

Maundy Thursday 2019
First Presbyterian, Luling

Luke 22:1-23

Human bodies need food. It's a biological fact. And so some humans simply eat as a matter of fulfilling that biological need. I've eaten like this; you may have too. I worked one summer at a terrible office job, and ate lunch most days alone in my car, on my way to or from running an unnecessary errand, just so I could get out of the building. That's eating just to survive. It's not a meal, really. I did it yesterday, too, but I try not to fall into this pattern.

Human bodies and minds and spirits equally need connection with other humans. So it's natural for humans to come together and fulfill both of these needs at the same time. Sharing a meal together is more than just providing nourishment for our bodies, and it's more than just connecting with other humans. Somehow sharing a meal together cements relationships in a way that nothing else can.

In all of the Gospels, but in Luke in particular, Jesus spends a lot of his days eating with people. Meals with disciples, meals with tax collectors and sinners, meals with Mary and Martha and Lazarus. And lots of the parables Jesus tells, especially the ones that appear only in Luke, are centered around food.

Jesus knew, just as we do, that meals connected his disciples together, that including someone in a meal is a means of demonstrating and communicating grace, that sharing food together is, well, sacramental. Sacramental, which is to say, a means of grace, a way that God acts right here in our midst.

Luke's description of the Last Supper is not incidental nor accidental. It rekindles the memories of the other meals the disciples have shared with Jesus, it creates a new memory not just for the disciples but for the church that will emerge, and it makes a pattern for the central meal and sacrament of the church. It looks both backward and forward at the same time.

Jesus shares the bread and cups—in Luke it's two cups—with the disciples, and tells them to do it again, in remembrance of him. The church has done that, faithfully, over the centuries: shared bread and cup in a sacramental meal that binds us together and connects us to those first disciples around the table.

Judas is included in this meal, and in this celebration and remembrance. The shadow of the cross deepens as the meal progresses, but Jesus never indicates that Judas should have been left out or excluded. Grace extends even to

him, even though it seems clear that Jesus knows Judas will be the one who betrays him.

The church has not done such a good job of remembering Jesus in this way: sharing meals and sacraments with those we judge unworthy. We've, over the centuries, tried in various ways to limit who deserves the bread and cup, as though we can limit God's grace, as though anyone could be worthy. We've separated ourselves from other Christians over interpretations of this meal.

If we eat and drink in remembrance of Jesus, we eat and drink the bread and cup. And we eat and drink and are joined together in holy ways to those we might not choose to rub elbows with. We share the bread and cup even with those we might want to keep out. Because sharing a sacrament means participating in the grace that comes from God, and that grace comes to everyone Jesus loves, which is to say, that grace comes to everyone.

Luke 23:32-49

While it would be more pleasant and good-feeling for us to stay gathered in the upper room around the table, we know that Holy Week does not end on Thursday evening. Friday comes, and with it the crucifixion.

We find Jesus on a cross, with criminals on either side of him, for he too was considered a criminal, a threat to the Roman rule and the uneasy peace that ruled Jerusalem. Consistent with his ministry, consistent with that last supper that included his betrayer, Jesus is surrounded by outcasts, and finds his place among outcasts.

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” Who is Jesus forgiving here? The criminals on either side of him? At this point, neither of them has shown any regret nor repentance. That doesn’t seem to matter to Jesus. His forgiveness comes freely.

Or maybe Jesus is forgiving everyone who has contributed, in whatever way, to him being there on the cross. Judas, Pilate, Herod, the people who chose Barabbas to be released instead of him, or those same people standing by silently watching injustice happen, those who are mocking him. There’s even less indication of any kind of repentance, but again, Jesus trusts that God’s forgiveness flows freely.

Jesus’s words of forgiveness on the cross confirm Paul’s conviction in Romans that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, not even death, not even our sins, not anything.

Jesus’s faith remains strong. In Mark and Matthew, Jesus cries out from the cross, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” But in Luke, Jesus cries out in faith, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit.” It’s a faith that nothing can separate him from God’s love. It’s a faith in God’s power to save. It’s a faith that in life and in death, our spirits are in God’s hands, and we belong to God.

Jesus’s faith then becomes salvation for us. Jesus’s forgiveness, because we don’t know what we do, is for us.

We know that we sin in ways that hurt ourselves and hurt Jesus and hurt people that Jesus loves. Jesus’s faith and forgiveness, even at the depths of what humans could do to him, saves us from that sin. Thanks be to God.