

“A Meal With Jesus”

John 13:1-17

Throughout the gospels, shared meals were one of the most distinctive features of Jesus’ public activity. He often taught at meals, banquets were topics of his parables, and his meal practice was often criticized by his opponents. Scribes and Pharisees aggressively ask, “Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?”

The issue is that Jesus eats with “undesirables,” and the marginalized and outcast, in a society in which the people with whom one shared a meal was hugely significant. Jesus’ meal practice was about inclusion in a society with sharp social boundaries. Religious leaders were upset that his meals were in the name of the kingdom of God. Politicians were upset because his meals were offering a very different vision of society.

When Jesus sat down to share a meal with tax collectors, sinners, and the poor, he was declaring, “This is the Kingdom of God. The divided world you see around you is not.”

But meals were not just about inclusion. They were also, and crucially, about food. The meals of Jesus were not ritual meals in which food only had a symbolic meaning. They were real meals, not a morsel of bread and a sip of wine as in our observance of his last supper. For Jesus – real food – bread mattered. In his teaching, bread was the basis of existence, as in the Lord’s Prayer. “Give us

this day our daily bread.”

For Jesus’ peasant audience, bread – enough food for the day – was a survival issue. Jesus emphasizes food and enough bread as God’s justice.

As Jesus blesses the bread and wine, he uses four verbs: “Took, blessed, broke, and gave.” These four key words refer us back to an earlier scene concerning food in which Jesus feeds 5,000 people with a few loaves and fish.

“Taking the five loaves and the two fish, Jesus looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all.” (Mark 6:41)

When people are hungry, Jesus feeds them, whether it be a small group in a Jerusalem upper room or 5,000 folks who have listened to him all day and they are hungry. The disciples prefer their own small group when they tell Jesus, “Send the 5,000 away so they may go into the surrounding country and village and buy something for themselves to eat.”

The alternate solution from Jesus seems quite impossible. “You give them something to eat.” The disciples respond, “Are we to go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread, and give it to them to eat?”

In answer to their question, Jesus forces them to participate step by step when he has them collect what food is available, make the people sit down in groups, distribute the food, and pick up what is leftover afterward. When people are hungry, Jesus does not send them away. When people are hungry, Jesus works

through his followers to feed them.

Jesus takes what is already there and when it passes through Jesus' hands, there is more than enough for everyone present. When his followers distribute the food, there is more than enough for everyone. The point of the story is not multiplication but distribution. The point of the story is that we are God's stewards, we are God distributors who are to establish God's justice on earth.

So tonight, Jesus breaks a loaf of bread and blesses a cup of wine that are to be shared among all who are here. Our first communicants and their parents have baked enough bread for all to be filled with the presence of Christ's body. As the leader of our altar guild, Marilyn has made sure there is enough wine to fill all of us with the presence of Christ's blood. When people are hungry, Jesus working through his followers, feeds them.

And Jesus not only feeds us, but ceremoniously rises from the table, lays down his robe, girds himself with a towel, fills a basin with water, and washes each of his disciples' feet.

Only Simon Peter dares to challenge this humiliating action by his master: "Lord are you washing my feet?" Jesus knows Peter will not understand until later, but solemnly warns the leading disciple that unless Peter accepts Jesus' washing, he will be disinherited!

The washing is not just an example of humble service, but is the example that he gives which the disciples are to imitate. He will lay down his life for his

friends. He will sacrifice his life for his friends. He will die tomorrow so that his friends will live.

In John 15, just before leaving for the Garden of Gethsemene, Jesus further clarifies why he's doing what he's doing. "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has a greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you."

The footwashing also shows the way in which the Christian community is invited to support one another: by shedding our protective layers and developing a mutually vulnerable intimacy with one another. To expose one's feet for washing, especially for adults, is to reveal one's bunions, callouses, plantar's warts, and sore spots. To wash these is to embrace sister or brother as they are, imperfect yet on the Way with Christ. Through this intimacy, a discipleship community can be prepared for any threat, whether from the world or from within.

So tonight we have prepared 10 of our youth, Emily, Rebecca, Devon, Ryan, Caitlin, Madyson, Spencer, Ryan, Tony, and Kayla; to have their feet washed and for the first time, to receive the bread and wine of Holy Communion with Christ.

When I asked them to name their favorite food, the winners were hamburgers, spaghetti, shrimp, steak, pizza, fried rice, two said hot dogs and two said bacon. I suggested that as we grow older, the bread and wine of the Eucharist will become our favorite food because it nourishes and strengthens us spiritually.

The presence of Jesus in us becomes more and more important as we prepare for our own resurrection day and the gift of eternal life.

When I asked our ten disciples what they think of when they think of Holy Communion, they said: “Food, Baptism, Last Supper, Forgiveness, Drink, Celebration, Passover, and Pastor.”

When they think of Jesus, they think of: “Heaven, Church, Body of Christ, Sacrifice, Love, Healing, Lamb, Cross, and Eternal Life.”

At their baptisms, their parents, godparents, families, and this whole congregation promised to teach them and to provide them with opportunities to learn what it means to be a baptized child of God. Tonight we join with our first communicants in believing Jesus comes to us in the bread and wine to forgive us and to strengthen us as his body in the world serving others.

Tonight Jesus invites us to his Last Supper before his crucifixion tomorrow. Come Lord Jesus be our guest and let these gifts to us be blessed. Amen.

May the peace of God . . .

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