

The Rev. Joel Petruschke
Our Saviour/St. Stephen
Maundy Thursday
April 6, 2023

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

So, sisters and brothers, I have a saying.

Actually, it is not mine, but I picked it from someone somewhere down the line.

The saying is, "Where there is food, there are Lutherans."

"Where there is food, there are Lutherans."

Yes, we like to eat, don't we? We like our church potlucks. We like our church luncheons. We like to eat.

And, I know that to be the case here at St. Stephens.

Already my wife and I have been blessed to enjoy a meal with you at your Valentine's Day dinner.

And the past two Sunday's, the congregation enjoyed food and fellowship following worship.

At Our Saviour, the congregation also enjoys food, especially during the annual GermanFest event, as well as at other times like the Share the Word, Share the Harvest event around Veteran's Day, so on and so forth.

So, yes, where there is food, there are Lutherans.

And here we are again, having gathered tonight as sisters and brothers in Christ to share another meal.

PAUSE

And there is of course a reason why we have gathered tonight to share a meal, this Agape Feast.

Because on the night prior to Jesus' crucifixion and death, Jesus shared a meal with his disciples.

It was known at the Last Supper.

This Last Supper was the Passover meal, which we read about in our reading tonight from the book of Exodus.

PAUSE

And as we know, when Jesus celebrated the Passover Meal with his disciples, Jesus did something during that Passover meal which has for many centuries now become part of our tradition as Christians.

Jesus took some bread, blessed it and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

And then Jesus took some wine, blessed it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and drink. This my blood shed for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

These meals—the Passover Meal and the Last Supper—share a connection.

They share a theme, and that theme is deliverance and covenant, DELIVERANCE AND COVENANT.

God delivered God's people the Israelites from bondage in Egypt via means of the Ten Plagues and institutes the Passover Meal to be celebrated in perpetuity to commemorate the liberation of God's people from Egypt.

And with this Passover meal, God reminds God's people time and time again for immemorial ... God reminds God's people of the covenant whereby God will be their God, and they, the Israelites, will be God's people.

Deliverance and covenant.

PAUSE

And then, we come to the Last Supper which is tied closely to Christ's suffering and death; Jesus gives up his body and his blood is shed on the cross for us.

"This is my body, this is my blood ... given and shed for you."

We come to the Last Supper then and we are reminded again of the theme deliverance and covenant.

In the Last Supper, we are reminded that Jesus delivers us not from the bondage of slavery like the Israelites in Egypt, but from a much greater bondage.

Jesus delivers us and all people from the bondage of sin and death, by the cross.

And God in Jesus Christ then establishes a covenant with all people ... with ALL PEOPLE ... such that in Christ, God is our God, and we are his people.

Yes, these meals—the Passover Meal and the Last Supper—share a theme of deliverance and covenant.

And so then we see the importance of our communion meal, as it relates back to the Last Supper and to Passover.

We see the importance of our communion meal, and we understand why we call it holy, as in Holy Communion.

PAUSE

But more simply than that, there is a reason why in the great history of faith ... there is a reason why God has chosen to connect important events with a meal.

There is reason for that, because meals in general are holy experiences.

Think about it. The idea behind a meal is for individuals to take a break from whatever they are doing...

...and to come together with other people...

...to sit down across from one another face to face...

...to enjoy a respite, to talk with one another, to rejoice in fellowship...

...and to eat, of course, at which point our body literally rejoices in the sustenance it receives.

Meals are holy, they are time set apart for a special purpose, which is what “holy” means after all—set apart for a special purpose.

We take time apart for food and fellowship, and so meals in general are holy experiences.

In fact, the significance of meals was driven home for me, when I heard some time back that the number one contributing factor to the success of a young person in life, however we might define “success” ...

Anyway, the number one contributing factor to the success of a young person, was whether or not that young person’s family sat down together at least once day to share a meal together.

Interesting fact, is it not?

So, yes, meals are holy. They allow for connection, they allow for covenanting, we might say, in that we are drawn together as a people.

And they allow for deliverance, certainly to be delivered if but for a moment, to be delivered, to take a break from the busy-ness of the day.

In general, meals are holy and it so seems yes most appropriate that God would attach a meal to significant faith events like the liberation of his people from Egypt AND the suffering and death of His on the cross.

Meals are holy.

And so tonight, as we move from sharing our supper meal to sharing the communion meal, let us remember the deliverance we have experienced in Christ.

In the sharing of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, we are delivered from sin and death.

And let us remember the covenant we experience.

In the sharing of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, God does indeed make us one with Him, such that God is our God, and we are his people.

Thanks be to God. AMEN.