

Maundy Thursday

Readings

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14

I Corinthians 11: 23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

Psalm 116

Collect

Almighty Father, whose dear Son, on the night before he suffered, instituted the Sacrament of his Body and Blood: Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully in remembrance of Jesus Christ our Lord, who in these holy mysteries gives us a pledge of eternal life; and who now lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*

+ In the name of the One who loves us.

Here's what you need to know about Jesus: the man knew how to throw a party.

Not a catered event. Not a tasteful gathering with appropriate portions, a reasonable end time, and a bartender who served drinks of mostly ice. A *par-ty*. The kind where somebody's twenty-something brother dances on a table and somebody else's uncle falls asleep in a corner and "doesn't he look comfortable and anyway that leaves more wine for us."

And there was always more wine. That's not a metaphor. Well actually it also *is* a metaphor, but it's also what happened. At Cana he made somewhere between 120 and 180 gallons of it, which is enough to concern a licensed caterer, and he made it out of wash water, which is enough to concern the health department. "That's good wine," the steward said. As if the Son of God, given the option, would ever bring the cheap stuff.

Jesus ate with everyone. Not "everyone" in the sanitized sense. *Everyone*. Tax collectors: which in first-century Palestine meant the local guy who'd sold out to the empire and was skimming your wages. Prostitutes: and not in the performative way to be noticed being inclusive. He just seemed to enjoy their company. The Pharisees noticed. That was rather the point.

He ate with lepers. With sinners so notorious they had *reputations*. He ate in the homes of Pharisees too, because the door swung both ways. He ate with a Samaritan woman's whole village. The people his tradition said were theologically contaminated and they fed him . . . and he let them. He reclined at table with a man whose daughter he'd just raised from the dead, while her sister poured perfume on his feet that cost a year's salary, and he didn't flinch. He ate grilled fish on a beach with a dozen men who had abandoned him.

Not the worthy. Not the put-together. Not the theologically vetted.

On this night he ate with Peter, who will deny him three times before the rooster has chance to catch his breath after the first crow.

He ate with James and John, who just last week were jockeying for cabinet positions in some kingdom they didn't understand. Thomas, who'll need to put his fingers in the wounds before he believes any of it. Judas, who has already made the phone call.

These are the first communicants. These are the charter members. Jesus looked at this motley, disastrous, beautiful collection of human beings and said: *This is my body, for you.*

Not "for the ones who get it right."

Not "for the ones who won't let me down."

For *you*.

The you who will run.

The you who will lie about knowing me.

The you who will sell me for the price of an enslaved person.

This bread is my body and I am giving it to *all of you*, and when you do this again

When you break this bread in a thousand upper rooms

and ten thousand parishes

and in cathedrals and in living rooms

and in prison chapels and in hospital beds . . .

You won't be remembering a meal. You'll be *at* the meal.

Now here is where the Haggadah breaks in.

The rabbis teach: *B'chol dor vador chayav adam lirot et atzmo k'ilu hu yatza mi-Mitzrayim* — in every generation, a person is obligated to see themselves as

though *they personally* went out of Egypt. Not to remember it. Not to study it. To *be in it*.

The Exodus is not back there. The Exodus is now, here us. You are walking through the sea with water in your sandals and your heart in your throat.

The rabbis knew exactly what they were doing when they grounded this obligation in Exodus 13:8: "*You shall tell your child on that day, saying, 'It is because of what the LORD did **for me** when I came out of Egypt.'*"

Not for them. Not for our ancestors. **For me.**

Like the spiritual sings, Not my brothers, not my sisters, but it's me oh Lord. Not my mother, not my father, but it's me, oh Lord.

The grammar is the theology. The first person singular is not a poetic flourish, it's the whole engine. The one telling the story didn't cross the Red Sea. Doesn't matter. The telling collapses the distance. You are not narrating someone else's liberation. You are dripping wet and barefoot on the far shore, and the water is closing behind you, and you are free, and you were *never* free before this moment.

This is what Jesus walked into the upper room carrying. Not just the Seder's liturgical sequence: the four cups, the bitter herbs, the questions but its *epistemology*. Its insistence that sacred memory is not memory at all. It is presence. It is participation. It is the refusal to let twelve hundred years of distance turn the Exodus into a history lesson.

So when he says *do this in remembrance of me*, he is not switching categories. He is not inventing a new kind of ritual. He is doing exactly what Exodus 13:8 has always done: collapsing the distance between *then* and *now*, between *them* and *us*, between *for our ancestors* and *for me*. He is taking the Passover's most radical claim, that you are *in* the story, not watching it, and he is extending it. The bread is not a symbol of his body. The wine is not a metaphor for his blood. You are not remembering the last supper. You are *at* the last supper. The towel is wet. The bread is warm. The man who is about to die for you is pouring your wine and calling you *friend*.

It is because of what the LORD did for me.

Not for them. Not for the first disciples. Not for the early church or the desert fathers or the medieval mystics or your grandmother who never missed a Sunday.

For *me*. Dripping wet. Barefoot. Free.

Jesus grew up with this. He didn't just *know* the Haggadah; he prayed it, he sang it, he breathed it. So when he gathered his friends in that upper room: friends who would scatter like roaches when the lights came on, he wasn't just remembering the Passover. He was *in* it. And he was doing something new with it.

He picked up the bread. This was matzah, the bread of affliction, the bread of *hurry up!* The bread you bake when there isn't time to let the dough rise because Pharaoh might change his mind. Bread of not-yet-freedom. And he said: *This is my body, given for you.*

He picked up the cup. This was the cup of blessing, the third cup of the Seder, the cup that comes after the meal, the one that seals the covenant. Wine the color of everything he was about to pour out. And he said: *This is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you and for many.*

And then. (This is the part that makes me blubber.) And then he said: *Do this in remembrance of me.*

But "remembrance" doesn't mean what we think it means. The Greek is *anamnesis*, and it carries the same freight as the Hebrew *zikkaron* — the same word that drives the entire Passover Seder. It doesn't mean "think about this later." It means *make it present. Be in it. Let the past tense collapse.* When you do this, you are not commemorating a dead man's last meal. You are sitting at his table. The bread is in his hands. The wine is being poured — right now, for you.

K'ilu hu yatza mi-Mitzrayim. As if you yourself came out of Egypt.

As if you yourself were at the table.

The table is long. The wine is inexhaustible. The door has no lock.

And the host . . . the host is on his knees in front of you with a towel.