

Around a dining room table in Springfield, Missouri, I first learned what it meant to partake of the Lord's Supper. We crowded twenty people around a table that would more easily fit twelve. We dispensed with flatware, and we ate chicken tikka masala and rice with yogurt and pita bread. We passed the pita around the table and tore off chunks to scoop up our food with our fingers. We ate and drank and laughed and talked, and I realized that this was a thin space. Here in this place, heaven had come near to earth.

My heart was full as I watched this group of people gathered around the table enjoying the food I had prepared. The hours spent preparing the meal and cleaning the dishes have faded from memory, but the feeling while gathered together remains sharply focused. It was a feeling of completeness, wholeness. While we were all broken people with broken lives, we were able to draw near to one another. Our fellowship showed me how the table brings us into communion with each other.

At a church in Western Maryland, I first learned how to receive communion. I watched as a ninety year-old retired pastor moved to the center aisle of the church, cupped his hands together in front of him and shuffled to the table. His wrinkled hands, cupped in front of him showed me that communion, like all good gifts is not taken, but rather received. Communion is a prayer as we offer up empty hands, and God bestows upon us the greatest gift of all, Emmanuel. Hands extend longing to be filled. Hands extend bestowing the gift. Cupped hands showed me how the table brings us into communion with God.

The table welcomes all who come. We crowd in extra seats to make room for everyone because everyone belongs at this table. Around this table, heaven draws near to earth and barriers between us are lifted. The bread is broken and plentiful. The wine is poured out and shared. Each one knows they are beloved. Abundant life is found through hands stretched out in welcome and hands cupped to receive.