**March 29, 2018; Maundy Thursday**

**John 18-19**

*Table Questions*

How does Jesus give his body to us?

What is a covenant? What old covenants did people have with God?

What is this “new covenant”? What significance does it have in your life?

What exactly should we “do” in remembrance of Christ?

How is the partaking of this meal a “proclamation” of Christ’s death?

Knowing the rest of the story as we do, what significance does this evening hold for Jesus? For the disciples? For us?

*Sermon*

Serving Communion is one of those holy moments for pastors and church leaders. Not just because are we invited to host Christ’s Table (which is an unmatched honor and privilege by itself), but also because Communion allows an honest moment with each member whom we serve. We call one another by name and remind each other that you, we, all are invited here. We look into each other’s eyes and see the faith and the doubt, the questions and the trust, the pain and the need and the hope. It is a rare, intimate moment that often overpowers me. Here is someone whom God loves, whom Christ redeems, and who is being transformed by these crumbs and sips that I offer them.

As we take these crumbs into our mouths, *somehow* (??) we experience the Triune God. Not exactly in body, for we are not cannibalizing Christ’s actual flesh and blood, though we do believe that Jesus is spiritually embodied in the meal. Simple elements of flour and yeast and grapes are mystically changed into something more. And yet they are still the same ordinary elements that they were before. They are still flour and yeast and grapes, naturally rooted in the earth and intrinsically tying us back to earth. We, who are from dust, eat that which is grown on the earth, and in doing so, experience Christ Immanuel – God who came to earth. And even more than that, we believe our salvation is tied to this simple feast. The gateway to eternal life is shaped by these earthly elements of bread and wine.

We do this because Christ commanded us to “do in remembrance of him.” So we remember this last meal with his disciples. We remember his body that was broken by the soldiers. We remember his blood that was shed in the streets and on the cross. We remember his sacrifice. And we remember the way he served his disciples, and the unlovable people whom he loved, and the outsiders and insiders and anyone who had need (which was everyone)… So we “do” this to reinforce our collective memory.

But this meal, and these famous words in 1 Corinthians move us beyond only a commemorative meal. This is not just a historic event. Our participation does not stop with remembrance. We are called to bring this into our present day living and individual actions. For every time we eat this bread and drink this cup, “we proclaim the good news until Christ comes again.” Each individual – me, you, and others – are sharing the good news by coming forward and eating and drinking. By sharing this meal, we are each showing and telling others to whom we belong. This meal is different. This meal is ordinary and holy. This meal is earthy and heavenly. This meal is life changing and life-saving.

The call to proclamation expands the meal from a personal experience with God to a broader meal for the community – community who we may know and love, as well as the neighbor and stranger whom we do not know. Sara Miles became a Christian because of a Communion service. In her memoir, Take This Bread, she wrote that after walking past a neighborhood Episcopalian Church on many walks, she decided to go inside. She doesn’t know exactly why she went in the church, because she didn’t want to be a Christian. But she did. A service was in progress and she sat down in the back. After the scripture reading and sermon, everyone started moving towards the center of the church where there was a large table, so she went with them. “We gathered around that table. And there was more singing and standing, and someone was putting a piece of fresh, crumbly bread into my hands, saying ‘the body of Christ’... and then something outrageous and terrifying happened. Jesus happened to me.”

She continued, “I still can’t explain my first communion. It made no sense. I was in tears and physically unbalanced… the disconnect between what I thought was happening – I was eating a piece of bread; what I heard someone else say was happening – the piece of bread was the “body” of “Christ,” a patently untrue or at best metaphorical statement; and what I *knew* was happening – God, named “Christ” or “Jesus” was real, and in my mouth – utterly short-circuited my ability to do anything but cry…

“I couldn’t reconcile the experience with anything I knew or had been told. But neither could I go away: for some inexplicable reason, I wanted that bread again.” [[1]](#footnote-1)

Sara Miles became a regular attender, crier, and eater at this weekly Communion service. As she participated and ate and drank each week, she came to know God and became a Christian. Because the members of that church trusted in the proclamation aspect of the meal.

So when we **do** this, we reinforce and embody the message that Christ proclaimed: all are welcome. All are loved. All are forgiven and redeemed. Those whom we know and love, and those whom we do not. The parts of ourselves that are known and loved, and the parts of ourselves that are not.

We leave this meal with grateful hearts and satiated souls, knowing that our need for more will grow and grow. We leave the meal proclaiming Christ’s love and sacrifice, and also needing that love and sacrifice immediately again.

Tonight we remember that Christ left this meal to begin his suffering, the penultimate experience of what it means to be human and earthly. We remember how this was done out of love for us. So we add our prayers of thanksgiving and lament, with others around the world. Grateful for a “wondrous love” such as this.

1. Miles, Sara. Take This Bread. Ballantine Books: New York, 2008. pp. 58-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)