COME TO THE TABLE

Week 1: Revelation @ the Table

Scripture Passage	Luke 24:28-35
Focus Statement	When Jesus breaks bread with the disciples, their eyes are opened, and they recognize him. Communion opens our eyes to see God and others more clearly. At the table, we come to know one another and God.
ME	Share a memorable mealtime story where you learned something new about someone. This could be a Thanksgiving dinner, Christmas dinner, or even your most awkward dinner experience.
WE	Throughout Methodism, it is common for us to have dinners or potlucks. This is the time when we share a meal. Most importantly, it is a time of sharing and community with one another. Share a story from the church's perspective of getting to know others over a meal (i.e. Sunday meals, church potlucks, mission dinners, community dinners/church BBQs, ecumenical church dinner). Introduce the series ("Over the next four weeks…")
GOD	Luke gives us a powerful illustration of revelation during this walk to Emmaus. The walk to Emmaus takes place following Jesus' crucifixion. Two friends are traveling on a dark road alone, mourning the loss of their savior, and come across a stranger. (Note: The preacher may wish to continue to summarize the story and give its context). Key points: 1. Through the breaking of the bread, the traveling companions' eyes are opened, and they recognize Jesus. 2. The traveling companions saw and experienced Jesus in a new and meaningful way. Share a specific illustration of when, through a meal, Jesus has been experienced. 3. After communion, the followers leave the table to share the good news about the resurrected Lord with others, thus extending the table.
YOU	If you are traveling down a dark road alone, know that Christ is your companion. You are not alone. You are at the table with friends. This day, as we celebrate communion, may our eyes be opened just as the disciples' eyes were opened. May Christ be revealed to us today.
WE	Christ invites us to the communion table and sends us out to extend the communion table and share the good news with the world. Share about how the church is extending welcome and meeting people on the journey. It is a chance to affirm the congregation, help them see God at work among them and encourage them to keep going in that direction.

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Week 2: Guess Who's Coming to Dinner!

Scripture Passage	Luke 14:12-14
Focus Statement	Most would agree to share meals with individuals who are familiar to them or with those they. Yet, Christ contends that the table is less about familiarity and more about hospitality and care.
ME	We all love going to dinner with our favorite aunt or family member who tells the best jokes; thereby ensuring we have a memorable dinner. However, what happens when we go to dinner and don't know what to expect? Share a story when you had an unexpected guest come to dinner and the experience was better than you had anticipated.
WE	We have often been the outsider in the group. It is the feeling when everyone else knows each other. Yet, you find yourself sitting there looking around and asking the question, "Who are these people, and will anyone talk with me?" Coincidentally enough, by the end of the evening, we find ourselves meeting new people and gaining new insights. It is God that calls us out of our places of familiarity, into this place of fellowship at the table.
GOD	Luke gives us insight into the details of Jesus' ministry. • Christ meets us at the place of humility and reminds us that God is glorified in our meekness. • Christ's table is not about us being comfortable. Rather, it is about us making space for others who bring different perspectives.
YOU	You are a child of the Most High God. God makes room for you at the table. We all have something special to contribute to the conversation of inclusivity. Imagine a world where our differences don't have to divide us and we can celebrate both what brings us together and what makes us diverse.
WE	Being the Body of Christ does not mean that we will not have uncomfortable experiences, but rather we can all work toward making space for the uniqueness that exists within the Kingdom of God. Planet Fitness prides itself in being a, "Judgement Free Zone." As the church, may we also seek to be place where people don't feel judged but rather know that they have a place at the table.

