

Holy (Maundy) Thursday

James Dunn

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

Mark Hatfield, a United States senator from Oregon for many years, wrote in 1976: “There has been a tragic and unbiblical separation between witnessing to the good news of Christ and acting with his love to meet human need. How dare we present the Christ as the bread of life to a hungry man and only be concerned with Christ as the spiritual bread, and not obey Christ by providing the physical bread to meet that man’s physical needs of today?”¹ Yet today, Holy Thursday of all days, we should remember the inexorable link between food for the body and food for the soul. The Passover event in Exodus focused on food.

The reading from 1 Corinthians describes that on the night of his betrayal, Jesus took bread and initiated a meal with meaning that is the focal point for worship until this day. Eating and remembering, drinking and reflecting, communing at table and worshiping—these survival techniques have always gone together. Indeed, it is “a tragic and unbiblical separation” when we try to divide the Bread of Life from bread for life. Work and worship, food and faith, eating and learning, togetherness at the table and oneness in spirit have been part of a common experience since Jesus, as John’s Gospel describes, washed his disciples’ feet during supper.

Part of this binding, bonding, building experience is essential because it is so regular and oft-repeated. Christ chooses to make breaking bread and eating a common meal the venue for self-revelation. He was and is bread. He was and is living water. Christ has not changed. He showed himself to his disciples and he reveals himself to us as the bread and water that sustain his people. His presence is constant. He is in the ordinary events of life. The Wesley brothers wrote and spoke of the “ordinaries” of life. Jesus the Christ comes as the extraordinary God to ordinary people in daily life.

But everyone is invited to his banquet table, and that is the pattern for all of us who claim to be disciples. More than that, it is our explicit instruction: “If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them” (John 13:17). We are really getting down to the daily business of Christian living when we extend the Lord’s Supper to all God’s children. Bread is that which, if we have it, we take it for granted; but if we don’t have it, nothing else is important to us until we get it. The world’s cry is the cry for bread.

“In the whole process of continuing creation,” Francis DuBose says, “God has brought the human family into partnership. The command to ‘rule’ nature is a commission to ‘manage’ the environment in such a way as to develop the God-given resources for the good of all.”²

If we are irresponsible managers, evil CEOs, God's plan, God's work, is distorted, perverted, and ditched. Some enjoy (and suffer) excesses while others go hungry. Even a mother's milk for her babies will not come if she is undernourished. The problem of world hunger can only be solved as we return to the basic stewardship principle that God established when the world was made. Hungers, physical and spiritual, must be met together.

Children's Time [LH]

Ask the children how many of them like bread. If your service includes the Eucharist, gather the children around the table and talk about how bread is both ordinary and special. When we're eating dinner at home, someone may pass the bread and it becomes a part of our meal—usually not the central part, but something that goes along with everything else we eat. But for those in our world who have little to eat, bread can be key to life itself. And when we take part in communion in church, bread is at the central place because it has a different meaning, a meaning that took shape at a meal Jesus shared with his disciples before his death. It is that event we remember each time the Lord's Supper takes place in worship, but is especially in our minds and hearts on Holy Thursday. Invite the children to remember those special roles bread plays, for hungry people and for us as Jesus' followers, whenever we celebrate the Eucharist.

Musical Suggestions [LH] Let Us Be Bread—GC 816 Bread for the World—GC 827 I Am the Bread of Life—BP 124 As We Gather at Your Table—FWS 2268

1. James M. Dunn, Ben E. Loring, and Phil Strickland, *Endangered Species* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1976) 3.
2. Gary Gunderson, ed., *Roots of Hope* (Decatur, Ga.: Oakhurst Baptist Church, 1979) 33.