

Reality Television has gone a bit mad hasn't it? Cooking seems to be the flavour of this year and the past couple of years.

There is a fascination with reality TV and cooking. But these shows are concerned about more than a solid, healthy meal. It's about creating a culinary master-piece. The food has to firstly look great on a plate, then it has to taste fantastic as judges argue about texture, fluffiness and all the things I seem to bypass as I fork food into my mouth.

We've had Master Chef – with a version for little kids as well. Now we have My Kitchen Rules and the latest one is Conviction Kitchen.

Conviction kitchen is about people who have a shady past and have been in prison competing for a job in front of a national audience. They'll either find a new start with a new position in a restaurant, or be faced with more failure and a return to life as they know it.

The show spruiks that Conviction Kitchen is an opportunity for people with a shady past to redeem themselves...

If there is one thing that Lent and then Holy Week reminds us all it's that we all have a shady past – and a shady present!

No-one here tonight has everything together and living a perfect life.

That kind of perfection is something only Jesus can claim with any kind of integrity.

Jesus who tonight doesn't give us an opportunity to redeem ourselves – but prepares to take our shady past and present upon himself as we approach Good Friday and Easter Day.

These three services of Easter reveal the amazing lengths of God's love for you and for me. Not how we can make it on our own and redeem ourselves, but seeing, understanding and tonight tasting God's redeeming work for you through His Son Jesus.

Tonight is about a meal. Tonight we eat in God's kitchen – not as judges, or for our viewing pleasure - but as His guests.

Guests who like the contestants on Conviction Kitchen, carry our own burdens with us from our shady past and our present.

Tonight we eat God's meal consisting of the very best food we could ever hope to eat. It is good food, in fact the best of foods

that Jesus offered his disciples on the night before he was crucified. It is this healthiest of all foods that God prepares for you to enjoy again tonight on this Maundy Thursday.

The food that Jesus offers you is himself. This food is Jesus wrapped in, with, and under a wafer of bread and hidden in, with, and under a mouthful of red wine.

He said **“Take and eat, this is my body given for you.....Drink of it all of you, this is my blood shed for you...”**

How? Mysteriously! We don't know how.

Some things are just toonmind blowing and too big for human explanations. Take comfort that you worship a God too big to squeeze into any human box of simple explanations.

We believe it is his body and blood, the crucified and risen and glorified Jesus, because he says so in His Word. As God's children we take him at his word, a word guaranteed with the seal of Jesus' own blood on the cross. That's all that matters.

So as we eat what Jesus “the ultimate Master Chef” has prepared for us, what does this food do **for** us? If we are taking in Jesus in His meal, then what does this food do **to** us? What do we become – because Jesus hasn't prepared a meal that won't affect us in amazing ways...

It's a cleansing meal that conveys God's forgiveness.

Jesus said it's“**...for the forgiveness of sins”**.

The food Jesus gives is better than any detox diet.

His food cleanses every sin, and even your conscience that accuses and condemns you. You won't find food like that at the in Woollies or Coles. You certainly won't find it in the best grand final dish on Reality TV!

It's yours **free** when Holy Communion is celebrated.

As you come to Jesus table you receive the forgiving Jesus Christ.

It's part of the teaching of our church - which lays out the facts for us tonight saying, **“where there is forgiveness of sins – there is also life and salvation”**. (SC)

This food is good for this life but it also guarantees God's baptized children *redemption now and eternal life with God forever*.

It's a foretaste of God's ultimate heavenly banquet that He has prepared for His people.

Now that is an amazing dish of food!

It actually does something to you – reflected in the post communion blessing you receive each time you come to the altar: **“the body of our Lord Jesus Christ and his Holy and precious blood strengthen and preserve you in body and soul to life eternal – go in peace”**.

No wonder we go in peace, our bodies and souls are eternally forgiven, saved and preserved by Jesus.

It makes us members of the new covenant, the new relationship between God and His people.

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”

That's what Jesus said as he instituted tonight's meal.

Through Jesus – and only through Jesus do we enjoy a new relationship with God, not based on laws and commandments and animal sacrifices - but grace and forgiveness.

Based on the sacrifice of Jesus *the Passover Lamb* at Easter for us. We come to God through Jesus and his blood now,

We have no fear of judgment or punishment for shady dealings in our past. *Instead we are part of the people of promise through Jesus.*

What Holy Communion assures us is that **we belong** and are people of the new covenant, the new relationship with God.

We stand with Jesus before our Heavenly Father as new and redeemed people. And God sees you as spotless and holy because you are joined and united to the Holy One - Jesus.

That's the power of this new covenant relationship.

It makes us witnesses to Jesus.

After quoting the words of Jesus instituting Holy Communion, St Paul goes on to say,

“Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes”.

By taking part in this meal tonight rather than sitting at home watching TV with fish and chips you are giving witness to Jesus, to Easter, to his dying and rising for you and the world. **You're proclaiming your allegiance to Christ tonight!**

You are saying you can't redeem yourself Conviction Kitchen style – but you need what only Jesus can give you for life in His Kingdom today and forever. And you are saying you are thankful. Thankful for everything Jesus has done for you by dying for you - every time you commune. That's why we always pray and give thanks to God for His amazing meal after we commune. [PAUSE]

Jesus said to **“do this in remembrance of me”**.

We talk a lot about Jesus being truly present in Holy Communion – but we also remember the work of Jesus in this meal.

And we remember by doing – by participating in the meal, by physically eating and drinking what Jesus has prepared for us.

Meals often do that - remember something or someone.

A birthday meal remembers **but it also celebrates** the person who is very much present with us. Communion celebrates all Jesus has done for us at Easter. So we are witnesses tonight to Jesus who died and who is with us here as we gather in God's name.

As we partake of the meal Jesus has prepared for us tonight - we are what we eat - forgiven and full of Jesus' life.

Redeemed not on our terms, but by God.

People who now enjoy a new relationship with God.

And people who are witnesses to Jesus.

We're complex people though aren't we!? We don't always keep things nice and simple. Sometimes we prefer the taste of junk food over Jesus meal. We enjoy food that isn't good for us.

So we sometimes stay away from communion for long periods and dine on other things. We act like the judges on reality TV thinking we know what's good and what's not.

We imagine we can survive without Holy Communion.

We imagine this food looks so ordinary that it can't be that good for us. We become bored because God, like mum or dad, puts out the same food again and again and we get tired of it.

We want to see a culinary masterpiece to marvel at and get excited about!

It's true that we might not always *feel* satisfied after receiving Communion. In fact we may not feel any different at all, but we need to believe that where Jesus is - there is always life and health and a clean slate.

What matters is what he says about this food not how we feel about eating and drinking it.

And he says it is good, eternally good and life giving.

He says it’s his own life given and shed for you.

That must be good for you and that’s all that matters.

So the table is set. The ingredients are ready.

All we need now is for Christ himself to say the word, his own words of institution that commit him to this food – excellent food and the most amazing meal you could imagine eating.

Naturally, because Jesus is the ultimate master Chef! Amen.