

Maundy Thursday

April 9, 2009

Texts: Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

It happens every once in a while. I'll head downstairs to get something out of the pantry. But by the time I've walked down the steps and opened the pantry door, my mind has moved on to other things, and I've forgotten what it was I came down to get. Sometimes if I pause to look around the pantry shelves, it will come back to me. But other times I look at all the cans and boxes stacked neatly on their shelves, but there's ... nothing. No recollection of what it was I needed at all. So I trudge back upstairs, hoping that when I resume whatever I was doing, it will all come back to me. And it usually does, but I'm also convinced that some days I'd forget my head it wasn't firmly attached.

Forgetting ... is a problem. It's something we all do. We forget where we put the car keys. We forget our homework, forget an appointment. But there is a more serious kind of forgetting—forgetting who we are and what this gift of life is all about. We forget that we are children of God, that God has claimed us in love, that our truest life has been revealed to us in Jesus' way of compassion and serving, of generosity and forgiveness. Maybe we forget because we're too busy with work or with parenting. Maybe we forget because we're worried about our job, afraid for what's going to happen with the economy, concerned about a loved one. And we begin to live out of being worried or afraid, because we've forgotten who we are.

God knows we forget. God knows all of our limits and failings. God knows it isn't easy remembering how to be God's people in the world when it seems like the whole world is living a different sort of life. That's why God gives us ways of remembering, ritual ways of sharing together as a community that connect us back to our true life, that remind us who we really are.

In our first reading for today/tonight, the people of Israel were on the verge of leaving Egypt, being set free from slavery, being led into a new life of freedom in the Promised Land. God knew that they would need a reminder of how they left Egypt, so they wouldn't forget that God had delivered them, that God was all about freedom, so they would remember that God cares for those who suffer and are oppressed, that God is on the side of the powerless. Around the world, Jewish families (will) gather tonight to celebrate the Passover, to tell the story again about how their ancestors had been slaves in Egypt, but God brought them out to live in freedom. God rescued them so that they could live a different kind of life. The Passover is a reminder, not

just of something that happened way back when, but of who God's people are now.

In our gospel reading, Jesus was on the verge of the culmination of his ministry. He had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover with his disciples. Their heads were full of dreams of freedom and hopes for what Jesus might do as God's chosen one, as the Messiah, how he would overthrow the Roman authorities and make Israel free. So Jesus gave them an example of the sort of work God had had given him to do. He knelt and washed their feet, and told them that loving each other, caring for each other in this sort of way—this was what he had come to accomplish, to set the whole human family free from fear and self serving, so that in loving each other we could experience this life as the profound gift God means for it to be.

And in addition to the example of washing his disciples' feet, that night Jesus also gave them a meal to share—bread and wine, which would remind them of his body offered up on the cross, his blood poured out as a final gift of love. And Jesus promised to be with them whenever they gathered in his name. The bread they broke and the wine they blessed would be the body and blood by which he would be present. And when we share this meal, Christ comes to us, and we remember who we are.

We gather side by side, and we remember that we are children of God, that we are part of a family that stretches around the world and through time; and that all our brothers and sisters are precious to our heavenly parent.

We gather, and each of us receives the same meal, a bit of bread and a sip of wine, and we remember that in this community that is called by Jesus' name, no one is more important and no one is less important. All are loved by God, and we are called to love and care for each other.

We receive this food and drink without paying for it, and we remember that God's love is freely given. God's forgiveness is freely given. Jesus doesn't invite us to his table because we are good. He invites us because he is good, and he wants to include us in his feast.

We receive this meal that is hardly a bite, hardly a sip, and remember that around the world are people who survive each day on not very much more. And we remember that Jesus has called us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to spend ourselves in love, and follow him in his way of serving, because Jesus has shown us the way to life.

It's so easy to forget. But Jesus gives us this simple meal, this great gift, so that we can remember. Thanks be to God. Amen