

- 1) It goes without saying that in order to live, we have to eat.
That said, while it's possible to survive if we always eat alone, that's just no way to live.
Think of all the things that happen during meals that are shared:
 - Deals concluded over business lunches
 - Romances kindled at candle-lit dinners
 - Logistics organized during hurried family breakfasts
 - Colleagues cultivated, friendship formed over coffee and cookies, or pretzels and beerMore is going on in each of these eating-meetings
than the multi-tasking of work projects, efficiently engaged.
The nourishment we all need comes in many dimensions;
and food for body, soul, and spirit often tastes best in each dimension,
when all these dimensions are conjoined in common meals.
- 2) When families and friends gather, it's not just to pass the time while passing the potatoes.
Many times, it is a particular event that catalyzes our convening.
We gather to celebrate birthdays, graduations, promotions, anniversaries.
We come together to remember loved ones lost, sufferings shared, hopes still hanging.
On occasions like these, we eat alongside generations who have gone before.
And we set a table for generations yet to come.
- 3) It is well to remember, though, that not all shared meals are happy meals
(much though McDonalds might like us to make them so).
Sometimes, at shared meals, we swallow hard—food almost sticking in our throats.
Fear and anger sometimes make it on the menu.
Grief can be the main course—sweet or bitter.
Arrogance and greed are, on occasion, served up and devoured with relish.
Meals can make animosities evident; meals can make unselfish compassion manifest.
In and through all kinds of eating with each other;
how we make our meals very much makes us—one way and another.
- 4) Tonight, having together broken bread in the parish hall,
we gather to share bread blessed and broken in the sanctuary.
And as we do so, we reconnect with our spiritual ancestors in three different time zones—
nourished ourselves, as a faith community, by the stories of their communal meals.
None of the three meals we remember this evening
can, by any stretch, be described as a “happy meal.”
Yet all of them are part of us—three shared meals, distinctively delineating our identity.

- 5) Meal #1 is a stressful meal, not a sit-down banquet, but a hassled, hurried stand-up meal.
It is food for a long, hard journey
a journey that will demand every ounce of resilience and perseverance
that this band of gathered fugitives can manage to muster.
It is, as it were, a trust meal—one binding each to the other, and all to God.
Time and time again, in the days and years ahead,
when terror makes them doubt the competence and care of the God who leads them;
Israel's children will be called to remember that God did provide and that God will.
There is, however, a tragic underside to this meal that Israel's children share.
While it fuels their march from oppression toward freedom,
the cost of that freedom will involve the loss of Egypt's children.
And it will foster a sense of entitlement that Israel does not deserve, and God does not intend.
Sorting out the difference between healthy and unhealthy use of God's generous bounty—
that will define Israel's vocation as a people—and it does for ours as well.
The question for them and for us: How can we follow, worship, and obey a gracious God,
without getting caught up in the arrogance of US above THEM, because We're Number One?
- 6) Meal #2 is not a stressful, stand-around meal—not a battle rations meal.
But, as it happens, that doesn't make this meal an obviously better one.
Tonight we listen in on a conversation Paul is having with Christians in Corinth.
He reminds them of their Eucharistic heritage because they have forgotten it, ignored it,
or never really gotten in the first place what it is that they were given.
The church in Corinth is starkly stratified between those who are rich and those who are poor.
The rich show up for supper early—and they chow down to full satiation.
The poor show up much later, after finally getting free from work—
and they find not enough left on the table for the sustenance they need.
The rich aren't threatened, as are Abraham's children, by an outside enemy.
They are simply oblivious to, or dismissive of those in their own faith family.
These Corinthians are also among us tonight—
and the table question Paul poses for them, he poses for us also—namely:
Can we even come to the Lord's Table if the way in which we do leaves folks hungry outside?
- 7) Meal #3 is a sober meal, indeed.
The stench of impending death is pervasive—impossible to ignore.
The instinct toward self-preservation, that often generates both fear and greed,
is etched in the faces, clenched in the bodies of those who gather at this table.
I suspect they are all finding it very hard to eat.
The meal, nevertheless, proceeds apace.
And then, the One who is central to their gathering,
in the middle of the meal, puts that very meal on hold.

He interrupts the eating to do the washing—to gently wash his fellow diners’ dirty feet.

In so doing he demonstrates that food need not be snatched in fear—as it was in Egypt,
or scarfed in greed—as it will be in Corinth.

In doing so he shows that the fundamental nourishment in our encounters with each other
does not come primarily in satisfying our appetites,
or in storing up calories for a long, hard slog.

The deepest nourishment of body, mind, and spirit
comes in and through the mutuality of giving and receiving.

8) Feeding hungry mouths and washing dirty feet—

these actions seem as far removed from one another as any two actions ever could be.

Jesus shows, in his enacted sermon, however,

that these two actions have everything to do with each another.

Indeed, if nourishment of body, soul, and spirit is our deepest need, and our clear intent,
then we really can’t have one without the other.

Jesus, the fountain source of nourishment and service,

has just himself been both fed and-foot washed by his dear friend Mary.

She isn’t present at this meal for him to return the favor.

So, instead He passes on what he’s been given—

to His disciples who are gathered around that table—

and to us, His disciples who gather at this one.

If Jesus can share with others the multileveled nourishment he has received—
the question he has for us is this: Can we do so as well?