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Week 3: Enemies @ the Table

Scripture Passage	Psalm 23
Focus Statement	When you feel that people or situations are against you, God is still in control and can provide a blessing.
ME	Share a time when you felt like a situation was not going your way, and then there was a turnaround. You may consider not sharing the ending, the turnaround, of how you pulled through until the end of your sermon.
WE	I am sure we have had moments in our lives when we may not have seen a way to navigate a difficult situation, and looking back upon it, we know that God saw us through. Consider sharing a story from the church or current world event that is a good illustration of God seeing you through.
GOD	Psalm 23 provides encouragement and assurance of God's presence in anxious times. The scripture speaks of green pastures, still waters, restoring souls and not fearing evil, and then we come across verse five that causes us to pause: "You preparest a table before me in the presence of my enemies" (v.5). What does that mean? In verse four, we imagine walking through the darkest valley where there are enemies lurking, waiting to attack. Yet, we do not fear because the shepherd's rod and staff provide protection. This wilderness imagery contrasts with the imagery of a royal banquet in verse five. The contrast reminds us that even when we feel surrounded by enemies (people, institutions, our weaknesses), God provides sustenance and fellowship at the table. The table reminds us and signals to our enemies that God is committed to our wellbeing, no matter what we go through. (Be aware that congregants might not be able to see "the table amid enemies" right now. This may be something they have yet to experience.) When we eat confidently in the presence of our enemies, we might even disarm them, creating a shift in the dynamic between us.
YOU	Each one of us likely has enemies or is in conflict in our lives. Often when we consider the situation, we see everything that has gone wrong in the past and fixate on what will go wrong in the future. We might be fearful and anxious. Invite the congregation to imagine a situation of conflict they are going through in their lives. What table of blessing might God be providing in the midst of that conflict? How do you envision yourself and the others engaging in this table of blessing? (Note: This may or may not mean a restored relationship.)
WE	What if we as a community sat at the table with (name a situation or conflict your church is going through). Imagine if we came to the situation with a mind and heart believing that God can work a blessing.

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Week 4: Laughter @ the Table

Scripture Passage	Genesis 18:1-15
Focus Statement	God invites us to pay attention to God's unexpected ways of working in our lives in moments of tears and laughter.
ME	Share a story when if you hadn't laughed, you would have cried or when laughter wasn't a reaction to because of comedy, but rather an expression of deep emotion.
WE	Sometimes we laugh out of nervousness or anxiety. Sometimes we laugh as a way to cope with challenges. Sometimes we laugh because we don't want to cry.
GOD	The story is of one woman's laughter in the face of the unexpected. Strangers visit Abraham and Sarah. Earlier, the couple left their home for a new land God promised to them, and God told Abraham he would be the father of many nations even though he had no children. Abraham and Sarah welcome the strangers with a meal of cakes, milk and meat. As the strangers eat, they share that Abraham's wife Sarah will bear a son. When Sarah overhears their table conversation, she laughs out loud at the idea of finally having a child in her old age. Her laughter is born out of her pain. It's not laughter because the situation is funny but laughter at the comicality of the stranger's statement. It's laughter that could easily be tears. Later, when Sarah does have a child, she names him Isaac, which means, "he laughs." She says, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me" (Genesis 21:6). Frederick Buechner describes this kind of laughter as the kind of comedy that brings "tears at the hilarious unexpectedness of things rather than at their tragic expectedness." As you work with this passage, be aware that people in your congregation have been impacted by infertility and by unexpected pregnancy.
YOU	For each of us, God works in unexpected ways. No one else can interpret your experiences for you. No one else can tell you the meaning of your painful experiences or how to respond to them. Sarah's laughter and her choice to name her son were ways of responding to her experience for herself and making meaning of it alongside God. God invites you to make meaning of your experience and to look for God's presence even when it seems unlikely or ridiculous. Consider allowing time for open sharing by congregants on how God has acted unexpectedly in their lives.
WE	As a church, we have a powerful role of listening to other people, of sitting at the table with them through the unexpected, and of looking for God at work in unexpected ways. That doesn't mean we tell other people what to think and feel in response to their pain. However, it means we share together, cry together, and laugh together. God works in and through us as we do, helping us see God and each other throughout the full range of what life brings. [to circle back to the series overview statement]