

Maundy Thursday 2022

Church of the Incarnation, Santa Rosa
Ellen K. Wondra

When I was a freshman in college, I started going to the congregational church where my mother's grandfather had been the pastor. I hadn't been to church much before. And I loved going to church. I loved the hymns, and the readings, and the sermons, and the prayers. I loved the clergy, and the congregation. I loved feeling accepted for who I was, warts and all, really accepted and not just sort of tolerated. It was life-changing for me; and being part of that church and being connected with God filled me with a kind of serenity and peacefulness I had never experienced.

But I did have a sense that something was missing. We had communion once every three months. On some Sundays, the pastor would gather with 5 or 6 of us in a small side-chapel for communion after the main service. And I found myself fed in a very real way when we did that.

A few months later, a friend of mine took me to an Episcopal Church, and there it was, what I had been missing: the Eucharist. The center of everything we were doing. The presence, in that bread and cup, in our receiving a little bit of bread and a little sip of wine, of everything we believed, everything we needed, everything we could ever hope and long for—all in that little bit of bread and that little sip of wine.

“On the night before he was handed over to suffering and death, Jesus took bread...” And he took the cup of wine. And he blessed them, gave them to his disciples and friends, told them to eat and drink, and to do it again and again in memory of him.

That [day] night is this [day] night. That meal with his friends, that special moment of blessing, that invitation to eat and drink, in memory of him, those are all present with us here and now, as we remember, in a special way, not only that particular meal, but all the meals Jesus shared with so many during his life among us and in that brief glorious period between his resurrection and his ascension.

And [today] tonight we also remember, we anticipate, what happened and what happens next. And, for the first time in more than two years, we again share the common cup in reality and not simply contemplation. It's a [day] night loaded with meaning, pressed down and overflowing, feeding us, healing us, connecting us, giving us hope.

There is so much to say about the Eucharist—so much to experience, to contemplate, to bring into our deepest being, to share with each other. So much in this simple and ordinary act of giving thanks and eating. Everything—in that little piece of bread and that small sip of wine.

We call the Eucharist communion—and that is what it is, most fundamentally: a communion with God in Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. When we take, and bless, and eat and drink, we are brought together with God in a more profound and more complete way, each and every time, over and over again, throughout our lives. As Scripture says, we are “knit up” into God, made a part of God's own life, even as God is made more and more a part of ours. In our eating and drinking, we are made anew—creatures made in God's image, creatures for whom God longs with all God's being, creatures who are most at home with God. And in the Eucharist we are brought more and more into that home. Even if we think we're not worth it. *Particularly* if we think we're not worth it. In receiving the body and blood of Christ, we become more and more part of that body, which has been and is and always will be the body that is divine, that is God, at the same time as it is human.

And in that taking and blessing and eating and drinking, we are also made more and more one with each other, and with all those, everywhere, in the past, in the present, in the future who also are knit up into the body of Christ. Who we are, who we have been, who we will be—at our best *and* at our worst—in the Eucharist becomes part of that larger family of God. When we make Eucharist together, we are celebrating not just with each other but with all the others who follow Christ, wherever they are, *whoever* they are. The glorious company of saints, the great cloud of witnesses—in the Eucharist we become ever more part of that multitude of the faithful, of those we know, but perhaps even more of those we do not have the chance to know (in this life, at least).

And that means, among other things, that we are never, ever alone. Even when we are most lonely, or most in doubt, or most tempted, or discouraged, or in despair, and just as we are most joyous—we are part of that body. It holds us up and holds

us close when we most need it. It prays for us and with us when we cannot pray. That glorious company is with us when we are most alone, most afraid, most at risk.

And we in turn also are with those who suffer, who mourn, who struggle, regardless of where and when they are. We are there for them, as they are there for us, as we are all there as Jesus was, with and for all of us, regardless. And together we are healed, and consoled, and reconciled with each other and with God. All of that made real, made tangible, in that little bit of bread and that small sip of wine.

And all of this—this profound and growing connection with God, this transformation, this unbreakable friendship and companionship with God and with others—is just the beginning. It's a foretaste. It's a promise. It's an anticipation of that heavenly banquet where we are all, together, in the presence of God. Where the tears are wiped from every eye. Where every bit of suffering, and loss, and failure is given new meaning as part of the life of God. Where all our jokes are funny. That heavenly banquet where there is always more than enough food, and drink, and where we enjoy each other and enjoy and delight in God, and God in us. In that little bit of bread, that small sip of wine, we are already part of that great feast of healing and reconciliation and fulfillment of creation in all its newly made glory.

And yet, what we do here is so simple, so ordinary. We take bread, and wine. We give thanks for them, and for those who have been part of their being brought to us. We give thanks to God for all that God is and does. And we share them out, among ourselves, and with others in all time and all places. Simple. Ordinary. And holy. For we do this in memory of and in the presence of the one who is the true and certain truth that God is always with us, in the most ordinary parts of our lives. So come to the table. Come to the feast. Come closer into the presence of God, through God's beloved, Jesus Christ. Happy are they who are called to the Supper of the Lamb!

Thanks be to God!