

REFLECTION – AUG 2nd, 2026

Good morning. The last time I shared a reflection with this congregation I spoke about a new discovery in mathematics. I thought that would be a sure-fire way to ensure I would never be invited back to share again. Alas, my scheme didn't work, so here I am.

This summer in our reflections at TUMC we have been exploring the theme of the 'Peace Table' – how food and coming to the table together can bring about God's Peace.

Today I would like to add to the conversation by reflecting on the Peace Table as a place of healing, and on food as medicine – medicine for the body, medicine for the spirit, and medicine for the community.

My colleagues in pharmacology likely have a very specific definition for medicine, but as a low-brow family doctor I think about medicine as anything done intentionally for the purpose of healing. Exercise can be medicine. Social engagement can be medicine. And yes, food can be medicine.

The idea that food can heal is hardly new. Long before there were randomized controlled trials, cultures around the globe understood that the natural world contained medicines. Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island learned which plants, berries, mushrooms, and tree barks could reduce pain, settle an upset stomach, lower fevers, and treat infections.

Many modern pharmaceuticals have their origins in nature. Aspirin was developed from compounds found in willow bark. The diabetes medication metformin traces its origins to French lilac. The chemotherapy drug paclitaxel was first isolated from the bark of the Pacific yew tree. Digoxin, used to treat heart failure, comes from the foxglove plant.

So when I say that food can be medicine, I could mean it quite literally. However, the scriptures invite us to consider not only how food heals our bodies, but what else healing might look like around a table.

As most of you know, my work outside of the home is serving as a family doctor. One of the superpowers of primary care is prevention. I spend a great deal of time talking with people about eating in ways that reduce disease and support health.

The biomedical model tends to view food primarily through the lens of composition: calories, macronutrients, and micronutrients. That lens can be useful. But it is also incomplete. Food heals bodies – but like many medicines, its effects are individualized, and sometimes surprising.

I have a patient who was born with phenylketonuria. In this rare metabolic disorder, his body cannot properly break down proteins found in ordinary foods. For him, many foods considered “healthy” are poisonous.

My patient’s experience demonstrates that we need to be suspicious of simple categories around food. We live in a culture that often divides food into moral categories: healthy and unhealthy, good and bad, virtuous and indulgent.

For many people the very phrase “Peace Table” almost feels like an oxymoron. Food can become a source of shame. Of anxiety. Of self-judgement. We live in a society that tell us that our worth and our health is defined by what we eat, or don’t eat. Or if you are a parent that your success as a parent is defined by what your children eat, or don’t eat.

I had a friend in university who once said, in some despair, that he wished someone would invent a pill containing all the essential nutrients his body needed, so he would never need to eat again. I continue to be fearfully fascinated by that idea. Because it seems to me that there is an immense poverty in the reduction of food to its constituent nutrients. A food may have the “perfect” nutritional profile - but if it is eaten without joy, satisfaction, meaning, connection, or awe – or worse, eaten with shame or self-loathing, that is not much healing.

None of this is to dismiss nutritional science. Calories and nutrients matter. Vitamins matter. As a physician, I rely on that science every day. The problem comes when we mistake important truth for the whole truth.

The authors of scripture seem to understand this intuitively. When Israel wandered in the wilderness, God gave manna – not simply to sustain bodies, but to reveal God’s daily, unfailing presence and provision. When Jesus left a physical practice by which his followers would remember him, he didn’t choose a creed or a written text. He chose bread and wine. Scripture repeatedly treats food as more than nutrition, but a link between our biological reality and a metaphysical God.

I adore cookbooks. I love leafing through them, reading descriptions, admiring photos and occasionally even making a recipe. One of my favourites is ‘The Supper of the Lamb’ by Robert Capon. Capon was an Anglican priest who wrote a cookbook built around preparing a leg of lamb for eight people – four different ways, while weaving theological reflections throughout. It is humorous, opinionated, and lavish.

At one point Capon devotes an entire chapter to peeling and cutting an onion. He spends paragraphs detailing the layers, textures, smells, flavours, and the tears all contained within this unobtrusive, pedestrian vegetable. It is ridiculous. And wonderful. His point is

not really about onions. His point is attention. There is an entire world of goodness and exuberant life hidden within food if we are willing to observe closely enough.

