

Getting to Know Jesus, the Christ

Oct 5, 2014

Thanks for the Food

**Psalm 80:7-15 and 1 Cor 11:23-26
(534, 574, 530, 556)**

To the casual passer-by, it probably looked like
a bunch of guys getting together for dinner.
They did look a bit tense.
They looked around suspiciously
as they entered the door leading to the upper room.
Who was in the café beneath?
Were they being followed?
Was this the time for the arrest?

It had been a stressful week for all of them,
especially for the rabbi
with whom they had been travelling
for some three years now.
The religious and political powers
that he had been challenging with his teachings
seemed determined to get rid of him.
And they were pretty powerful,
especially here in Jerusalem
during the festival of Passover,
celebrating God's freeing of Israel from slavery in Egypt.

And that was the reason for this meal.
As faithful Jews, they gathered for the Passover meal.
The meal happened at the beginning of Passover week.
It was usually a family that gathered,
and this bunch of guys was a new family of sorts,
gathered around this Jesus of Nazareth
who, in truth, was God incarnate.
Seder customs included telling the story of the Exodus,
discussing the story, drinking four cups of wine,
eating matza/unleavened bread, partaking of other foods symbolic of the Exodus,
and reclining in celebration of freedom.
Matza is poor people's bread,
a symbol of both the affliction of and freedom from slavery.

The other foods included vegetables dipped in salt water to remind those gathered of the tears shed by their ancestors.

This meal was both solemn and celebratory –
solemn in its remembering of cost of freedom
and celebratory in its remembering of the joy of freedom.

It fed the family gathered
to continue to live the freedom God had secured
for the purposes God had established.
Those purposes, as the family was reminded,
had to do with freeing Israel to be the blessings
God has created them to be
for the whole of creation.

The various stages of the meal were marked by blessings,
by expressions of gratitude for the liberation being celebrated.

Four glasses of wine were drunk,
each preceded by a blessing.

They represented the four promises God made in Exodus 6:6-7:

*Say therefore to the Israelites, "I am the Lord,
and I will free you from the burdens of the Egyptians
and deliver you from slavery to them.
I will redeem you with an outstretched arm
and with mighty acts of judgment.
I will take you as my people and I will be your God.
You shall know that I am the Lord your God,
who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.*

That's what the gratitude was for at every Passover dinner.

It was so that night in the upper room in Jerusalem
some 2000 years ago.
It is so at this Lord's supper that we celebrate this morning.
This food and this ritual,
different from, yet similar to, the *seder* menu,
feeds us for freedom.
This is freedom food.
It's costly and it's joyful.

But that's the nature of our God.
Their Trinitarian self is willing to pay the cost to gain the joy.

This ritual of remembering
that we celebrate on the first Sunday of every month
here at Brentwood
nourishes us in a special way to flourish in the grace of Jesus Christ.

This Passover meal of the new Exodus
that God brought about in and through Jesus, the Christ
reminds us of both the cost and the joy of our freedom.

It's both freedom from and freedom for.
Let's think of it in terms of the four freedoms
promised by God in Exodus 6:6-7.

It's God granting freedoms from the various slaveries we may suffer from –
addictions, depressions, illnesses, anxieties, fears.

It's God reaching out to us to enfold us
in the everlasting strength of his loving, fatherly arms.

It's God delivering us from subservience to any power
that seeks to hurt or destroy,
not only us, but any of God's beloved creatures.
We are freed to bless the creation,
to care for it as God would.

It's God taking this people,
now these disciples of Jesus, the Christ,
and forming them into a community of beloved friends
who are equipped and sent out to represent this covenant God
in every situation they find themselves in.
They are sent out to witness to the freedom
that is offered in relationship with this God –
the One who freed Israel in the Exodus,
who freed all of humanity in Jesus Christ,
and who continues to offer and nourish the freedom to flourish today,
at this table of remembrance,
with this food of freedom.

The challenge for all of us as we leave this table of grace this morning
is what we will do with this gift of freedom.

We can take it for granted. Too often, I suspect, we do.

We can ignore it. Too often, I suspect, we do.

We can deny its power. Too often, I suspect, we do.

Or we can be transformed by the freedom it nourishes and give thanks.

This morning, in particular, I trust and pray that we are and do.