

WELCOME 12th November 2023 – 24 Pentecost '23 A

Luke 22:14-20 & 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Welcome! It's great to be together again today! Along with your worship order you have in your hands **Growing Praise** inserts & **Bible Study Qs** that are able to lead you deeper into God's word/work in your life, & help you share that w/ someone else. We also use them for our **Zoom Bible Study Catch-ups on Friday @ 1p.m.** Link will be on website...Tuesday...Wednesday...

As we move into this week The **Table** – every home has one. It's where we eat, connect, laugh, cry, pray...just be us. It may be **the** most important place of human connection, belonging & acceptance. Throughout the Bible, God shows up around meals at tables. In fact...the centre of the spiritual lives of God's people in both Old & New Testaments is a meal at a table: Passover & Communion.

In the meal at God's table God anchors our identity in him. In the meal at God's table God creates community for his purpose. In the meal at God's table God gives security & promises eternity. In the meal at God's table Jesus embraces each of us personally.

In the meal at God's table Jesus speaks three big words - *given for you*; & those words transform the lives & destiny of all humanity. In those words Jesus not only announces the saving love of God, but embodies it & gives it freely to us. Wherever our lives have taken us Jesus invites us to himself in his meal at his table to be filled with his presence that floods our lives with unending grace & life abundant to share.

"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant between God & his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you."

Let's pray...and then explore & experience that together...

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, you broke down the barriers when you crept in beside us. In Jesus, your hands touched all, and touched us. You opened our eyes to see how the hands of the rich were empty, and the hearts of the poor were full. You took the widow's mite and the child's loaves and used them to show us the Kingdom.

Here in the company of the neighbour whom we know and the stranger in our midst, and the self from whom we turn, we ask to love as Jesus loved. Make this the place and time, good Lord, when heaven and earth become one, and we in word and flesh know ourselves beloved by you. In the name of Jesus Christ...Amen.

Let's hear God's word...

FAITH CHAT:

1. What is most enjoyable about sharing a meal with others around a table?
2. What is most significant to you about sharing Christ's meal with others around Christ's table? Why?

24 PENTECOST '23 A – THREE BIG WORDS: GIVEN FOR YOU

Hi I'm John. I'm a recovering Pharisee. I don't often admit that...but it's true. And like any "recovery" program...you're almost never "well," you just admit your relapses & find a community w/ the strength to forgive & have another go at not being what you once were. In my defense...

I came by it naturally. I grew up in a large church where even as a child I knew there were "do-s/don't-s rights/wrongs" policies, procedures, by-laws & constitutions & you were meant to stay w/in the hard/fast boundaries they proscribed. *Sound familiar?*

I remember...7th grade & got to actually climb up into the pulpit to narrate part of the C-mas program. I knew...every Sunday when the pastor climbed up there he had this special "red" pulpit lamp that he switched on while he preached & off when he said Amen. You know where this is going? Well...come showtime I climbed up there at the appropriate moment spread out my narrator's script & by golly flipped on the red light...I ignored the audible gasps in the congregation & narrated like no one had ever narrated b/4 surrounded by this holy red glow. It was incredible. The SS superintendent & C-mas program director had a few words w/ me later...

I got worse though...I ended up in seminary where Pharisee is a course requirement for pastoral ministry. How do I know? Well...I was taught that a properly set communion table would **be** constructed in a certain specific order. Any Ladies on an altar guild would perhaps be familiar w/ a blueprint for what goes where...& Pr Schmitzenheimer might have words if you got it wrong? I was drilled in proper procedure & doctrine & the varied approved liturgies & what elements were/not appropriate. Sung was better than spoken & do it "right" among the "right" folks. load up the doctrinal cannon

My recovery started late in my studies when I began to take Jesus more seriously than those blueprints, & during my final sermon at Trinity Luth Seminary, Columbus, OH I chipped the massive granite baptismal font w/ a sawed off pool cue & then buried it up to my elbow in the font displacing a few litres of water...I wish to this day I had filmed that moment...it was a lot of water. That perhaps was one moment, but what really had gripped me long b/4 was an interaction from the life of Jesus that still makes my heart skip a beat. I'll get to Lk & 1 Cor in a bit. But it's where Matthew recounts his own call to follow Jesus...

