone down through Christian history has sat at this Table. We get baptized differently, we learn about life differently, we worship differently, but we all eat here. So right now we're here with everyone who has ever been here before us and everyone who will come after us. That blows my mind." We ate and drank together and then stayed at the table, watching as kids came and went, eating and drinking and laughing and crying, a visual and visceral symbol of all that gets handed down and handed on at the Table. Like the stories in the walls of that little row house and the memories that have worked their way into the fibers of our old farm table, so the simple act of breaking bread and sharing the cup

offers us the chance to see Jesus, to recognize Christ in one another, to tell our stories, and remember we always have a place to eat.

Rituals are the raw material from which we can build of our lives a mountain of memories, offering us the chance to see that we have come from God and we are going to God, that we are inextricably connected to one another by the grace of God, and, even in the scope of so grand a universe, it matters that we celebrate with our signature dishes, over and over again.

Saturday Night Chicken

1 pound boneless chicken breast, cut in thin strips
olive oil
Goya Adobo seasoning (con pimento)
Tony Chachere's Creole Seasoning
1 pound fettuccine
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 cup heavy cream (or 1 cup plain Greek yogurt)
1 tablespoon honey (if you are using the yogurt)
2/3 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese
salt and pepper to taste

Put a big pot of water on the stove to boil for the pasta. If you are using dry pasta, it will take longer to cook than fresh. Time it so the pasta finishes with the chicken and the alfredo sauce.

Put the chicken strips in a bowl and toss with the two seasonings. I use equal parts of each. We like it hot, so I use a good bit. Experiment to your own taste. You can also add more as you are cooking. Get a sauté pan good and hot and then add olive oil. When the oil is hot, but not smoking, add the chicken and cook until the strips are cooked through and a little crispy—about 6–8 minutes.

Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat and add the cream (or yogurt), stirring well. Cook until cream is simmering, but not boiling. Take some time here. The longer it cooks, the more it naturally thickens. Keep

stirring. Add cheese and cook some more until the cheese is melted and well integrated into the sauce. When you add the salt and pepper, go slowly with the salt because the cheese has some already. You can also add other flavors—garlic, Cajun seasoning—to your liking. If you don't want flecks in the sauce, use white pepper.

Drain the pasta and put in a large bowl. Pour the alfredo sauce over pasta and toss. Put pasta on the plate and the chicken on top. Open a nice bottle of wine and feel the love.

Serves two with some leftovers.