

I honestly don't remember Maundy Thursday hardly at all growing up, except one. That particular Lenten season, we were rotating where we worshiped for the midweek services, as well as Holy Week. But for this one, we gathered at that other Lutheran church on the other side of town: that other church with those high and mighty Lutherans. Of course, they probably would have said the same thing about my home congregation, but that's a minor detail we'll leave alone. Nevertheless, that other Lutheran church had the audacity to do something different during what is considered to be the Holiest Week of all. Instead of worshiping in their sanctuary with the beautifully crafted pews and the picturesque stained-glass windows and all the soul-soothing ambiance of the space; those other Lutherans had the audacity to make us worship in their fellowship hall basement.

And not only that, but we had to sit around these huge folding tables with the yellow-fading tops, that seemed to be the standard décor for every Lutheran church across America that had a fellowship hall basement predating the 1970s. And even though I was relatively new in the grand scheme of knowing how Lutherans tend to operate; one thing I did know is that those huge yellow-fading tables were only for our pride and joy Lutheran potlucks: for our fried chicken entrees and German casserole dishes and all colors of the rainbow Jell-O desserts. And yet, these other Lutherans insisted on being different.

And yes, even for me in my then relatively novice worship experience, it still felt a little awkward worshiping in the basement, not being on the pews. It even felt...well, weird, to be honest. But it's quite possible that they were onto something that night. Maybe even those high and mighty Lutherans knew just how to hit the Maundy Thursday spot, a night that sometimes gets easily overlooked in the grand scheme of our Holy Week proceedings: a Maundy Thursday with a meal that might have very well felt rather awkward and weird and a whole bunch of feelings that could not be put into words for the disciples of long ago; who may not have had the faintest idea what their Lord and Messiah was about to do for them, and for the whole world, for that matter.

But back to the church basement a couple thousand years later, I don't remember anything about the service itself, except one spot, the Communion spot. There, evidently, was a reason behind the madness of it all with those the huge yellow-fading tables. The pastor did the usual blessing and prayers over the bread and wine, and I remember trying to figure out how exactly we were all going to get up and make our way to the pastor without getting too much into each other's way, even trying to be respectful of the other high and mighty Lutherans. But another change-up was about to be thrown: another, evidently, well thought-out idea to connect back to the meal that continues to captivate us thousands of years later. Instead of us doing the standard operating procedure of making our way up to the clergy, who for thousands of years would be the only one dared allowed to share the body of Christ with anyone; instead, they insisted that we pass the bread and wine around the table to each other.

As if Maundy Thursday was not just about us receiving the love and grace and compassion from Jesus Christ; it was also about us sharing all the above with the next person, and the one after that, and the one after that, even if they were from the other side of town, or the other side of whatever we deemed important to us. Yes, it was awkward, even weird, but somehow, somehow, incredibly holy; and I wonder if that vast array of feelings and emotions filled that most precious dining space with Christ long ago. But I will be the first to admit, as holy as it all was becoming that rather unique Maundy Thursday, I was getting a little nervous as the body and blood of Christ was getting closer to me. I was a little more than worried that I would fumble the elements, which may have forever sealed my fate about a future route to a clergy role for myself, or that I wouldn't remember what I was supposed to say to the one next to me. And maybe there was just some level of unexplainable anxiety: was I worthy to be a part of this surreal, holy moment? Was I worthy to experience this memorable...something with God?

And then, sure enough, it was one of those other Lutherans who had to give me the bread and wine. I still remember the unexplainable calmness felt at that moment. I still remember the ease. I remember as if God was saying even through him: "it's going to be alright." And I wonder if that is part of what Maundy Thursday that can get so easily lost in our Holy Week proceedings; if that is part of what Maundy Thursday is all about: God saying to you, "it is going to be alright." That doesn't mean there still won't be disagreements even among the Lutherans. That doesn't mean there still won't be pain and anguish after tonight, because there will be; but still, God insists "it's going to be alright," because in this meal is the unbreakable promise that this God is going to be with you through thick and thin: in every room you go, around every table you work and dine at and try to figure out all the matters of life. It is going to be alright, because this meal means that you will always have a seat at this table of unfathomable grace. Yes, it may feel weird and awkward at times exactly how we carry out not just Communion at different faith communities and the all-around way we do church, and how we each do our unique way of sharing the Gospel with the next one and the one after that, and yet somehow, someway, it can all still feel so incredibly holy through it all. So for the meal with the endless supply of Christ's love for us and the empowerment to share that joy with others, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!