

## Jesus' Recipe for a Kingdom Style Feast

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I love to cook. I am not very good at it, but I still love to cook. I have discovered that you can take a recipe, change it a bit, maybe add spice, or for me I replace ingredients that will lower the calories and 'viola' you have something that seems new and is acceptable to a different group of people. A good recipe is adaptable by the cook. The idea and primary ingredients remain much the same. But the meal can be changed, dampened down, or spiced up, depending upon the context, audience, and the effect desired. This is not just good cooking. It's also good evangelism.

As a parish and a church we are changing. Covid-19 has is forcing us to change. The economics of the area we live in is forcing us to change. In September we will be combining our pastoral and liturgical leadership with two others parishes. The changing circumstances we live in is causing us to change with it. Change or shrink and disappear.

As we seek to teach the ageless message of God's love and salvation, we need to find a way to serve it up in a new, refreshing, and scintillating way. We need to present our recipe for god's love in a new way, giving new zest to the ageless flavour of the Gospel.

New teaching, old story. This is the basis for Jesus' discipleship lessons. This week in our scripture lesson from Matthew 13, we see him dishing out advice to his followers not just about what to teach but about how to do it.

This might be called Jesus' recipe for Disciple Making, For Jesus, using short biting parables, is giving his disciples six pointers on how to take the scriptural interpretations he is teaching them and infiltrate them into the world in a way that will change the world.

Let's look at what he is saying. It's actually a "how-to" list, a recipe if you will, for getting the Word out and gaining followers of The Way.

Step One: Ingredients. Add to the "old, old story" a little Mustard Seed. Jesus tells of the smallest possible seed that is planted into a field. That small seed will someday become the largest tree, fit to hold, feed, and nest every kind of bird within its branches. The seed is the

resonant Word of Jesus, the new understanding of the Kingdom of God. The field is the world. The disciple's job? To "plant" this new teaching within people's ears and hearts. What kind of seed will do the trick? The kind that resonates, that will grow and expand their vision. The lesson? A little can be a lot. The size of the effort does not determine the size of the outcome. A little bit of effort can grow into a huge movement.

We all know that to change a recipe, all you need to do is add one small new ingredient, and the taste of the entire composition will be made new. One alteration can change a proven old recipe into an award-winning, new, innovative success.

What's Jesus' message? We don't need to change the Story. The scriptures are timeless. How we present them, how we interpret them, what kind of new twist we can see in them, how we can insert something new and interesting, familiar and yet unique that will resonate with people, that is the question. As the old song goes, "it only takes a spark to get a fire going." Make the old seem new, and people will pay attention.

Step Two: Rising Agent: Yeast. Jesus uses the metaphor of yeast to demonstrate how teaching His new Truth will infiltrate peoples' hearts, their culture, their daily living, their faith and society themselves over time. He tells the story of yeast "hid" in a bushel of wheat flour until it has worked its way through all of the dough. His advice? Just keep on teaching the truth, and be patient. Yeast is a stealthy ingredient. And Jesus' advice for changing the world is to teach truth quietly and consistently. He doesn't advocate for a harsh, violent, uprising. But for offering a gentle, distinct, appealing taste of what God's kingdom is like, and what God's intent in the scriptures truly is. People know "truth" when they taste it. It just takes time for a good recipe to spread. In a little bit of time, a new taste can become a smashing and popular hit. Sometimes thinking about another bowl of brussel sprouts just feels like another boring bowl of brussel sprouts. But roast them up with a little salt, pepper, and parmesan cheese, and voila! A tasty, crispy treat. Or in Jesus' mind: tired of bland matza? Add a little yeast to the flour. Only a little does the trick. Wait an hour. Bake. And taste the delicious, fresh bread that will emerge from the oven. You'll never

go back to matza. Jesus knows that teaching the truth in a new and attractive way has the potential to change the hearts of people. It just takes time.

Step Three: Give out free samples. Better yet, gift your new recipe from an unknown “admirer.” Who doesn’t love to discover something new and amazing and be the first to tell about it? Jesus tells a story about a treasure hidden within a field. Someone finds it and covers it up, then later sells everything to buy it. Jesus advice? Teaching the gospel has nothing to do with making ourselves seem knowledgeable and everything to do with making others feel knowledgeable. This is not about making ourselves the center of attention, but making Christ the center. Share the message quietly and humbly, and people will discover it all on their own, will value it, and will apply it to their own lives. All you need to do is bake. The taste stands on its own, as does the recipe. Soon people will be making it in their own homes and passing it on to their own group of friends. The Truth of God needs no convincing. Just “taste and see that the Lord is good.” Those who taste it for themselves will become the best evangelists.

Step Four: Allow it to shine all on its own. Once people start spreading a good recipe, it will come to the attention of the experts. And every good store will want to sell it. Jesus tells this parable not of someone who stumbles upon the “truth” but of those truth merchants, who are seeking “truth.” An expert gemologist will know a superior diamond when he or she sees it. A teacher of the scriptures will also know the truth of God when he or she hears it. Jesus says, the merchant will sell everything he owns to possess this “pearl,” for Jesus knows that once this new truth of the kingdom reaches the ears of a wise leader, or those who are “experts” in the field, that they will “buy into it” fully and whole-heartedly. And from here, this new teaching will become mainstreamed. Once mainstreamed, it will change not only lives, but systems and cultures. And all the disciples need to do is wait and let it happen. Examples of this type of evangelism might be Cursillo, Marriage Encounter, Messy Church, Fresh expressions etc.

Step Five: Allow time to take its course. And let God handle it from here. In Jesus’ story of the net that catches all fish with people sorting them into those good to eat and those to discard, Jesus notes that it

will be evident that some have heard and ingested the Word and that some have rejected it --that is, those who have internalized Jesus' truth as opposed to those who have rejected it. In the end, God will take an accounting of all people. And will note those whose hearts contain the Truth Jesus taught. Jesus' message to his disciples: Once you let it go, your job is done. God will take it from here.

Step Six: Keep All Recipes in Safekeeping. They are all worth their weight in gold. Jesus tells his disciples that those trained to teach about the kingdom of heaven must both honor the old and invite the new. Time honored recipes never grow old. And yet, new recipes constantly add pizzazz and attract a new group of adherents. Learn from your past. But innovate and keep making things new for every time and culture. Step Six is Jesus' rendition of God's first and foremost command from the book of Genesis: Tend and till your garden covenant with God. But bear fruit, feed, and multiply God's Word throughout all generations. Honor the old. Cultivate it every day anew.

In your lives, in your ministry and mission, may you take Jesus' recipe for God's kingdom to heart. May you cook with love, and pass on that recipe to everyone you meet. For you are a seasoned disciple.