

March 17, 2024

Rev. Lisa Schrott

1 Kings 17:8 -16 & Luke 22:14-30

Dining with Friends

We continue our Lenten journey through the feeding texts from the Gospel of Luke. This morning's passage is one we often hear on Maundy Thursday – the Last Supper text that is part of the journey to the cross. We also hear it referenced each communion Sunday as we prepare to eat the bread of life and drink from the cup of salvation around the communion table. This morning I ask us to put aside what we know of this text and listen afresh for a story about a man, emotionally drained and preparing for tough days ahead, sharing a final meal with his friends. Hear now these words from Luke 22.

When the hour came, Jesus 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 Jesus 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.

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But Jesus said to them, "The kings of the gentiles lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather, the greatest among you must become like the youngest and the leader like one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

"You are those who have stood by me in my trials, and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. **This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.**

It has been a hard week - well really a hard season for Jesus. He had been on the road for quite awhile, traveling from his home region in Galilee to Jerusalem, to the place where he knew his earthly journey would end. In Luke Chapter 9, the Gospel writer Luke tells us "When the days drew near for him to be taken, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem." In the Greek

of the New Testament, this phrase “set his face” was a reference to a concept from the Hebrew scriptures of “an absolutely firm resolve, an unshakable decision or attitude, a definitive intention. . . . Jesus crosses Samaria, Judea, the Jordan with absolutely firm resolve—almost obstinacy—to get to the Holy City, whatever may be the dangers, the suffering, and the diverse circumstances of the pilgrimage.¹

Truth be told, it was a journey with some definite high points, with gatherings at the homes of friends like Mary and Martha, and the times he blessed the children who had gathered around him. The healings were pretty special too. The man with dropsy, the woman bent over for many years, the ten who had leprosy and the beggar who was blind. Not just their health was restored. They were also restored to community, able to become again part of the fabric of life, to resume daily rhythms of relationships. Yes, there were many good days when the presence of the Holy Spirit was palpable and the gap between the kingdom of heaven and earthy life seemed so small that it almost disappeared. When Jesus knew the synapses in the disciples’ brains were in sync with their heartbeats and their outstretched hands of care.

And as Jesus reflected on this pilgrimage, he remembered the ordinary days and the hard days too. Day after day of teaching the disciples and the crowds about those things God cares most about, things which do not always align with what the powers of the world think are most important. How many stories had he told? Parables about great banquets and good Samaritans, about lost coins and lost sheep and lost sons; about rich rulers and persistent widows, and small mustard seeds and yeast that yield bounties beyond comprehension.

He had entered into the beloved city of Jerusalem ahead of the Passover feast. His last stop before pausing on the east side of Jerusalem at the Mount of Olives had been in Jericho. There he met the tax collector Zacchaeus and stayed at his home. The crowds and religious leaders grumbled about this act of hospitality by Zacchaeus – just as they had when he dined at the home of the tax collector Levi. Could they not see that Levi had dropped everything and followed Jesus, repaying the money he taken? Zacchaeus had vowed to do the same. Why do they – all of the crowds who laud him – not get that he came to seek out and to save the lost?

Jesus thought again on the entry into Jerusalem – people were describing it as a triumphal entry – with cloaks and palms spread on the ground that his donkey colt trod. As he approached the path down from the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen, saying, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Emotions were running high. The religious leaders were there again – some of them telling him to make the disciples stop their cheering. Jesus smiled ruefully to

¹ Ceslas Spicq. Translated and edited by James D. Ernest. e^{isth}/risen (sterizo) *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Accessed through Accordance Bible Software. Version 13.3.4; OakTree Software; Octobe 2022.

himself as he remembered that moment when he told the Pharisees that even if the people were silent, the stones would shout out his entry.

And then – and then – that moment when he saw the city of Jerusalem below him. It was a gut punch. Wave after wave of emotion overcame him. So much history, so many stories. An earthy kingdom united under David and a grand Temple built by Solomon. And yet the one Lord God was forgotten, overlooked and replaced by gods whose promises looked shiny on the outside and then were never fulfilled. The people built temples and shrines to these other gods forgetting all that Lord God had done – the fulfilled promises to Abraham of descendants more numerous than the stars; of Isaac and Jacob; they forgot that it was the Lord God who delivered them from slavery – raising up Moses as a deliverer, who led them into the promised land. They forgot about Joshua and the warriors whose hard fought battles brought them this holy and sacred land of milk and honey.

Wave after wave of emotion overtook him as he remembered the prophets who spoke truth to power. He thought about Elijah – the one who some thought had been raised from the dead and was baptizing people in the Jordan – not recognizing that John, the baptizer, was a new prophet. Yes – Elijah had a special place in the peoples' hearts. He remembered that day when he first told his disciples that he would suffer, die and on the third day be raised... that day when he went up on the mountain with Peter, James, and John and his appearance changed to them. His face was glowing and his clothes became dazzling white while he talked with Moses and Elijah about his departure – this departure that was approaching fast – to take place in Jerusalem.

