
Supper with Friends

A sermon by Dean Sam Candler
Maundy Thursday – Year C

Most meals happen rather haphazardly.

What do you want for supper tonight?

Who's cooking?

Should we go out to eat tonight?

Have you been to the grocery store?

What did you bring for lunch?

Are you having breakfast today?

Did you bring anything to eat?

Nobody has any food. There's a small lad here, with two fish and five barley loaves, but what are they among so many? You give them something to eat.

Go into the city, and a man carrying a large jar of water will meet you; follow him. He will show you a large room upstairs. Make preparations for us there.

Children, your job is to set the table. Children, your job is to clear the table. Your job is to wash the dishes.

Jesus got up from the table, took off his outer robe, tied a towel around himself, poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet.

In most of our meals, we do not know exactly what we are going to say. After all, most of our meals are not exactly business meetings, or theology meetings. As long as the television is not on, or as long as we are not monitoring our computer screens and smartphones, the conversation is rather simple.

Anything happen at work today? At school? What did so-and-so say today? What are we going to do this weekend? I wonder how old so-and-so are.

Hey, if I, your Teacher and Lord, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. Don't wait to be served; go serve somebody first. Don't wait to have your feet washed; go wash someone's feet first.

Honey, where are you going tomorrow? Lord, where are you going? Lord, we don't know where you're going.

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, will teach you everything and remind you of all that I have said to you.

I want you to do your homework right after supper. No dilly-dallying.

This is my commandment, that you love one another.

You are my friends. I do not call you servants any longer, but I have called you friends.

Most meals happen haphazardly, sometimes almost randomly. But as they do, routines start to form. We get into habits. We start having supper at the same times each week. We return to the dishes we like the best. The same people start filling the same roles. Sometimes we even repeat the same things, over and over again.

This is my Body. This is my Blood. Eat this, drink this, in remembrance that Christ died for you, and be thankful.

Much of the work that goes into preparing and serving a meal, we forget about. It is so routine, that we no longer pay attention to it. Tonight, at the Eucharist of Maundy Thursday, we pause to pay attention, to give close attention to these routines, maybe the closest attention we give all year to these practices. Maybe Maundy Thursday asks us to pay attention to our own household meals, too.

Tonight, bowls and basins have been prepared. Linens have been washed and ironed. Towels. Water. Bread has been baked, pressed into powerful wafers. Wine has been fermented and fortified. Feet will be washed. And, afterwards, we will even give close attention to the cleaning up. Every meal needs to be cleaned up. We will not simply get up from the table after eating. We will watch the housekeepers come in to remove the tablecloth and wash down the table, scrubbing the table with cleansing salt. We will watch the housekeepers set up the hangings for tomorrow.

Tonight is Holy Eucharist, our Holy Thanksgiving meal. It is not just food; it is washing feet and honoring each other too. It is not just drink; it is loving one another with a wiser love. That wiser love understands that love is always betrayed. That wiser love understands that we love even the people at table with us who betray us. We love even then. We love even the people who do not want to be washed. And we, we let ourselves be washed even when we don't want to be touched.

Tonight, we give our attention to this Holy Eucharist. This is the place where Jesus comes to call us not servants, but friends. "I have called you friends," Jesus says to each one of us.

A "friend," said Will Campbell, the old renegade Baptist minister, is someone you have spilled a lot of salt with. Don Quixote said, "A person must eat a peck of salt with his friend, before he knows him." Cicero, in the first century AD, said, "Trust no one until you have eaten much salt with him."

All these definitions of "friend," carry the same meaning. A friend is someone with whom we have passed a lot of time. We have spent so much time with each other that we've eaten a lot of salt together. We have done some great and memorable things with each other, but we've also done rather routine and ordinary things, over and over again. Sometimes, we have suffered salty stings together. Sometimes, we've done nothing at all with friends, over and over again. We have simply hung out, bided our time, chewed the fat. Friends are the people we have travelled with, people we have journeyed with.

We are "companions," those who share bread together, sometimes complaining companions, and sometimes encouraging companions. Jesus calls us friends tonight, at the end of the long, earthly part of his journey. And we call each other friends, too, washing together, at supper together, cleaning up together, afterwards. It is both ordinary friendship, and extraordinary transcendence.

For, in this ordinary practice, in this practiced routine, in these routine habits, in this Holy Eucharist, among friends, we actually see the extraordinary. We see both extraordinary suffering and extraordinary glory. We see the glory of God, in the love of Jesus Christ our Lord.

AMEN.