

St. John Lutheran Church

The Sermon

Rev. Andy Rutrough

Maundy Thursday
April 14, 2022

Exodus 12:1-14
I Corinthians 11:23-26
John 13:1-17, 31b-35

By and large, for the most part, we human beings like to eat. If you don't like to eat, or if you have a problem with eating, let's talk. There are folks that can help us make things better.

But a lot of us really like to eat. Yes, that beef tenderloin was really good tonight. Yum, yum, yum, yum yum.

It's not just the taste, is it. No, it's not. We enjoy eating together. We enjoy telling the stories of how our day went, laughing together, seeing each other.

This is a bit of a surprise, because we human beings also like to think of ourselves as independent, self-sufficient, not needing to be propped up by anyone.

And yet, we need something from outside of ourselves in order to survive. We need food and water, or we will die. So we are, in fact, dependent on the farmers who grow the food and the truckers who transport the food and the store clerks who lay out the food and the earth from which the food grows, and God, who moves within the earth.

We are, in fact, dependent, limited, mortal. So you would think that we might want to hide our eating, so no one would see our vulnerability. We might want to get our eating done quickly, so as to avoid the reality of dependency that it shows.

And yet we do not. We get together and enjoy all kinds of different foods, we go out to dinner to celebrate an anniversary or go on a date, we get together to eat at Thanksgiving, at Christmas, on birthdays, at Easter.

This is a good thing.

In our second lesson for today, Paul shows us how God makes one of our meals even deeper. Paul recalls Jesus' words at the Last Supper. We say these words every week. "In the night in which he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to his disciples, saying "Take, eat, this is my body."

Bodies. Jesus's body is important. Jesus is not just a nice idea or a noble set of aspirations. Jesus is a real person, who came to us in a body. Our bodies are also important. Your body is precious. No matter how old we are, whether we are one minute old or one hundred years old, no matter what body type, whether we are thin as a rail or plump as an apple, no matter what of the vast and holy array of colors God made us in, your body is a miracle of intricacy and complexity and exquisite beauty, because your body bears the image of God. It is holy.

Now, at communion, Jesus becomes a part of our bodies. We are the body of Christ.

Jesus says, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you and for all people, for the forgiveness of sins, do this for the remembrance of me."

Blood, in the Bible represented the life of a thing. So Jesus's life becomes a part of our bodies. For the forgiveness of sin, so that we become a part of God's life, so that the separation, the alienation between us and God is healed. All of this through food.

Please note, the roots of this meal, of communion, run back to a meal of freedom. In our Old Testament lesson, God sets up the Passover meal, to remember when the people of Israel were enslaved in Egypt. There was no hope, no possibility of freedom. Then God brought them out of slavery into freedom.

This is a meal of freedom. Now, in our days, we usually think of freedom as freedom from something. We seek freedom from slavery, freedom from addiction, freedom from crushing debt, Freedom from abuse, freedom from illness. Freedom from is precious, but what do we do with it? Well, we do what we want. Usually, freedom from leads only to doing what we want.

In Scripture, God brings us into an even deeper freedom: freedom for. God brings the people of Israel out of Egypt, and doesn't just say, "Okay, you all, just do what you want." No. God brings them out of slavery and then gives the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are the rules for living in community. So God brings the people of Israel out of slavery, so they can be free for community.

In the New Testament, Jesus frees us from our sin, for servanthood.

Servanthood is not subservience. There's a difference. With subservience, we do something for someone else because if we don't something bad will happen. We will either get hurt, someone will hit us or yell at us, or we will get left on the street to freeze or starve.

With servanthood, we do things not because we have to, but because we love. A little girl falls on the sidewalk and skins her knee, we seek to comfort her because, well, because she has God in her. She is made in the image of God. We hold the hand of an old man while he is dying, and we pray with him, not because we have to but because he has God in him. He is made in the image of God.

That's servanthood.

In the gospel lesson for this evening, Jesus chooses to wash his disciples' feet. He does it because he loves them. Then he says, "Y'all need to be washing each others' feet." He says, "This is my commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."

Jesus becomes a part of our bodies in this meal, this food, this celebration of the great feast, of the great party that will come someday. This is a meal, a celebration of freedom for servanthood, for love. This is the meal, the sweet taste of God's life, of God's holy laughter.