

## **The Last Week - 3/21/10 – Ex. 12:1-4, 11-14; Mark 14:12-25 – Bread for the Journey**

It's amazing how much of our life revolves around eating. Whether we eat 3 meals a day, survive on granola bars and energy drinks, consume meals on the run or around the table, food is central to our lives. Food fuels our bodies. But food is about more than nutrition and energy. Think about how we look for people with whom to eat and how that company enriches and nourishes our lives. Eating with others fuels our soul. It reminds us that we do not travel alone, that we are connected in community. We feast together on life.

Eating is central to our life as a Christian community. The meal we call Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper reaches back in time and place to the Exodus event in Egypt. God's people had become slaves to Pharaoh. Life was oppressive. They cried out to God for help. The Scriptures say that God heard their cries and sent Moses to deliver them from bondage. As Moses engaged Pharaoh in what amounted to a 10 round knock-down-drag-out contest, round ten found God employing the Passover meal. God's people placed the blood of a lamb on their doorposts so the angel of death would pass over. They were to eat the remainder of the lamb so they would have strength for the journey ahead. This meal was not about forgiveness, but rather deliverance; not about sacrifice, but new life. It was a meal of expectation: God was about to act in a decisive manner; God was coming to answer their prayers and deliver them from oppression. Since that first meal, the Passover has been eaten by God's people with the same sense of anticipation and expectation. God hears our cries; God acts decisively on our behalf; God comes to free us from oppression. We eat. God gives us strength so we can participate in what God is doing.

With that in mind, Jesus gathers with his disciples on Thursday night of Holy Week in the Upper Room at a pre-selected house. Jesus knows what is about to happen. God is about to act decisively in and through him as he confronts both the Roman and religious authorities about their oppressive ways of treating God's people. Like that first Passover there will be a struggle between God's representative and the powers that be. The blood that will be shed is not a sacrificial offering, but rather a symbol of the intensity of the struggle. Oppression does not go silently into the night. It claws, scratches, kicks and bites. It always exacts a toll. Blood is often shed. Those who stand up to it can expect a fight to the death. As such, we need bread for the journey. We need to remember that God will provide what we need for this fight. So we gather to eat, remember, draw strength for what lies ahead.

As Mark tells his story of the Last Supper, he records that Jesus uses 4 verbs: took, blessed, broke, and gave. These 4 words take us back to an earlier scene in Mark where Jesus fed 5,000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish. In this event, two divergent solutions to a hunger situation are established. When the hour is late and the people are hungry, the disciples see a problem and want to "send the people away." When Jesus looks at the same situation, he sees an opportunity and wants the disciples to "give them something to eat." Then Jesus engages the disciples in the step by step process that leads to the solution. Jesus takes what is already present and offered to him, the 5 loaves and 2 fish, blesses it, breaks it, and has his disciples distribute it. There is more than enough for everyone present! The point of the story is not about multiplication but distribution. It is about divine justice and bringing the kingdom of God to bear on our human situations. Trusting in God's presence and provision, we offer ourselves to accomplish God's purpose. "Give us this day our daily bread" becomes real when we share what God provides trusting that there is more than enough. This becomes the sacramental symbol and the primary practice of the kingdom movement. Because we believe that God is present and acting decisively to free people from oppression, we participate in God's solution. God delivers, but we are the means by which the deliverance comes. We need bread in order to be bread for the world.

This meal, filled with God's promise and presence, is what gave Jesus the strength he needed to face what lay before him later that Thursday evening and on Friday. I would submit to you it is this meal that gives us the strength we need to face our own times of betrayal, suffering, and death as we wait for deliverance and new life to emerge. As we come to the table today, where are you beaten and broken by life? Where do you and others experience oppression and injustice? God hears our cries for help, gathers us around this table of grace, and gives us bread for the journey. It is here that God equips and empowers us to live out God's purpose. As Rosa Parks reflected on the Civil Rights movement, she wrote: "This movement was not just about desegregating the

buses, or even the mistreatment of our people in Montgomery. This movement was about slaking the centuries-old thirst of a long-suffering people for freedom, dignity, and human rights. It was time to drink at the well.” Indeed, it is time to drink at the well of God’s mercy and the table of God’s grace. We need bread for the journey so that we might be God’s bread for the world.