



Week 4: Agape Meals

One who is full loathes honey from the comb, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet. (Proverbs 27:7)

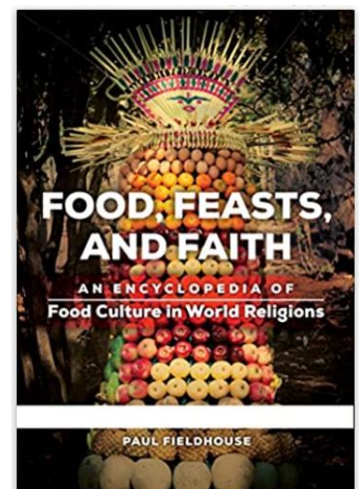
Agape Feast

An agape feast, also known as a love feast, is a religious meal shared as a symbol of love and fellowship among Christians. It gets its name from the Greek word *agapae*, meaning “selfless love,” and embodies the central commandment of Jesus, the Christian prophet, to love God and love one’s neighbor. Among early Christians the daily agape feast was open to all and consisted of a communal meal followed by celebration of the Eucharist, at which consecrated bread and wine were consumed to commemorate Christ’s Last Supper. During the second and third centuries the church began separating the agape feast from the Eucharist, and eventually the communal love feast fell into disuse.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, some Christian sects including the Moravian, Methodist, and Brethren Churches revived the love feast. The Brethren in Christ Church, founded by German settlers in rural Pennsylvania, held love feasts each spring and fall. The two-day event was a major undertaking that required months of planning, the provision of food, and accommodation for hundreds of guests. The feast involved preaching and the giving of personal testimonies as well as the sharing of a communal meal, followed by celebration of the Eucharist. Love feast menus typically included hearty local fare such as bread, meat, cheese, homemade soups, fruit, potatoes, beets, coffee, and desserts. Prior to the meal, participants washed each other’s feet as a sign of humility in imitation of the biblical account of Christ washing his disciples feet at the Last Supper (John 13:1–11).

The love feast tradition is still observed by the Church of the Brethren, the United Methodist Church, and the Moravian Church. Brethren practice incorporates the three components of foot washing, a

communal meal, and the Eucharist, while in the Moravian Church sweet buns with tea, coffee, or lemonade are served to congregations as part of the service. The United Methodist Book of Worship provides guidance for a love feast celebration as an occasional service: simple food such as bread, crackers, or sweet rolls and water or tea and coffee are quietly served while prayers and scripture readings proceed. The spirit of love feasts can also be seen in the modern church supper that continues to celebrate Christian fellowship through sharing food. Charitable organizations such as the Agape Table in Winnipeg, Canada, honor the tradition in a nonreligious context by offering food and fellowship, especially to the homeless and marginalized of society.



Bible Readings

Genesis 18:1-10 The Lord appeared to Abraham near the great trees of Mamre while he was sitting at the entrance to his tent in the heat of the day. Abraham looked up and saw three men standing nearby. When he saw them, he hurried from the entrance of his tent to meet them and bowed low to the ground. He said, "If I have found favor in your eyes, my lord, do not pass your servant by. Let a little water be brought, and then you may all wash your feet and rest under this tree. Let me get you something to eat, so you can be refreshed and then go on your way—now that you have come to your servant." "Very well," they answered, "do as you say." So Abraham hurried into the tent to Sarah. "Quick," he said, "get three seahs of the finest flour and knead it and bake some bread." Then he ran to the herd and selected a choice, tender calf and gave it to a servant, who hurried to prepare it. He then brought some curds and milk and the calf that had been prepared and set these before them. While they ate, he stood near them under a tree. "Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. Then one of them said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

John 13:1-5, 12-17 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. ...When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.

Matthew 26:26-30 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the [b] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Questions to Ponder

1. "Agape" means selfless love. Looking at the 3 passages above, where do you see agape in action?
2. The word servant appears countless times in our bible. It is often a lowly term used to describe those who are less important. How does Jesus change the outlook of servant?
3. What other examples or stories in the bible are about servants who show themselves worthy beyond their titles, position, or name?
4. Food is more than mere nourishment for our bodies – what does nourishing your body of faith mean to you? Is partaking in Communion special? Why or why not?
5. How can we better share agape meals and servanthood with those in our families and community?

Recipes to Share

Party Food – Your favorite dish to make (or eat) at a party.

Notes: