

## Maundy Thursday

Meals are important to Jesus. You can really get a pretty good sense for what Jesus is about just by going through the places in Luke's gospel that talk about eating.

Fasting was and still is a common spiritual practice. But it wasn't one Jesus did much of. He fasted for the 40 days prior to his temptation in the wilderness, but that's it. In fact the Pharisees and scribes actually asked him about that. They said to him, "John's disciples, like the disciples of the Pharisees, frequently fast and pray, but your disciples eat and drink." <sup>34</sup> Jesus said to them, "You cannot make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?"

Then Jesus went on to say, For John the Baptist has come eating no bread and drinking no wine, and you say, 'He has a demon'; <sup>34</sup> the Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'

In his parable of the father and his sons, the father lays out a huge feast to celebrate the son's return home.

So the first thing we can say about Jesus is that sharing meals together is a way of expressing joy and fellowship. A meal is a way to create, heal, and celebrate relationships.

Then of course there's the frequent grumbling of the Pharisees and scribes that Jesus ate with tax collectors and sinners. We heard the story of Zacchaeus whose very life was transformed by a meal with Jesus.

It appears that sharing a meal is an important part of Jesus' ministry to heal and transform the lives of the broken. When Jesus shared a meal with someone the rest of the community rejected, it told that person and the rest of the community "this person is worthy of God's love and care."

Multiple times, Jesus was a dinner guest at the home of pharisees...even though they were frequently critical of him.

Sharing meals with the Pharisees tells us Jesus is determined to carry out his mission of healing and transformation for all people – even those who oppose him. Jesus is radically inclusive.

When Jesus fed thousands of people with 5 loaves of bread and two fish, he demonstrated God's abundance.

When he sent 72 of his disciples out to heal and proclaim the kingdom of God to people in the towns and villages, he told them to eat and drink whatever the people offered. Not only

providing a meal but graciously accepting one was a sign of hospitality and was again important in the creation of relationships.

That brings us to the meal in tonight's reading.

The Passover meal was already rich with history and tradition in the Jewish faith. It was a meal to be shared with friends and family, celebrating relationships.

The Passover meal was a remembrance of God's work to rescue Israel from slavery in Egypt. It was a meal of freedom and new life.

Jesus has been eagerly awaiting sharing this special meal with his closest friends. He does so even knowing that one of them will betray him...one will deny him...and all of them will abandon him. That shouldn't surprise us...after all, he's been eating and drinking with tax collectors, sinners, and Pharisees. Might as well add betrayers, deniers, deserters.

But of course this meal becomes much more. It becomes a meal that will spread freedom and healing beyond just the Jewish people. It will become a meal to heal and transform the world.

There will be two more meals after Jesus' death and resurrection. In one, he shares a meal with his fellow travelers in a home Emmaus. As the bread is broken, Jesus is revealed to the others for who he is.

This Eucharistic meal instituted by Jesus is how we see, feel and taste Jesus.

It's all there in this one meal...

A celebration...fellowship and creation of a new community, the body of Christ...healing and transformation...radical inclusiveness...freedom and new life...the abundance of God's love. All the meals Jesus shared before point to this one.

And this one points to the next one...the Messianic banquet...when we all eat with Jesus in the Kingdom of God.

Tonight, we share this eucharistic meal with Jesus. We will see, feel and taste Jesus. Like he transformed so many by sharing a meal with them, so he works healing and transformation for us when we take that little wafer and little cup of wine.

There has been a lot of talk about healing lately. We have all been battered and bruised by this past year. Over 565,000 people have lost their lives from Covid...565,000 grieving families and countless friends. Businesses have struggled and some have failed. Jobs have been lost and poverty has increased.

Fierce politicization of the virus has fractured friendships and even torn families apart.

Work to bring racial injustice to an end continues to meet with denial and opposition. A brutal presidential election and its chaotic aftermath have left their mark on our collective psyche.

We are in need of healing, individually and collectively.

But that healing will not come magically. There will be painful times of confronting sin and evil...sometimes in ourselves. It will require humility and listening to people we may not want to.

Healing will need to begin with each of us experiencing our own healing...healing of old wounds...healing from that which leads us to hurt other people.

We think of Holy Communion as something that brings us forgiveness. And it does. But forgiveness is not about papering over our sins or letting them slide. Forgiveness is deep healing and transformation...it's freedom from the things in us that keep us trapped into a way of being and acting that aren't God's intention for us.

Tonight, we hear the same words Jesus disciples heard...those words make even our home bread and wine something they weren't before. Those words make them Christ's body and blood, given for us, to heal us and transform us.