Another rueful smile crossed his face as he remembered all that Elijah had done to bring the people closer to the kingdom of God. Like Jesus', Elijah's days were long. He was a prophet in the days of King Ahab and his wife Jezebel. Jezebel is somewhat notorious as one of the "bad girls of the bible." Amongst her many issues, the biggest is that she did not worship the God of Israel, but rather a host of other gods. Elijah and Ahab (and Jezebel, too) had some pretty intense encounters – stressful days for Elijah. Jesus thought back to that time when Elijah needed to be fed – fed not only food, but also companionship for the difficult work he was doing, calling out the behavior of Ahab and Jezebel, behavior that led to a drought and famine in the land.

The Lord sent Elijah to a town called Zarephath told him that a widow will feed him. Now traditionally the situation is the other way round, with the prophets and the people called to care for widows, rather than widows providing for prophets. But the Lord God knew better.

We don't hear much about the widow's background, except that she has a son. And she is poor – down to her last rations of meal and oil. She is at the end her rope, ready to cook one last meal before she and her son perish. The widow said, "As the LORD your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering

a couple of sticks, so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it, and die."

And Elijah said to the widow "Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said; but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me...For thus says the LORD the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not be finished until the day that the LORD sends rain on the earth." And Elijah was fed – both in body and in soul. As was the widow. And her son, whom Elijah later saved from illness and death.

As Jesus looked down on the city in Jerusalem, he remembered this story and all of the stories of people fed by God through neighbors, friends and strangers. There were the widows Ruth and Naomi; Joseph's eleven brothers and father Jacob; the 5000 who came to hear him teach, and so many more. And Jesus wept. He wept over the city, saying, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God."

Jesus wept for all of the brokenness in the world. The frayed relationships from the millions of paper cuts we inflict on each other every day. The deep, gaping estrangements caused by chasms of not really listening to each other; caused by caring more about being right than being in relationship. Jesus wept for the world that felt security was an even trade for rule by armies and emperors, dictators and strong men. Jesus wept for the world where a mindset of scarcity prevailed, where sharing the gains of your hands with those who are unable to work was seen as foolish at best, and enabling at worst. Jesus wept for the world where human-made borders meant our common humanity was not even recognized, let alone celebrated. Jesus wept.

And Jesus was angry. As he prepared to eat one last meal with his disciples, he remembered his visit to the Temple, the majestic Temple rebuilt after the exile, when the Israelites returned home. Did they not learn anything in exile? The Temple is a house of prayer and it has been turned into a den of robbers.

So full of emotion, he was. The hour had come. It was time. He needed to be with his disciples, his friends. He needed to share this last Passover supper with those who had walked on this journey with him. There were still some things he needed to share with them. And he needed to see their faces, their smiles and their shock. Jesus needed to see the hand on the table of the one who would betray him. Yes – this meal, this bread and cup was for them – the disciples -and all who came after them; generations and generations, stretching across time and place. But it was also for him. The fulfillment of all of the covenants, of all of the promises, was to be realized soon. He had not walked this road alone. While he may die

on a singular cross, the love of his Father was made manifest by his birth as a human, and this was a message to be shared. To be shared freely and abundantly. At the table with friends. Across the years, the decades, the centuries, the millennia, at the table with strangers who become friends when the bread is broken and the cup is poured.

When the hour came, Jesus 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.”

Jesus and the disciples gathered at the table because they were hungry and thirsty. They were empty. We gather at the table because we too are empty. We are hungry for the bread of life, the bread that will sustain us when the days are long, when the uncertainty of the future seems too much to bear, when the pain and grief overwhelm us, and we cry out “My God, my God why have you forsaken me.” We eat this bread because we, like Elijah, are called to uncomfortable places, places where our voice and our priorities and our loyalties are not always welcomed.

We are thirsty for the cup of salvation. We drink from this cup because we need salvation. We need salvation from our own worst selves – our need to be right, our selfishness, our fears, the expectations and perceptions of others which cloud our ability to be compassionate to ourselves and others. We drink from this cup because we are called to battle the forces of evil in our world, to cry out at the injustices that permeate our landscape, and to yes, lament the lives lost to gun violence, addiction, crime, suicide, poverty, and war and then to pick up our cross and follow Jesus.

As Presbyterian pastor and theologian Frederick Buechner says, “To eat this particular meal together is to meet at the level of our most basic humanness, which involves our need not just for food but for each other. I need you to help fill my emptiness just as you need me to help fill yours. As for the emptiness that's still left over, well, we're in it together, or it in us. Maybe it's most of what makes us human and makes us brothers and sisters.”² And Jesus said, “You are those who have stood by me in my trials, and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom.” May it be so. Let us pray.

² Frederick Buechner. Originally published in *Wishful Thinking*. HarperOne;1993. Available online as *The Lord's Supper* from the Frederick Buechner quote of the day: <https://www.frederickbuechner.com/quote-of-the-day/2016/7/1/lords-supper>