As Jesus was walking along, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at his tax collector's booth. "Follow me & be my disciple," Jesus said to him. So Matthew got up & followed him.

– Mt 9:9 No one wanted anything to do w/ tax collectors. They stood outside the boundaries of all that was right & good & acceptable. There was no liturgy of welcome for tax collectors/collaborators w/ the hated Roman occupying gov't. You

only dealt w/ them when you had to pay taxes & you did that through gritted teeth & took a shower when you got home...But there it is...*Follow me & be my disciple & Matthew got up & followed...walking along & having a chat...*

Later, Matthew invited Jesus & his disciples to his home as dinner guests, along with many tax collectors & other disreputable sinners. – Mt 9:10 Why wouldn't you invite the few friends you have to get to know the guy who's perfectly comfortable doing what no other Rabbi would be caught dead doing...hanging out w/ you? *We get it.* Matthew's parents have disowned him, his siblings deny any relation, no one except tax collectors will set foot in his house & likely those guys have brought a +1 date which means women who have no reputation to lose 'cos it's already trashed. What a guest list! The Pharisees, of course, see that straight away: *But when the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with all these losers & boofheads?"* – Mt 9:11 How does this band of maggots & misfits rate a dinner w/ a Rabbi? Good Q!

But when Jesus heard this, He said, "Those who are well don't need a doctor, but the sick do. Now, go & learn what this means: I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I didn't come to call the righteous, but sinners." – Mt 9:12-13 See...that right there will flat ruin you. 1st – the way Jesus sets it up/word "righteous" is phrased sarcastically. NLT says, "those who THINK they're righteous." That's pretty spot on. If you're gonna pretend you're better off than these guys, go on pretending while they get well. That's the sense 2nd Matthew tells us Jesus quotes Hos 6:6 2x...In Hosea the prophet directly quotes God who says his peoples' faithfulness is like morning fog...here & gone. They drifted away from their relationship w/ the Father & made a pretense of faith. They kept up the rituals, sacrifices, & outward things of Judaism. Every now & then they'd show up at the Temple & say the right things & do the right things, but it didn't last... It was all for show...or to get themselves out of a jam when life got hard. So when God speaks to people who are lousy at even the semblance of repentance & crappy at living their faith God says "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." That is, "I desire to show mercy TO you not demand a sacrifice of atonement FROM you." God does not desire to extract from us sacrifices for our sins & promises that we'll do better next time & all the other lies we tell to make up for our weakness. God sweeps it all away w/: "mercy not sacrifice." That is God's heart toward all of us at all times.

So twice Matthew reminds us that Jesus stands as our defender b/i maggots & misfits like us & the Pharisee accusers all around w/in us as they tell us again & again what useless wretches we are **AND** assures us that when Jesus sits down at a table...when Jesus hosts a meal, it's a table of mercy...of healing...restoration... grace...forgiveness...he sits beside us as Dr not manners critic. The deepest heart

of Christ in every situation, w/ guilty or innocent—all together or all over the shop is simply: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”

Jesus sits at the table & all he sees around him are people he loves. Jesus doesn't sit w/ Matthew & his shonky friends & give them a doctrinal exposition or theological examination or dressing down. He shares a meal. He offers his friendship...his fellowship...his companionship...what no one else would offer at any price Jesus gives freely. Ultimately at a table w/ Jesus is where we hear the best news of all: “*This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant between God & his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.*”

