

Rev. Lisa Schrott
Maundy Thursday April 14, 2022
Luke 22:14-23
Invited to the Table

Hear the words from the Gospel of Luke that tell of the night so long ago, when Jesus shared a last supper with his disciples.

Luke 22:14-23

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 Jesus 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."

But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!" Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

The meal in some ways was ordinary – or at least began that way. At the appointed time, the host sat down at the table and his friends joined him. The host told them how much he had anticipated this meal – how he had eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with them – his friends and disciples. But then he said something that startled them a bit, although they suspected that this Passover meal might be somehow different. He said to them that he desired to share this meal with them before he suffered. And that they would not share a meal again until they were reunited in the Kingdom of God. Yes, somehow this night was different.

As was the tradition, they shared the Passover story, remembering God's covenant with Moses and the Hebrew people. And then another extraordinary thing happened. He - Jesus – used food to tell the story of a new covenant. A new covenant. Jesus took bread and after he had given thanks, he broke it and he told his friends – this is my body which is given for you. And he took the cup of wine and he told his friends this cup that is poured out is a new covenant sealed in my blood for the forgiveness of sins. And then Jesus told them that they should eat this bread and drink this cup in remembrance of him. Again and again they should come to the table in remembrance of him. For there is a new chapter to the story, the story of who we are as a people and how we were freed from the long darkness of sin; these foods tell the story of how God never abandoned us and how much God loved us that God sent Jesus into the world, not to condemn it, but to save it; of how God desired us to be people of the new covenant.

You see the meal they shared together that night – that Last Supper - was typical of their time with Jesus. It was about community. It was about again and again coming to the table. Jesus and the disciples spent a lot of time sharing meals. Some were simple meals of fish they caught at the lake and some were fancy banquets in the homes of important people. And the meals weren't just with the group of friends, Jesus was always inviting people he met along the way. And I don't just mean the officials and leaders, the movers and shakers and A-list celebrities. No Jesus invited those who couldn't repay with a like invitation; the ones people thought were nobodies and worse, the ones people thought were less than the nobodies, the homeless, tax collectors and prostitutes; the sinners one and all. Jesus invited them all to the table.

And friends, we are invited to this Table. For this Table is a place of transformation – strangers become family; we become connected to something bigger than ourselves. Barriers are broken down – not only barriers between people, but also those barriers and obstacles we have in our lives that keep us distant from God, keep us from fully embracing God's call on our lives. Yes, we are invited to partake of the Lord's Supper

In her book *Take this Bread, A Spiritual Memoir of a 21st Century Christian*, Sara Miles recounts her first experience taking the Lord's Supper. She says:

“One early, cloudy morning when I was forty-six, I walked into a church, ate a piece of bread, took a sip of wine. A routine Sunday activity for tens of millions of Americans — except that up until that moment I'd led a thoroughly secular life, at best indifferent to religion, more often appalled by its fundamentalist crusades. This was my first communion. It changed everything.

Eating Jesus, as I did that day to my great astonishment, led me against all my expectations to a faith I'd scorned and work I'd never imagined. The mysterious sacrament turned out to be not a symbolic wafer at all, but actual food — indeed, the bread of life. In that shocking moment of communion, filled with a deep desire to reach for and become part of a body, I realized what I'd been doing with my life all along was what I was meant to do: feed people.”¹

Miles goes on to share how this act of meeting God at the table led her to begin an ambitious food pantry at the Episcopal church which fed her. And then to continue feeding others by becoming a deacon and assisting in the serving of communion to the congregation. And she had another epiphany – “What happened once I started distributing communion was the truly disturbing, dreadful realization about Christianity: You can't be a Christian by yourself.”² Furthermore, she realized that she couldn't choose who was going to be seated at the table, who was good enough, who was holy enough. And nor was it a private meal – she understood that the bread on the table had to be shared with everyone for her to really taste it. Taste and see that it is good, we say as we share the bread and the cup.

