

Maundy Thursday April 14, 2022

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**Kingdom Table**

Church of the Good Shepherd, Athens, OH

There are many kinds of tables. Perhaps you have heard of some of them: the Round Table, the Red Table, Turquoise Tables, or Table Talk. All these tables are places where people gather to discuss issues or engage in conversations. The Round Table comes from the legends of King Arthur. It was a symbol of working together for the greater good and has evolved to mean a discussion where everyone present has an equal opportunity to speak. The Red Table is hosted by a celebrity who discusses taboo topics. Turquoise Table is a movement started several years ago to provide a safe place for neighbors to get to know each other – we have one on the front porch of the church. Table Talk is another venue for people to share their thoughts or opinions on contemporary issues.

While all these tables have their differences, their shared common purpose is to be a place for invited individuals to share their opinions or get to know each other.

Tonight, we are reminded of a different kind of table: the Kingdom Table. Tonight, the Church remembers the last time Jesus gathered with his disciples before his death and resurrection. It's interesting to ponder what Jesus did and did not do knowing he was about to suffer and die. He did not buy elaborate gifts for all his followers. He did not overindulge in his favorite pleasures. He did not close himself off from everyone to write down all his important ideas or opinions so they would be preserved for posterity. He didn't do anything self-indulgent.

Instead, Jesus gathered his disciples around a table to share a religious ritual and receive a new commandment. In John's Gospel Jesus washed his disciples' feet to teach them how they are to live his new commandment – serving each other out of love. Tonight, we heard from Luke's Gospel which leaves out the foot washing and instead includes the words we hear whenever we celebrate Holy Communion. This is what makes the table where Jesus gathered with his disciples a Kingdom table.

Both actions: the washing of feet and institution of Holy Communion embody Jesus' commandment to love as Jesus loves, with his whole self. Love that is not self-indulgent, it is selfless.

This love is difficult to live into, which is why Jesus gave us Holy Communion. It is food that is both of earth and heaven, intended to nourish us with the stuff of God's kingdom to help empower us to live that love in the world, with our families, friends, in our schools, workplaces, wherever we happen to be, whatever community we happen to be part of. Holy Communion is not magic, it is

better than magic. It is a sacrament. It is, as the prayer book says: “an outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace, given by Christ as sure and certain means by which we receive that grace.”

On the night Jesus knew was his last before suffering and dying, he gathered his disciples around a table. He did not exclude the disciple he knew would betray him. Nor did He exclude the disciples who were fighting over who was the most important. He didn't exclude the disciples who didn't understand. He didn't exclude the disciples who irritated him. He included them all in all their dysfunction; showing us the Table of God's Kingdom has room for everyone, even those we might not want there.

At God's Kingdom Table, Jesus fed everyone with food of God's Kingdom: Christ's body and blood, the grace of forgiveness, salvation, and love.

To this day, the Table of God's Kingdom is one place heaven and earth meet, which is one reason we call it an altar, and why when we approach the altar we are asked to do with reverence and respect. It isn't magic. It is better than magic, it is where heaven and earth meet through our offering of bread and wine that God, through the Holy Spirit, makes Christ present in that bread and wine. This is not meant to be understood the way we understand physics or mathematics, nor through emotion. But how you might appreciate beauty that can't be captured in words, colors, or the image itself. That is why sacraments are also holy mysteries.

The Kingdom Table is one of Christ's lasting gifts. It may not be a place to gather and share opinions, but it is where heaven and earth meet in Jesus' selfless love. It is a Table we are all invited to, so Christ can nourish us in this same love so that we might embody his love, forgiveness, healing, and salvation in the world.