



breadfortheworld
HAVE FAITH. END HUNGER.

April 1, 2010
Holy (Maundy) Thursday
Art Simon

RCL: Exodus 12:1-4(5-10), 11-14; Psalm 116:1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35
LM: Exodus 12:1-8, 11-14; Psalm 116:12-13, 15-16bc, 17-18; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-15

Maundy Thursday reveals how service to those who are poor and hungry springs from the very heart of God and the central redemptive events of both Old and New Testaments.

First, the text from Exodus features the original Passover, which marks God's rescue of the impoverished, oppressed, enslaved Israelites. God hears their cries, delivers them, and makes these "nobodies" a chosen people. So begins the great inversion: the mighty are brought down, the lowly and despised set free. The Israelites forever remember this in the way they treat others, especially poor people, widows, orphans, and foreigners (see Deut 24). The search for food brackets Israel's entire Egyptian period. The unleavened "bread of affliction" and the subsequent manna in the wilderness underscore that, despite hardship and famine, God means to provide everyone with enough to eat. Part of the recitation (*Haggadah*) of the Passover in Jewish households today includes these words:

This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate in the land of Egypt. Let all who are hungry enter and eat. Let all who are in want come and celebrate the Passover with us.

Second, the Passover Jesus celebrates with his disciples on the night he is betrayed recalls the feeding of the multitude. In both cases Jesus *took* bread, *blessed*, *broke*, and *gave* it. The feeding appears six times in the four Gospels, and the early Church used it as a eucharistic text (see John 6). Jesus has compassion and feeds the hungry people, both in body and spirit. His deed and his words proclaim the kingdom, reflecting the prophetic promise that in the messianic age God will feed his people (Isa 25:6-8, 49:9-10). Today feeding hungry people remains a sign of the kingdom, and failure to do so a sign of its absence. The sacrament of holy communion nourishes us to celebrate the kingdom.

Third, just as the prophets insisted that God's presence in prayer and worship must be connected to lives of compassion for hungry and oppressed people (Isa 58:3-10), the same holds true in the Lord's Supper. In today's epistle Paul is alarmed that Christians



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in Corinth are sticking to class distinctions when they celebrate this meal, some eating and drinking to excess, while poorer brothers and sisters (arriving later, probably because of work obligations) go hungry. The offenders sin against the body and blood of the Lord and invite judgment on themselves, Paul says, by failing to treat fellow believers as part of the body of Christ. What an affront it must have been to those who had found new life and equality in Christ! Yet the picture is a remarkable snapshot of our world today, with most of us who read this reflection consuming far more than enough, while others throughout the world—many of them brothers and sisters in Christ—go hungry. Surely the sacrament speaks to us about this.

Fourth, John's Gospel elaborates on the meaning of the Lord's Supper rather than repeating what is in the other Gospels, so it does not record the institution of the sacrament. John 13 describes Jesus' washing the disciples' feet and urging them and us to follow his example. The gesture suggests not only a connection between holy communion and humble service but the washing of baptism and a life given to service as well. That service calls for works of love and justice.

Fifth, in verses 31-35 Jesus gives his followers "a new commandment." What is new about it is not love, but that we are to love "as I have loved you," as the one who emptied himself totally for us, who went to the cross that we might live. This is how 1 John 3:16 puts it: "We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another." No tokenism here. Not a small check or a quick prayer for hungry people, but a call to *lay down our lives* for others, because God in Christ laid down his life for us.

While I was an inner-city pastor on New York's lower east side, our congregation adopted changes in the communion liturgy, stimulated by the reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The changes included extending the peace of Christ to one another (which many of the young people expressed as "Peace bewitch you"). Not a bad twist, I think. It is when we are "bewitched"—swept away, overcome—by the peace of Christ that we can break bread in the Eucharist and be moved to break bread with hungry people.

Children's Time

Washing feet is a natural. You might wash the feet of one or more children and talk about what it means. What might correspond to such a task today? Changing a baby's diapers? Cleaning toilets? Or you might bake a miniature loaf of bread and ask how many loaves you have. Then break it in pieces and ask if there is one or many. Apply the "one loaf, many pieces; one body, many members" idea of 1 Corinthians 10:17. Ask how they would feel if they were hungry and this was the only food available, but others ate



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their piece. Explain what was happening in Corinth and how that mirrors our world today. What can we do about it? Whether foot-washing or loaf-sharing, ask *why* God wants us to help others. What has God done for us?

Musical Suggestions

Sent Forth by God's Blessing—*Lutheran Book of Worship* 221

I Am the Bread of Life—*Banquet of Praise* 124

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing—*Lutheran Book of Worship* 210

Let Us Break Bread Together on Our Knees—*Banquet of Praise* 229

My Soul Proclaims with Wonder (Song of Mary)—*Banquet of Praise* 83

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