

April 6, Lent 5C (John 12:1-8)

## **What is it like to be at the table with the resurrected?**

by [Jasmin Pittman](#) in the [April 2025](#) issue

Published on March 31, 2025

I've lived a majority of my life in the American South, and to me, our food is sacred: ribbons of wilted leafy greens specked with onion, fresh-picked field peas singing of summer sun, and peaches that drip sweet abundance down our chins. I can imagine my ancestors—some of whom were enslaved people—enjoyed these southern staples too, especially during times of celebration. When I come to the table, the land speaks through what it has given, offering me a taste of what tethers me to those who came before. In this way, eating this food holds the mystery of resurrection.

In Jesus' prelude to Passover, the festival honoring his people's liberation from enslavement in Egypt, the mood is heavy. After raising Lazarus from the dead, he has retreated to the edges of the wilderness as religious authorities plotted his death. There is a sense that he and his disciples are wan and pinched with hunger, in need of both physical and spiritual nourishment to gather strength for the road ahead. The group travels back to Bethany.

Lazarus's household invites Jesus to share a meal. This is only a short line of text, one small part of a narrative largely devoted to the intimate gesture of Mary's anointing of Jesus. But it's worth noting how the scene is set. Though they must be in the midst of Passover preparations, perhaps Martha pauses to welcome Jesus and arranges for a goat to be roasted over an open flame. Maybe she studs tender spice cakes with figs. She might stew lentils in rich aromatics, recognizing her newly resurrected brother's need for grounding back in his body, family, and community.

I wonder many things about this moment in Jesus' story. What is it like to be at the table with the resurrected? How would some of the original listeners respond to this part of the story when they heard it? What questions does it beg of us now? To paraphrase Rilke's often-quoted passage, I also wonder how I can learn to love and

live these questions, without demanding certainty from them.

In *Heart and Mind: The Four-Gospel Journey for Radical Transformation*, psychologist and scholar Alexander John Shaia presents the gospels as “an extensive spiritual and psychological map.” He chronicles a fourfold, seasonal journey of growth inspired by the way of Jesus. Shaia theorizes that each gospel seeks to show us how to move through four different core questions which are universal to the process of transformation. John’s version of the gospel story addresses our need to understand and embody the question, *How do we receive joy?* Another tender interrogative to consider.

Now that my children are older, we don’t eat meals at the family table as often as we used to, finding ourselves sabotaged by differing schedules and the allure of algorithmic entertainment curation. Even so, a celebratory meal usually calls for time at the table. It’s a comfort, and I also consider it a small act of resistance to a culture that insists we live at breakneck speeds to survive. We are not robots or machines, the table reminds us. We tend to our bodies in part by slowing down, freeing ourselves from a tyrannical pace and cravings for illusory distractions from that pace. We pay attention to each other, we savor the food, we sink into our seats. I think this prepares the way for resurrection to sit with us.

In her memoir-cookbook *Praisesong for the Kitchen Ghosts*, writer and poet Crystal Wilkinson chronicles five generations of family recipes, sharing the untold heritage of Black Appalachia. Describing her grandmother’s Christmas jam cake, Wilkinson writes, “the thick tangle of raisins and pecans whisper *home*. . . . I am always reaching back.”

We are living in astonishing times. If my grandfather, Elijah Henry, were still alive, he would exclaim, “goodness, gracious, great balls of fire,” in response to the news, his voice ringing throughout the house. As I look for ways to fortify, both individually and communally, I find myself leaning more and more into the impulse to “reach back.” I am cooking and sharing the food of place and of lineage so that we can be reminded that liberation runs in our blood.

The phrase “joy is an act of resistance” has been cropping up in my circles a lot lately—so much that I’ve almost grown numb to it. While I wholeheartedly agree, when I pair this phrase with the question, *How do we receive joy?* something different is brought to my attention, almost as though a beloved is gently waking me from sleep. To receive is in some ways to surrender. We’ve coded surrender as

weakness, but allowing ourselves to receive joy can be one of our greatest sources of strength. God, as embodied in the person of Jesus, was able to receive extravagance in the face of tumult amongst his people, greed hemming around him, and growing threats of violence and death. God could've decided there was too much work to be done to stop and eat a meal in community. But God chose differently. This is a God I want to remember when I am afraid for myself or for my neighbor.