



March 24, Maundy Thursday 2016: St. Chad's

Luke 22:7-20

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.' They asked him, 'Where do you want us to make preparations for it?' 'Listen,' he said to them, 'when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?" "' He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there.' So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.' Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'

I once taught a class on the Eucharist. We began the class by exploring this question:

“What is a meal that you participated in that will always live in your memory?”

Some people, of course, talked about holiday meals—Christmas or Easter or some other special celebratory day when all the best food was served to large gatherings of family and friends around a big, well-appointed table.

Some talked about meals with just one other person—a meal around a campfire after a long hike with a friend, a sandwich at lunch with a grandchild who had invited that grandparent to an

important day at school, a meal on a plane with a husband or a wife at the beginning of a wonderful vacation when the whole vacation was still before them.

But the most memorable meal I heard about that day was a meal described by a man, a meal he had cooked and shared with his wife and his three children the day or so before she was to have risky but necessary surgery, surgery with an uncertain outcome. He, his wife and his three children, two of whom were adults, with one being a sixteen year old teenager, sat together at the family dinner table and ate a simple meal. In the middle of the meal, the woman, wife and mother, said this: No matter what happens on Friday, no matter how it goes, know that I love you, that my whole life has been about loving you. And no matter what happens, no matter how it goes, remember to love each other, to take care of each other. With that, the man said, the woman, wife and mother, lifted her glass and bidding the others to join in, she made a toast:

“To our love,” she said with joy but through tears.

This story told to my class that night, it seems to me, is the story of the meal we are both remembering and participating in this night: the story of the meal eaten in the upstairs room by Jesus and his disciples that was the first Eucharist. For both are meals eaten in the face of great tribulation and eaten in order to enact love between and among people, love that I believe cannot stay put but must always find its way out to the rest of the world.

And so two questions: Why do we need to eat together in the face of tribulation? What is the love and the joy we celebrate in eating together?

Eating together reminds us of the things we need in the face of tribulation. Eating together demonstrates that we will be fed even when things are tough. For us as Christians who believe that God is the source of all, eating together grounds us in the idea that God, the source of all, will sustain us in the tribulation we are undergoing or will undergo.

But, of course, meals do more than this—they connect us to each other. The sharing of food creates community in ways that conversation or proximity alone will not. Food and drink, offered, passed, received and consumed around a table or in a circle make us all one, show us we all count and give us a sense of belonging to and with one another that is tonic to the human soul.

And so tonight as tribulation in the life of Jesus looms before him, as tribulation in the life of the world surrounds us in acts of terrorism and violence, as tribulation may be tugging at your shoulder in your personal life, your family life or your work life, let us come apart, let us share a meal with the Holy One of God who sits at table with us. Let us learn once again that God feeds and sustains us, that God chooses to host us, all of us, at his table, and through this meal, God is saying: “No matter what happens, I love you. No matter what happens, love each other.”