

*As If It Were Your Last*

Maundy Thursday 2010

John 13:33, 36, 14:1-6

- ✦ Criminals facing execution are often granted a last meal. They often choose things like steak, shrimp, mashed potatoes, their favorite pie. I confess the choices intrigue me, even as the whole idea makes me sick inside.
- ✦ Jesus, too, chose his last meal. It was before he was arrested, so he got to choose his dinner companions, as well. We know, at least in part, what Jesus chose to eat and drink, and the scriptures tell us that his disciples were gathered around, even the one who would betray him, the ones who would abandon him the next day.
- ✦ The meal was a traditional Jewish Seder meal, complete with the rituals observed at this most important time in the Jewish calendar. There was a part in the Seder meal for everyone, for each person needed to see themselves in the story of Israel's deliverance from slavery by a merciful God.
- ✦ So I have a feeling that Mary and Martha were there, too, along with Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and some whose names we don't know. After all, who would have prepared and served the meal? At the multi-faith Seder meal we celebrated a fortnight ago, Rabbi Allen Secher commented "Of course there were women there—somebody had to prepare and serve the meal! And there were children, too, learning the stories of their ancestors and the promise of a Messiah to deliver them from the bondage of Rome's oppression."

- ✦ Jesus knew it would be his last meal, and his friends most likely knew it, too. The Romans and the religious authorities were out to get him; his time had run out, and they would never all of them be together again.
- ✦ Writing in *The Christian Century*, the wonderful writer Frederick Beuchner describes the scene this way: “It is an unforgettable scene there in that upper room—the shadows, the stillness, the hushed voices of people speaking very carefully, very intently, because they want to get it all said while there was still time and to get it said right.
- ✦ You can only imagine the way it must have haunted them for the rest of their lives as they looked back on how they had actually sat there with him, eating and drinking and talking; and through their various accounts of it, including all the paintings and dramatic reenactments over the centuries, and through the church’s remembering in the Eucharist, it has come to haunt us, too.”
- ✦ But Beuchner thinks of the Last Supper as haunting in another way, as well—not just a kind of shadowy dream of an event long past but also as a kind of foreshadowing of an event not all that far in the future, our own last supper, the last time you and I will sit down with a handful of our closest friends.
- ✦ Most of us, though, don’t know when our last suppers will be. We always think there will be other times, other gatherings, other occasions to say what we have always longed to say. And that’s sad, because it means that we also won’t know how precious this supper is, how precious these friends and loved ones are who we will eat with for the last time.
- ✦ Adam Hamilton, in his new book and study *Twenty-four Hours that Changed the World*, asks this probing question: “If you knew you had one more day to live, that it was time for your last supper, who would be sitting around your table?”

- ✦ With that difficult question in your mind and heart, picture the scene. What would you choose to eat? For the time will run out for us, too, and only then will we realize how precious those friends and family, that meal really are.
- ✦ And yet every one of our meals, even a take-out pizza eaten at the coffee table after a long day, points to the preciousness of our life and to the certainty of that eventuality that there will be a last meal, too.
- ✦ There in the shadowy upper room that night, the disciples turned to Jesus, who was their light, with greater urgency and passion than maybe ever before because, with all hell about to break loose, they had no other place to turn. They had drunk the wine he told them was his blood and put into their mouths the bread he told them was his body.
- ✦ And thus with something of his courage in them they asked him a question they had never risked asking so helplessly and directly before. It was Simon Peter who asked it, and what he said was, “Lord, where are you going?”
- ✦ They certainly knew a part of it, didn’t they, just as we know. He was going into the night, to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane, under the ancient olive trees that are still there today, to the God he called Abba, Daddy. His prayer would be a plea not to let the awful thing happen to him that he knew was already happening. And the Gospels do not record that he got so much as a whisper in reply.
- ✦ He was going alone, he was going though he didn’t want to go, and he was going scared out of his wits. He sweated blood is the way the gospels put it.
- ✦ In our lives, we ask the same question that Peter asked, which was in essence, “Are you going anywhere at all or just going out, like a light.” And it’s the question we ask about Jesus and about ourselves. When the time comes, does life run out? Did Jesus’ life run out? Do we run out?

- ✦ “You will seek me,” Jesus says, and he is right. We seek for answers to our questions—questions about life and death, questions about what is right and what is wrong, questions about the unspeakable things that go on in the world. We seek for strength, for peace, for a path through the wilderness. And we seek Christ.
- ✦ And Jesus responds, “Let not your hearts be troubled,” even in the midst of his most terrible time. “Take heart, believe in God, believe also in me.”
- ✦ Beuchner says, “well, we are believers, you and I, that’s why we are here—at least would-be believers, part-time believers, believers with our fingers crossed. Believing in him is not the same as believing *things about* him such as that he was born of a virgin and raised Lazarus from the dead.
- ✦ Instead it is a matter of giving our hearts to him, of come hell or high water putting our money on him, the way a child is meant to believe in a mother or a father, the way a mother or a father is meant to believe in a child.”
- ✦ The question for us tonight is this: “What if this were your last supper, your last time to express your love?” Not only to those around you, but to the One who has gone to prepare a place for you, to the One who is the source of love itself.
- ✦ As we gather tonight in for this meal that signifies remembrance and deliverance, what is it that you need to be saved, delivered from by God? The same sins of the world are here: enslavement to things that hurt us and each other, oppression, violence, vengeance, and fear. They have simply taken on slightly different forms.
- ✦ Would others know you as one of His disciples by your love? Would they recognize you through the way you serve others in love? In a few moments we will remember through the ritual of washing one another’s hands the kind of love Jesus embodied and asks us to live out as well.
- ✦ May you seek to make your hands His holy hands for our world so in need of healing and reconciling love.

- ✠ May you savor this Maundy Thursday meal as if it were your last, and may you live in Him, eat with Him, serve with Him, trust with Him, for the rest of your days, and in the life to come.
- ✠ Amen.