

Eating Contests (and more)

Have you ever wondered how bizarre we Americans can be about food? Consider this example: The “Nathan’s Famous International Hot Dog Eating Contest,” which is a major league eating tournament and takes place on the 4th of July. Joey Chestnut won again this year, as he has for the 13th time, by eating a world-record 75 hot dogs to capture the famed mustard-yellow belt.

Women enter such events as well and this year Miki Sudo (her real name) consumed 37 franks and buns to win handily, although she fell short of the 41 she consumed in 2018. Her closest competitor, Juci Supo (not her real name), could manage only 25 before she turned bright green and released the contents.

America is the land of the free and the home of absurd contests. For example, each year in New Orleans there is a “Oyster Eating World Championship.” In 2011 Pat Bertoletti (his real name) ate 468 oysters in 8 minutes and set a New Orleans record.

Joey Chestnut doesn’t just eat hot dogs. Last year, he also won “The Baked Bear World Ice-cream Sandwich eating Championship” by eating 25.5 sandwiches in 6 minutes, earning the pig’s share of the \$4,000 total purse.

It isn’t that eating and feasts are not important—both are referred to often in the Bible. Consider the stories of the Great Banquet (in Mt 22:1-14 and Lk 14:15-24), with several lessons for us. First of all, it is God who invites people to share the joy of living and feasting with his Son. The Son as God’s heir is his likeness and the reason for the invitation is to honor him. But people can refuse to come. They may do so politely—“Sorry, you should see my business pressures right now.” Others may get nasty—“Who do you think you are, insisting that we come to a banquet?” People may even find that they dislike the King and his message so much that they kill the messengers. But most probably they make excuses based on personal interests—it doesn’t matter because they all refuse.

In 1985, my wife and I were asked to represent Wycliffe at a ceremony in Oklahoma City that honored several inductees into the Oklahoma Hall of Fame. The occasion took place in a large convention center and was attended by over 2000 people. There were eight people inducted into the Hall of Fame, including our friend Vida Chenoweth, former concert marimbaist and co-translator of the Usarufa New Testament in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea.

We were told what to wear, what time to arrive at the function, where to sit, and how to meet our friend after the ceremonies. Banquets are like that—there is no room or food for imposters. Suppose that we wanted to wear T-shirts, a baseball cap, jeans and running shoes—would we have been left in? No, because there is a protocol for banquets.

There were also invitations and protocol for the NT stories. There were multiple invitations and finally the banquet hall was filled. Was it done the way the King first intended? Certainly not, but the story ends well in the sense that the hall is filled and there are no distinctions—all are clothed alike except for one, and he is thrown out.

To me, there is another parallel: what about the small crippled and lame cultures and societies? Who are they and where are they? Think also of refugees, aliens, prisoners, the elderly, generally those who are not invited to banquets and feasts. There is no competition noted for helping them!

Finally, note that our words can be compared to food: we can eat, swallow, or choke on them. They can be “sweet to the soul and healing to the bones.” They can be perverse, seductive or bitter. And out of the same person’s mouth can come praise or cursing (James 3:10).

“Wise words satisfy like a good meal; the right words bring satisfaction.” (Proverbs 18:20a, NLT)

Post July 4th hot dogs
Karl and Joice Franklin