Jesus tells those around him of their absolute need to eat & drink of the gift only he can give...himself...given for you. In John's gospel after Jesus feeds the 5000 he explains what this meal means: “*I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man & drink his blood, you cannot have eternal life within you. But anyone who eats my flesh & drinks my blood has eternal life, & I will raise that person at the last day.*” The words “flesh” & “blood” w/o question point to the cross just like gospels/Paul where Jesus' flesh will be broken & his blood will be spilled. Jesus links the violence done to his flesh & blood in his execution & death on the cross (the moment when he will give himself fully for the life of the world) & eating/drinking as it unites us to him every time we eat/drink. As we eat the bread/drink the cup, we participate in the promise that Jesus fulfilled on the cross. We receive his promise of eternal life now & at the last day. We receive what he says he has died to give: Life now in relationship through him w/ the Father & life eternally on that great day when death is swallowed up in his victory

Jesus promises rather than explains. Jesus promises that whoever eats the flesh & drinks the blood of the Son of Man has eternal life now & will be raised up on the last day. Jesus promises to provide food for the life of the world: his flesh & blood. Jesus promises to feed the world w/ the gift of himself. For the “flesh” & “blood” of Jesus, his incarnate life & his very real death on the cross, is life-giving food for us & for the world. In, with, & under the bread & wine of Holy Communion, which is nothing other than Christ's body & blood, Jesus forgives sin, grants eternal life & salvation, nourishes our trust in him & empowers us to be witnesses to the Gospel.

In, with, & under the bread & wine of Holy Communion, which is nothing other than Christ's body & blood, Jesus declares that he will always be mercy for you – forgiveness for you – life for you – wholeness for you – peace for you - power for you – healing for you - love for you – commissioning for you...because there is always someone who needs to know that Jesus is “for you.” We eat – We drink & Christ moves into our hearts & lives. Christ moves us closer to the very life of God. Christ

moves into our hearts & lives so that we are as intimate w/ Jesus as the Father is w/ the Son. In that eating/drink/trusting he shapes us more & more into his image. He restores what we threw away with our sin. He heals what we have broken. He rebuilds in us our capacity for the joy of his salvation.

“With this Word you can strengthen your conscience & say: If a hundred thousand devils, together with all fanatics, should rush forward, crying, How can bread & wine be the body & blood of Christ?...Here stands the Word of Christ: “*This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*” In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood shed for you...*” Here we abide...it is truly the body & blood of Christ. For as the lips of Christ say & speak, so it is, as He can never lie or deceive.” – Martin Luther

You know as I do why you need this word “given for you” & this meal “given for you” over & over again...because there are days when it feels like 100,000 devils & all the fanatics have landed at your doorstep & are kicking the door off its hinges. Which is why Dietrich Bonhoeffer would write...You do not have your faith once & for all. The faith you will confess today with all your hearts needs to be regained tomorrow & the day after tomorrow, indeed, every day anew. We receive from God only as much faith as we need for the present day. Faith is the daily bread God gives us...Every morning it is a new struggle to fight through unbelief, faintheartedness, lack of clarity, confusion, anxiety & uncertainty, in order to arrive at faith...Every morning in your life the same prayer will be necessary. *I believe, dear Lord, help my unbelief.*

On the night he was handed over to be killed, Jesus took bread & wine; He thanked God for those gifts & said, “*This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant between God & his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.*”

We weren't in the Upper Room, but we know those words were meant for us as well as for the 12. Communion is for you & you & you...not just for some – it is for all who trust that what Christ says he provides is true – His Body. His blood. His forgiveness for sin. His relationship of love w/ God the Father & life w/ Him forever. Wherever our lives have taken us Jesus invites us to himself in his meal at his table to be filled with his presence that floods our lives with unending grace & life abundant to share.

TAKE IT HOME – As you leave today, be specific & share w/ your neighbour...

Who in your life needs to hear, “Jesus is for you”?

Let's pray with that in mind...*Lord Jesus you gave your life so that we could have life w/ you now & forever in the Father's presence. By your Spirit build our trust in your promise. Grow our reliance on your Word. Strengthen our witness to your unending love & ceaseless redemption. We pray in your Name... Amen*