

Welcome Speech: Chef Kevin Mitchell imagining the words of Chef Nat Fuller



Hello, I'm Chef Kevin Mitchell of the Culinary Institute of Charleston. I am spokesman for the team of chefs who prepared tonight's banquet for you, and I'm also appointed to stand as representative of our culinary forefather Nat Fuller. As you know, all of the dishes you will taste tonight come from his menus and are served in the style true to his banquets 150 years ago.



1. Aged duck, served at the Nat Fuller Feast. Photo by Jonathan Boncek, courtesy of the Nat Fuller committee.

I've wondered what Nat Fuller would have said to the company assembled at the Bachelor's Retreat at the end of the Civil War. I think he may have said something like this:

"All things are ready, come to the feast!
Come, for the table now is spread;
Ye famishing, ye weary, come
And thou shalt be richly fed."

Welcome, friends and guests. I am sure many of you are looking around this table and seeing new and unexpected faces. But I remember that the Lord says that many who sit down at the banquet table in heaven will be the Father's unexpected guests. We can do no better than to follow his example when it comes to hospitality.

These have not been hospitable times. Strife and sorrow have held the upper hand. For a long season, people have expressed themselves through violence.

War has never been my work.

My study has always been how to make people enjoy the times they share together. It is ancient custom that once people at the same table share bread and salt, they shall do no harm to one another. It is a matter of some pride to me that my work has always been to supply the bread and salt that makes peace break out.

I do more than that. I prepare dishes whose deliciousness makes pleasure go around the table. Tonight there is a particular pleasure, a particular taste that's featured—the taste of liberty. I suspect that some here at this table have not tasted in their lives a food that was not produced by people in bondage. Everything here, however, was produced by free persons who received just compensation for their toils. I don't know about you—for me, it just makes the food taste somehow better.



2. Daven Coad, putting finishing touches on a course at the Nat Fuller Feast. Photo by Jonathan Boncek, courtesy of the Nat Fuller committee.

Friends, I'm not here to give a lecture or to teach you how to talk with one another. We have had lessons. Now is the time to talk with your neighbor, make a new friend, or hear someone tell his or her story. Of course at the end of the evening, when we bring dessert there will be toasts. Anyone then is free to stand and speak a sentence from the heart.

My mentor, my teacher Eliza Seymour Lee could not be present. But her great-great-granddaughter [Robin Lee Griffith](#) is here. Would you come and receive my hand in gratitude?

Tonight you shall taste the most celebrated dishes from my repertoire. I could not have offered them to you without the support of my colleagues, Chef Sean Brock, Chef B. J. Dennis, Chef Michael Carmel, and Chef Forrest Parker, and the faculty and students of the Culinary Institute of Charleston.



3. Chefs Sean Brock and Kevin Mitchell preparing the food at the feast. Photo

by Jonathan Boncek, courtesy of the Nat Fuller committee.

I have pressing work in the kitchen. I will return when it is time to issue the toasts. Until that time let me speak a benediction.

Dear Father, bless the people in this room, both guests and servers. Give the diners here health and pleasure from the food we serve. Give them appreciation of the peace of this time and place.

Keep the pains and evils of the world distant from us here.

Give us kindness, hope, and wisdom.

May peace, grace, and love be your portion until we enjoy your hospitality in heaven.

Amen.

Bon appetit.

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