

# Healing humanity and other recipes



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Pope Francis said, “ He -Jesus- does not stand a safe distance and does not act by delegating, but places himself in direct contact with out contagion”. In this quote, Pope Francis notes how Jesus selflessly gets directly involved in the earthly turmoil. Many literary figures exemplify this, for instance, Babette from Babette’s Feast by Karen Blixen. In this story, Babette demonstrates a selfless act of healing by sacrificing all of her money, ten thousand franc’s, to cook a dinner for the community. However, she provides more than just a meal; she returns harmony to the community. The town of Berlevaag has felt “ discord and dissension had been raising their heads” since the death of their Dean. Members of this religious sect remember and focus on only the wrongdoings of others. Babette unites the community through her dinner in many ways.

First, the idea of a French dinner brings the townspeople together in a panic. Second, the dinner itself provided an opportunity for conversation and forgiveness for a town that has become “ somewhat querulous and quarrelsome”. As the night goes on, those in attendance realize that this is a night that they will never forget. Therefore, Babette’s dinner healed the community by uniting them in fear, opening a dialogue, and creating a lasting memory.

The sisters and Babette have very different ideas of what a French dinner is. In fact, “ the idea of French luxury and extravagance next had alarmed and dismayed the Deans daughters”. The sisters assume that the dinner will be a modest occasion, as their lifestyle suggest. Yet, Babette intends it to be a “ love affair”. This frightens the sisters because they are incredibly resistant to change. For instance, when each was younger they had the opportunity to

leave their life and start a drastically different one. The entire town shares this resistive trait; they almost let Babette live with them because she is foreign. Yet, once they did there were immediate benefits. “ The old Brothers and Sisters, who had first looked askanced at the foreign woman in their midst, felt a happy change in their little sisters’ life, rejoiced at it and benefited by it.” The sisters are shocked and confused when they realize that Babette will bring in goods from outside of their town, asking “ But what goods Babette?”. As this happens barrels of wine, a turtle, and other foreign items come into the kitchen. Martine shares her fears of these ingredients with her Brothers and Sisters. The group takes a vow to not talk about the food they will be served. Although there is much discord in the community, they manage to come together to find a common solution. Therefore, Babette’s ornate French dinner unties the frightened townspeople.

The dinner elicits conversation out of the townspeople, allowing them to be open and talk freely about their qualms. “ Usually in Berlevaag people did not speak much while they were eating. But somehow this evening tongues had been loosened.” Conversation around the table is light, happy, and focused on anything besides the meal they are eating. The guests turn their relationships with each other around; Conflicts are worked out, debts forgiven, and love renewed. For example, two women, who used to fight, talk about their childhood in the town, Brothers admitted to cheating one another, then pardon each other, and old lovers forgive themselves and each other for the past. Finally, the General and Philippa get the reunion that they have always wished for. Although it took time, the tension between the parishioners towards each other is softened. The feast allowed for the

parishioners to come together and, consequently, become a better community.

Finally, the feast will have long-term effects on the community. The parishioners treasure their memories, especially those of spiritual miracles. During the dinner, one Sister reminisces about a time that the Dean had promised to preach a sermon in the village on the other side of the fjord. However, the journey across the river was too risky. The next day the river froze over, and the Dean walked across it to give his sermon. All at the dinner appreciate this memory because they remember how they felt witnessing this event. The dinner evokes similar feelings of togetherness and amazement. “ They had seen the universe as it really is”. The dinner brought clarity to the parishioners that they will not forget, specifically the idea that focusing matter of the now is much more important than focusing on matters of the past. Babette’s dinner will help the townspeople always remember this lesson and put it to use.

To conclude, by uniting them in fear, opening a dialogue, and creating a lasting memory, Babette’s dinner healed the townspeople. The French dinner manipulates the parishioner’s resistance to change by bringing them together in fear. Having a common enemy, allows for the townspeople to talk to each other as equals. Miracles are held as treasured memories; therefore, the dinner’s healing effect will always be remembered. The healing of each individual’s difficulties allowed for the entire community to heal – even Babette. Babette’s life is marked by tragedy, and this dinner allows her to get some closure on her past. Intentionally or unintentionally, Babette’s healing helps others in her community to find peace with their inner turmoil

and, consequently, their outer turmoil. Babette's Feast teaches that sometimes facing one's fears can be a healing process, especially with the help of good food.