It is the blessings of the ordinary – of bread and wine, of bread and juice- that God calls us to share. To share on this night – to share because of this night. In this act of sharing we are

¹ Sara Miles. *Take this Bread, A Spiritual Memoir of a 21st Century Christian*. Ballantine Books; 2007 pxi.

² *ibid*, p96.

changed. We are transformed by the gifts and the presence of our host Jesus Christ and those who join us around the table. We are transformed by the welcoming love of God. We are transformed so that we might share the welcoming love of God with others. And friends our world desperately needs us to share the welcoming love of God.

I read a story – actually a poem - last fall about what that kind of welcoming love looks like. The story didn't take place in church, but in an airport, not what we think of as the most welcoming of places these days. Poet Naomi Shihab Nye shares the story. Nye's father was a Palestinian refugee and her mother an American of German and Swiss descent, and Nye spent her adolescence in both Jerusalem and San Antonio, Texas. Hear these words from Nye...

“Wandering around the Albuquerque Airport Terminal, after learning my flight had been delayed four hours, I heard an announcement: “If anyone in the vicinity of Gate A-4 understands any Arabic, please come to the gate immediately.” Well — one pauses these days. Gate A-4 was my own gate. I went there.

An older woman in full traditional Palestinian embroidered dress, just like my grandma wore, was crumpled to the floor, wailing. “Help,” said the flight agent. “Talk to her. What is her problem? We told her the flight was going to be late and she did this.”

I stooped to put my arm around the woman and spoke haltingly.

“Shu-dow-a, Shu-bid-uck Habibti? Stani schway, Min fadlick, Shu-bit-se-wee?” The minute she heard any words she knew, however poorly used, she stopped crying. She thought the flight had been cancelled entirely. She needed to be in El Paso for major medical treatment the next day. I said, “No, we're fine, you'll get there, just later, who is picking you up? Let's call him.”

We called her son, I spoke with him in English. I told him I would stay with his mother till we got on the plane and ride next to her. She talked to him.

Then we called her other sons just for the fun of it. Then we called my dad and he and she spoke for a while in Arabic and found out of course they had ten shared friends.

Then I thought just for the heck of it why not call some Palestinian poets I know and let them chat with her? This all took up two hours.

She was laughing a lot by then. Telling of her life, patting my knee, answering questions. She had pulled a sack of homemade mamool cookies — little powdered sugar crumbly mounds stuffed with dates and nuts — from her bag — and was offering them to all the women at the gate.

To my amazement, not a single woman declined one. It was like a sacrament. The traveler from Argentina, the mom from California, the lovely woman from Laredo — we were all covered with the same powdered sugar. And smiling. There is no better cookie.

And then the airline broke out free apple juice from huge coolers and two little girls from our flight ran around serving it and they were covered with powdered sugar, too. And I noticed my

new best friend — by now we were holding hands — had a potted plant poking out of her bag, some medicinal thing, with green furry leaves. Such an old country tradition. Always carry a plant. Always stay rooted to somewhere.”

Nye ends the poem saying, “And I looked around that gate of late and weary ones and I thought, This is the world I want to live in. The shared world. Not a single person in that gate — once the crying of confusion stopped— seemed apprehensive about any other person. They took the cookies. I wanted to hug all those other women, too. This can still happen anywhere. Not everything is lost.”³

Friends, this can still happen anywhere. The cup was poured out for the disciples who longed to be faithful and the cup was poured out for the one who would betray Jesus. Poured out for the ones who will pretend they have never heard of Jesus when the going gets tough; for the ones who just aren't sure how this all makes sense. Poured out for the ones who the rest of society says aren't worthy to dine at this table. Poured out for us— for all of us- all of us in our humanity and brokenness and ordinariness. Poured out for us because we are all invited to the table. Come – come – dine with Jesus. All are welcome. Join me in prayer.

³ <https://poets.org/poem/gate-4>