Capon's onion offers a corrective to the overly cerebral spirituality that we can drift into. God's goodness certainly appears in ideas, theology and mental constructions. But God's goodness is also present in onion juice which soaks into your skin and reminds you of its memory days later. Our bodies are not obstacles to spiritual life. They are one of the places where we encounter it.

Food reminds us that we are creatures. Dependent. Material. Created.

And if food itself is full of God's goodness, we should not be surprised that people are too. Not because we always act well. Not because we never harm. But because our worth does not begin with our performance. The onion had a world of goodness before it hit any frying pan.

That brings us to Jesus.

In Luke 5 Jesus eats with tax collectors and people described as "sinners" – so-called "unhealthy" people. (Remember those moral categories from earlier?) What is striking is not simply that Jesus teaches them. He eats with them. At that time, eating together meant acceptance, relationship, belonging. Jesus does not deny wrongdoing. But neither does he reduce people to it. His actions suggest that people remain worth of dignity, relationship, and restoration. The radical thing was not only what Jesus said. It was the table he chose.

Food can be medicine for bodies and spirits, but tables can heal communities.

A number of years ago, my clinic recognized a gap in our care. Many of our patients living with schizophrenia had so many urgent medical issues that conversations about prevention and healthy living rarely happened.

So we created a monthly group. People would gather for teaching sessions on food, movement, smoking cessation, foot care. The program became surprisingly successful. Eventually we realized something. The most important intervention may not have been the teaching. It may have been the lunch we always offered. People came because they felt welcome. Because they felt cared for. Because they belonged. Healing had started before anyone learned anything.

We have a niece who, due to a neuromuscular condition, doesn't eat through her mouth. She receives nutrition through a feeding tube directly into her stomach. There is physically nothing for her at a table of food. And yet family dinner remains one of the most meaningful parts of her day.

In Luke 14 Jesus tells the story of a banquet. The society appears fractured. Some are too occupied with status and productivity to come. Others – the poor, disabled, and excluded – are on the margins. Yet the host insists the table be filled.

I don't hear this story primarily as an investment strategy for heavenly rewards. I hear it as a vision of healing in the present. The reward is the full table. The reward is restored belonging. The reward is seeing people treated as whole participants in community.

And perhaps it matters that Jesus imagines this restoration not as a public lecture, not as a concert, not as a ceremony, but as a meal. Food reminds us of our shared dependence. Every one of us needs nourishment. Every one of us has preferences and limitations. Every one of us depends on grace more than we prefer to admit.

When we eat together we acknowledge – physically and symbolically – that we are more alike than different. By refocusing us on inclusion and shared humanity, the Peace Table has enormous potential to bring societal healing. I'm convinced that if you can get people simply to eat together, you've already begun bridging the gulf between them.

Throughout scripture, God repeatedly chooses tables as places of encounter. Manna in the wilderness. Meals with strangers. Bread and wine shared to remember. Banquets where unexpected guests are welcomed in. And Jesus, over and over again, chooses not simply to preach to people but to eat with them.

As a physician, I spend much of my life trying to help people become healthier. There is good work in that. But I've become increasingly convinced that holistic healing is often stranger, richer, and more communal than we imagine.

Sometimes healing looks like lowering a blood pressure. Sometimes healing looks like finding the right food for a body. Sometimes healing looks confronting shame and rediscovering joy in eating. Sometimes healing looks like peeling an onion slowly enough to notice that creation is alive with goodness. And sometimes healing looks like sitting across a table from someone and realizing that you belong.

The Peace Table has a world of healing to give. Not that everyone who comes becomes perfectly healthy. Not that all conflict disappears. Not that every wound is immediately repaired. But that at the table we practice something true about God's kingdom: that nourishment is meant to be shared, that delight is holy, and that every person who comes to the table is already worthy of a place there.

So this week, I wonder: What healing might you be able to find at the table? Who might God be inviting to your table? And where might God already be waiting for you at someone else's?