

Mark 14:22-26
March 28, 2024
Maundy Thursday

An Invitation to the Table

Welcome and Blessing for the Meal

Welcome to our Maundy Thursday meal and service of worship. I'd like to begin this evening with a prayer that was likely said at the meal Jesus had with his disciples in the Upper Room. It is a traditional Hebrew blessing for the bread, often used as a blanket blessing for the entire meal.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמוֹצֵיא לֶחֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ

(Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam Hamotzi lechem min haaretz.)

Now, I'll invite you to join with me in an English translation of this blessing. The words may be found in your bulletin, in bold print:

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

Scripture

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. I assure you that I won't drink wine again until that day when I drink it in a new way in God's kingdom." After singing songs of praise, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Mk. 14:22-26 (C.E.B.)

*Remarks*¹

We began with a meal together. It was not unlike any other meal we've shared together. It was not unlike any of the other meals we've heard recounted this evening, either. Whether we eat from a lunchbox or in a fancy café, at a picnic table or in a formal dining room with family, we've all experienced the same thing.

We begin with a blessing, and then we are blessed with food and conversation.

¹ My remarks will be made within the context of a larger story being told, as written by Leslie James. We will hear the voices of several people who tell their experiences of having a meal with Jesus. There will be the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus being recognized in Emmaus; there is also breakfast on the beach and the meal he shared with Simon the leper. My remarks will lead into the celebration of communion within the context of these other stories.

At our home, we often begin our meals with a unison prayer, one I learned as a child and many of you know as well:

Come, Lord Jesus, be our guest
And let this food to us be blessed.

But in many ways, Jesus is not only our guest at this table. He is also our host.

And as the host, he probably began the meal that night as we did this evening. He was not necessarily blessing the food, but reminding those who were present that God is the one who is blessed. That all gifts come from the God who created all things. His blessing would have been familiar to those around the table:

בָּרַךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַמּוֹצֵיא לָהֶם מִן הָאָרֶץ:

(Baruch atah A-donay, Elo-heinu Melech Ha'Olam Hamotzi lechem min haaretz.)

Blessed are You, Lord our God, King of the Universe,
Who brings forth bread from the earth.

We also know Jesus changed the narrative.² He didn't limit his actions to giving thanks for the bread. He took the bread, he blessed the bread, he broke the bread, and he gave them the bread (Mk. 14:22). He gave it new meaning when he identified himself with the bread (Mk. 14:22).

Then he repeated it with the cup. He took the cup, he blessed the cup, and he shared the cup (Mk. 14:23). He said this is the cup of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins (Mk. 14:24).

Do all of this, he says, in remembrance of me (Lk. 22:19).

I believe he was inviting them – and us – to remember the many times he had shared a meal with them. There were vivid images of meals where he had told stories and challenged authorities, meals where he had welcomed the outcast. There were meals with Mary and Martha and Lazarus. There was the meal at the wedding feast in Cana. He ate with saints and sinners alike.

It is perhaps because of those memories that the disciples did not gather around the cross after his death. Nor did they gather around the cross after Easter. Instead of gathering around the cross, they gathered around a table.³

With those stories in mind, then, I invite you to join me here, at this table.

Allow time for people to move to the Table

² Geddert, p. 338

³ I am indebted to Diana Butler Bass for this insight.

*Prayer of Consecration*⁴

Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

It is right, and a good and joyful thing,
always and everywhere to give thanks to you,
Almighty God, creator of heaven and earth.
From the earth you bring forth bread and create the fruit of the vine.
You formed us in your image,
delivered us from captivity,
and made covenant to be our sovereign God.
You fed us manna in the wilderness,
and gave us grapes as evidence of the promised land.

Holy are you, and blessed is your Son Jesus Christ.
When we turned aside from your way and abused your gifts,
you gave us in him your crowning gift.
Emptying himself that our joy might be full,
he fed the hungry, healed the sick,
ate with the scorned and forgotten,
washed his disciples' feet,
and gave a holy meal as a pledge of his abiding presence.
By the baptism of his suffering, death, and resurrection
you gave birth to your Church,
delivered us from slavery to sin and death,
and made with us a new covenant by water and the Spirit.

On the night in which he gave himself up for us, he took bread,
gave thanks to you, broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you.
Do this in remembrance of me."

When the supper was over he took the cup,
gave thanks to you, gave it to his disciples, and said:

"Drink from this, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant,
poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.
Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

And so, in remembrance of these your mighty acts in Jesus Christ,
we offer ourselves in praise and thanksgiving
as a holy and living sacrifice, in union with Christ's offering for us.

⁴ Adapted from the United Methodist Book of Worship.

Pour out your Holy Spirit on us gathered here,
and on these gifts of bread and wine.
Make them be for us the body and blood of Christ,
that we may be for the world the body of Christ,
redeemed by his blood.

By your Spirit make us one with Christ,
one with each other, and one in ministry to all the world,
until Christ comes in final victory,
and we feast at his heavenly banquet.

Through your Son Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit in your holy Church,
all honor and glory is yours, almighty God,
now and for ever.

Amen.

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