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Exodus 12: 1-4, 14-17 & Luke 22: 14-23

*The Path to Repair and Restoration: Again and Again, We Come To the Table*

Now the Festival of Unleavened Bread, which is called the Passover, had arrived as you just heard Ewen share. Jesus had sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.” We hear now about this last meal Jesus ate with his disciples from the Gospel of Luke 22:14 – 23.

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 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. 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 God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.**

Join me in prayer....Loving God, if the disciples had known that the last supper would be their last meal with you before the crucifixion, I bet they would have listened differently. I bet they would have taken notes and hung on your every word. Lord, help us to listen like that. Clear away anything in me that might distract, anything in me that might hinder my hearing and receiving of your word. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we pray. Amen.

Again and again we come to the table. To this table. Again and again we come to hear the story. The story of that meal – that Last Supper. 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 eagerly 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.

I remember hearing about that meal and how those who had grown to know and love Jesus were expecting the traditional Passover feast. This is the night.... This is the night we sing.

This is the night, this is the night, when once you led our forbearers, Israel's children, from slavery in Egypt and made them pass dry-shod through the Red Sea." But the opening question of the meal that night "How is this night different from all other nights?" had a different feel this time. The food we use to tell the story – the foods representing our days in slavery in Egypt: the karpas and the maror remind of us the tears we shed and the bitterness of Egyptian slavery. The roasted lamb shank bone that represents the offering of sacrificial lambs that we once took to the temple. And the unleavened bread reminding us of the haste in which we left Egypt – so quickly we could not wait for the bread dough to rise. These foods tell the story of who we are as a people and how we were freed from the long darkness of slavery and oppression; these foods tell the story of how God never abandoned us and how much God loved us; of how God desired to repair broken relationships and restore us as the people of the covenant ... the covenant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. ... these foods tell the story of that covenant.

And then something extraordinary happened they told me. He - Jesus –used food to tell the story of a new covenant. Yes – you heard right – a new covenant. He 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.

And then they told me that as they we were trying to grasp what this new covenant meant, Jesus said something that shook them to the bone. He said that one of the group sitting around that table would betray him. Betray him – imagine that. And all of his friends starting questioning each other as to who would do this – who could or would betray Jesus. You see they had become a community – a family really – as they were traveling with Jesus through Galilee and then to Jerusalem. They were with Jesus night and day as he taught them what it meant to love God and love your neighbor; they were with him when he healed the sick, the ones who couldn't see or couldn't hear and the ones who were unclean. There were so many – so many who were now healed and restored and had rejoined the community. They were with Jesus as he rode into Jerusalem with the shouts of Hosanna echoing in their ears and they were with him when he challenged the authorities who took the letter of the law more seriously than the spirit of the law. They were there through all of that – and yes sometimes there was a little tension as they jockeyed for position or when they didn't understand the significance of Jesus' words. But one of them betray Jesus. No way.

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. They 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. Again and again Jesus invited them all to come to the table. They tell me it was a pretty radical thing to do and that sometimes got Jesus in hot water.

But they tell me that Jesus invited people again and again to come to the table, because that is what we do. The stories of bread and wine; of wheat and vine tell the story of our faith. From the manna – the bread of heaven – that fed the Israelites as they wandered in the desert, free from slavery, yet not home in the Promised Land; to the widow in Zarephath who trusts the prophet Elijah when he says her jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the Lord sends rain on the land; to miracle of the wedding feast at Cana when Jesus changes water into wine; to the feeding of the 5,000 with a few loaves and fish. These are the stories of who we are - our stories of sacred moments when God's love and providence have been poured out on us through the blessings of the ordinary.

They tell me that it is these blessings of the ordinary – of bread and the cup - that God calls us to share. To share on this night – to share because of this night. They tell me that the most amazing part of this amazing story is that this new covenant sealed in the bread that was broken and the cup that was poured out was not just for Jesus' friends sitting around the table, but for everyone. Imagine that... for everyone.

The cup was poured out for them and for me 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 just like the disciples, we question and accuse each other as to who among us is betraying the Lord with our theological, political or cultural viewpoints.

Poured out because again and again Jesus invites us to this Table.