

"God sits at our table"

Tables. I've been thinking about tables this week, as I prepared for our worship this Thursday night. I thought about Jesus- about how he gathered with his friends for one last meal together, before his death on the cross.

They gathered for Passover. At the Passover meal the Jews remember how God saved their people long ago. The Hebrews lived and labored as slaves in Egypt in a time of death-dealing plagues. God told them to mark their doorposts with the blood of a lamb, and the angel of death would "pass over" each of their homes. They marked their doors. The plague struck many, but all Hebrews were spared. For centuries the descendants of those Hebrews have gathered once a year around a feasting table to remember and celebrate the Passover Feast.

That's exactly what Jesus and his followers did. They gathered around a table to eat a Passover lamb. They ate unleavened bread, which is a reminder of the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt. They had to leave in a hurry, without letting their bread rise. Four other items were traditional at the Passover feast:

- A bowl of salt water, in remembrance of the tears their people shed in slavery, as well as a reminder of the waters of the Red Sea, through which God's hand delivered them.

- A collection of bitter herbs, horseradish, chicory, endive, in remembrance of the bitterness of slavery, and of the bitter hyssop branches that were used to streak the doorposts with lamb's blood.

- A paste called Charoseth, made from dates, pomegranates and nuts. This was to remind them of the clay from which they made bricks in Egypt. Through it were sticks of cinnamon that stood for the straw used in making the bricks.

- Lastly, there were four cups of wine, each one a reminder of God's promises given to them during their flight from Egypt:

- *I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians

- *I will deliver you from bondage

- *I will redeem you with outstretched arm and acts of judgement

- *I will take you for my people, and I will be your God.

It was a table creaking under a load of food at Jesus' Last Supper. It was a REAL meal. The law taught that the whole lamb and everything else must be eaten; not a scrap could be left.

Jesus ate this hearty meal. And he used the common foods on the table before him to teach his disciples; to show them the depth of his love. They always had bread on their tables. They always had wine. These were not special foods of the Passover Feast. Jesus took these ORDINARY foods and said, "See, your daily meal can remind you of my love for you-- that I love you so much I will even die for you. When you eat bread, think of my body that I give for you. When you drink of the fruit of the vine, remember my blood that I give that you might have life."

That table, where Jesus ate so long ago, is connected to our altar table used for Holy Communion. Every time we celebrate this sacrament, we are joined with God, made known to us in Jesus Christ.

But Jesus is not only Lord of the communion table. Christ is Lord of the dinner table, the breakfast table, the booth at McDonalds, the picnic table, and the blanket spread on the grass at summer outdoor concerts.

Friends, we have an amazing faith. Our faith makes it clear that God is not removed from creation. God is right in the middle of it. Our faith teaches us that this world is filled with God's presence. Everything God made is holy. EVERYTHING. By coming to us as God did in Christ, he makes it clear that barns are holy places, farm animals are holy, straw is holy, mangers are holy. God did not scorn life as a human being, but embraced it completely. Since God came in Jesus we know that all people are holy- the unwashed, the sick, the impoverished, the difficult, the dysfunctional, the starving, the wounded. All are HOLY. When I come face to face with any part of God's creation, I am standing before the HOLY.

Every table where we sit is now HOLY. God sits at every table with us. When we come forward to be served the bread and cup in a few moments, God is in our midst. But he is ALWAYS with us in that same way.

It's not easy to remember this all the time. When a kid complains about the food, or knocks a glass over after being warned to move it back from the edge three times--- or when your spouse says something hostile, or bitter

arguments pass from one side or the other--it is VERY difficult to remember that God is sitting with us at that table. It can be hard to believe that this sarcastic friend or brother or sister or spouse, this sassy or crabby child at your table is HOLY. But they are. Not all our BEHAVIOR is holy-- that's for sure-- but each being, each person is HOLY, no matter what. God is within us all. God is among us. Now. Everywhere. All the time.

My prayer for us as we leave this night, is that God will open our eyes and our hearts to the HOLY in all creation. That we will grow in our awareness of God's presence in our midst wherever we are.

Let us pray:

God, help us to remember you sit at our table- at all our tables. Help us to see you in the ones gathered with us. Help us to feel your presence at every table where we sit: in the school cafeteria, at our kitchen table, in the restaurant, in our fellowship hall at church. When we gather around a table to play Monopoly, help us remember your presence. When we sit at a table to pay bills, may we see you there. When we gather around a table to share food after a funeral, when we pass by the Christmas buffet table, when we study for a test on the dining room table, when we lay out a map to plan a vacation on that same table-- O God, we know you will be with us. But we aren't sure that we'll remember you're there. Help us God. Remind us though simple things like bread and juice. Open our eyes, our hearts, our lips. May we see, taste and touch your Holy Presence in our midst. Amen.