

“The Table – A Place of Grace for Everyone”

April 9, 2020

A Place at the Table series – Holy Thursday – Livestream

When Jesus gathered with his friends, they were celebrating Passover – a time to remember God’s saving work in their lives and the story of God’s saving work from their ancestors. For our Jewish friends, Passover started last night, and it really was “a night unlike any other night” as they were not gathered together as usual. The Seder meal certainly didn’t feel the same without extended family around the table, but I did see posts of families eating together virtually.

Passover is a time of great joy because the Israelites celebrate freedom from slavery - going through the sea on dry land by God’s grace. But it’s not without sadness as they remember lives lost and times of oppression and slavery in Egypt. Joy and sadness meet in the time of remembering.

We might feel some of that tonight. We grieve, too, not being able to gather in-person in our sanctuary. But even so, we are together to remember. To remember the story of God’s salvation that Moses told the people to carry with them. To remember that God is in the business of making a way even in the midst of uncertain and dire circumstances. To remember Jesus’ sharing a meal with his friends and then telling them to remember him in the breaking of bread and sharing of the cup.

Yes, that’s true when we celebrate Holy Communion, but we also remember Jesus as we share in worship tonight. We share food and remember all of the times that Jesus shared meals – many times with people who were on the margins. He ate at their tables. He invited them to the table where he ate. He told them they had a place, and this time reminds us that we’re called to do the same. The table is a place of grace for everyone.

In the midst of this time when we’re sheltered in place, we’re discovering again our human need for connection and inclusion. Jesus comforts us, saying “you have a place at the table” and Jesus challenges us to make sure we are doing the same – that all people know they are welcome in our hearts, in our homes, in our churches—even if we can’t physically be with each other right now.

We are together to remember when Jesus washed feet. For a host to have water available for guests to wash feet was normal, but what Jesus did wasn’t normal or expected. Usually people washed their own feet – no one else did it for them. It’s about servanthood, but it’s really an act of incredible love. And it’s what Jesus calls us to do for one another.

And certainly as we wash our hands tonight, and as we offer that to one another in our homes, we know how important it is. That's been the phrase we've heard over and over. Perhaps some of us have been saying it over and over – "Wash your hands!" And it is an act of service – to pay closer attention and care for each other. But it takes a toll – drying our skin so much that it's chapped, even raw. And that's where we are – our world is a bit raw right now, too. So we need some comfort and balm.

We serve one another, but we also are served by one another. In these days when we're staying home in order to care for each other, hearing that word again is important. It's been there all the time, but we don't always hear that mutuality is implied. Yes, we're called to offer grace, but we're also called to receive grace. And for most of us, that's not so easy.

I've had that conversation with some of you – inviting you to be open to receiving grace from others just as quickly as you offer it. Maybe we struggle because we believe that others need it more. Maybe we feel like we don't deserve it. But Jesus is clear that his care expressed through his people is for everyone – even us.

We are together to remember. Jesus went off alone and asked his disciples to watch and pray with him. After everything, he spent time with God in fervent prayer, knowing what he'd face and praying "Thy will be done." We worship and serve God who did not back away from human suffering, but who went to the cross, who loved to the end, who suffers with us, who struggles with us, who promises to never leave our side. We remember God who loves and who offers a place of grace for all.

Thanks be to God. Amen.

SONG for HANDWASHING – I Will Follow