



November, 2009 – The Best Meal A Story for All Ages

When we host a meal, what is really important? This story from Creating Home, a Tapestry of Faith K/1 curriculum, offers wisdom to carry into your holiday preparations.

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The Best Meal

Once a there was a great chef who was famous throughout the land. She was so good she taught other people how to cook and their food was almost as tasty as hers. Just for fun, she would throw fancy dinner parties once a month. Everyone wanted to be invited to these dinners. For these dinners, she would instruct the student chefs to cook new and extravagant dishes. The dinner guests, in awe of the chef's skills, would spend the dinner savoring each bite. All you would hear would be quiet little "ooohs" and "aaahs".

Because she wanted to always feature new goodies to eat at all her parties, she would travel far and wide all over the land to experience new food. Everywhere she went, the town would honor her. The best cooks would create dishes unique to their region. The great chef tasted them all and requested the recipes of the dishes she liked best. As you can imagine, she ate a lot of food and knew a great deal about how to prepare the best meals.

One evening, while traveling home, the chef stopped at a small country house to ask for directions to a hotel. The family insisted that she spend the night with them. Happily, she was in time for dinner. The mother took a casserole out of the oven. Brother tossed a salad with different vegetables. Sister sliced the bread. "Let me help", said the chef, so she set the table for the four of them.

When everyone was seated at the table, the family held hands. The chef felt the young sister's hand slip into hers and the chef, in turn, reached out for the brother's hand.

The mother said, "To have food upon the table" and the children replied "Is a blessing!"

The mother said "The sunset and the possibility of another sunrise tomorrow...". "Is a blessing!" the children replied.

"The love of family, the warmth of friendship, and the grace of the Spirit..."

“Is a blessing!” the children and chef replied together. Then they laughed, happy that the chef had joined in their grace.

They ate and during the meal everyone told stories about their day. The chef could not believe how delicious the food was. She didn’t want dinner to end. All things must end, however, and off to bed the children went.

“May I have the recipes?” the chef asked the mother, who was flattered that the chef had so enjoyed their simple meal.

In the morning, the chef rode on toward home. When she got home, she went straight to the kitchen, gave the young chefs the recipes, and told them to start preparation for a dinner party tomorrow night. Tomorrow came, the guests arrived, and the casserole, salad, and bread were served. The chef took a bite and chewed. Something was wrong. Something was missing. This was not like the meal she had at the farmhouse. She ordered the students to explain what they had done differently, but they promised they had only followed the recipes. So she sent someone to go to the farmhouse to bring the mother to her house. The mother came and the chef asked her what missing ingredient had she left out of the recipe.

“What’s missing cannot fit into a recipe,” she replied. “Did you and your guests make the meal together? Did you hold fast to each other while giving thanks? Did you share your stories during the meal?”

“No,” the chef replied. None of that had happened. Then the chef realized that sharing a meal together – what we call “breaking bread together” – was about more than just eating good food. It was about working together, sharing lives, and sharing laughs. It was about being thankful for the food not because it was fancy or the best, but because being together to enjoy the food would nourish you, your family, and your friends.

After that, the chef decided to give small, intimate dinner parties. She and her guests would work together with the student chefs and they would all sit together, give thanks, and enjoy the very best of meals.

Inspired by a story in Tales for the Seventh Day: A Collection of Sabbath Stories by Nina Jaffe (New York: Scholastic Press, 2000).