

Enough to Last 'til Morning

“Eat and drink it anew.”

Mark 16:1-8

*A FIRST-PERSON DRAMATIC MONOLOGUE
(THE DISCIPLE, BARTHOLOMEW)*

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Maundy Thursday
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First United Methodist Church of Royal Oak, Michigan

The Sponge

The street that passes by our upper room began as the road leading through the City gates; it winds through the buildings and market squares and leads to a gate on the other side, a back door, as it were, and a hill of death. I see him, there from my distance: forsaken, beaten beyond recognition, and so close to death. They have been taunting him, wagging their beards and shouting: “He saved others, why doesn’t he save himself?” “Hail King of the Jews! If you are the Son of God, why come down from the cross!”

I can scarce hear his replies, if they are replies at all: something about *forgiveness*, *for they know not what they do*. Now this, and I hear it plainly: “I thirst.” A guard is pouring from a wineskin onto a sponge...he places the sponge on a pole and raises it to Jesus’ lips...and he drinks.

Pathetic, I think; it is not at all a time of strength and challenge like the times we always had.

It started so differently, under a tree. I was tasting figs and studying the Law as I rested in the cool of the shade when Philip called my name. “Bartholomew! We found the Messiah, the very one Moses and the prophets foresaw! It’s Yehoshua ben Joseph of Nazareth!”

I loved my friends and held them in high regard for their ability to fish. Yet, they were the kind of people that easily believed in the occurrence of miracles ever-tending to over-react. You know the sort. Truth, to me, is sacred. If I am to believe in something, I must be certain. I have no patience to be fooled or, worse yet, live in a lie. I was not convinced.

I remember laughing; “Nazareth! the mud town in the hills? Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

I wanted to respect him though; so I asked Philip to take me to meet him so I could see for myself. Across the Jordan River to Capernaum on the Lake: he took me to the simple, young rabbi sitting in the house. I hadn't yet been announced; there was no chance for an introduction when he looked up suddenly as though he had been expecting us and said straight-away, "Here is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit."

I have no patience for idle compliments, no matter how fortunate one is in guessing my character. "And where did you get to know me?" I asked. Then he said that which he could not have known: "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." He had not even seen me and yet he knew me. Who else could this be, but the one whom Philip had said he was? "Rabbi," I said with a prayer, "you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel." Then it was Jesus who laughed, and he said, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You'll see greater things than these. No kidding, you see Heaven itself torn open and angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

And we did. From that point to this, I saw wonder after wonder. Some will speak of the miracles: of unlikely moments when Jesus opened the eyes of the blind; fed multitudes with only a little bread; walked on water; or turned water into wine. These he did, and every time he did so we could see the Kingdom of God break forth with power. Yet, these were but signs of the real miracle he worked. Every day he opened access to God for those who had been closed off. This was the real miracle. He brought the compassion of God into the world. He healed people with God's forgiveness and gave a future to those who had been bound in life's traps. Jesus, more than anything, tore open God's Heaven and let the angels descend and dance with others: this is the miracle I saw.

You might say that every where we went, he shared God's abundance with others. His love and joy were meat for the soul, nourishment that gave life and strength to the spirit. And he, himself, was bread and wine that gave sustenance to us all.

The Meal

Shame, how Judas objected when finally someone did something for him. It was after the procession and after Jesus entered the Temple and cast the money changers from its courts. He had been teaching daily into the week. Each evening we retired from the City and went to Bethany, where so many believe in him, love, and follow. This is the settlement of Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus, Jesus friend who had

died and was called back into life by the Master's voice. Early in the week, yet, we were given a meal at the home of Simon who had been a leper cleansed by Jesus.

While Jesus reclined at the table, a woman approached him with a pure white jar made of fine alabaster filled with spikenard, an oil imported from the mountains far to the East. It must have cost a sum equal to a year of wages. Then, she broke open the jar; she poured the oil on Jesus' head as though she were anointing a king. The fragrance of the nard filled the room as we all caught our breath.

It was as if in a moment someone had destroyed a whole flock of sheep, or set a house afire. Some were incensed at the waste: "This could have been sold," they said, "the poor fed!" And they shamed her for what she had done; and it felt so righteous. We had thought we were speaking out of the lessons Jesus taught.

But, we hadn't understood about abundance. We misunderstood what it means to be lavish in showing love. Jesus had taught us about that, too. In fact, we would not have objected so if we had listened: that true almsgiving is not a matter of austerity and duty. It comes from a reckless sharing of God's abundant love. "The poor will always be with you," he said; "she has poured out love without reserve." It's in that spirit of loving Jesus that he wants us to pour out our means that the poor may be as the rich. He is the bread and the wine, he is the abundance that sustains us and creates in us the sharing heart.

None of us understood; especially Judas who could not accept it. He left us for some time that night, and none of us knew where he went.

Passover, and Thomas and I were sent ahead to get a room and prepare it for the Seder. We were greeted by a man carrying a jar of water who led us into a house. This was all as Jesus described; and just as he said, the owner of the house took us to a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. We began at once to prepare the lamb and the boiled eggs, the bitter herbs and unleavened bread, the charoset and the salt water, the greens and the cups of wine. We placed it all at the table, with a place provided for each of the family we had become.

The rest arrived and as we were settled, each in our places Jesus told us, "No kidding: one of you is going to betray me, one who is eating with me." No! Who would ever do that? Which one of us could it be? Each of us looked at him, I think each looked full in his face saying, "I mean it, Master; not!" Then he said it would be one of

the twelve, one of us: his inner circle; one dipping his bread in the bowl with him. Then, did I see Judas quickly withdraw his hand?

The Seder is a meal that makes us who we are: surely the people of covenant. We gather 'round the table with the foods eaten on this night and we remember who we are and from where we have come. We find the bonds between us stronger than life as we ask the questions and pray the answers of God's salvation and everlasting compassion. Every time the bread is broken or the cup is lifted, we celebrate and we hope.

During the supper Jesus took the bread and he broke it and said the words that were never said before: he said, "This is my body...broken for you." Then, after the supper he took the cup and from the heart of our tradition added the words, "This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood: poured out for many." And he said, "Seriously: I will never drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Never? Will he never drink of the cup, never taste of the meal that names us until that Day of all days when God's redemption is won for all and the struggle with sin and death and evil is over? Never? Not until peace and justice are established, our distance from God closed, and God's love is all and in all?

Never, until then? O, will that be long...or will it be soon?

Eating, Drinking Anew in the Kingdom

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Is this the time when he drinks it anew in the Kingdom of God – that great heavenly banquet when reconciliation with God takes place? Then, if we should ever break the bread and share the cup as he told us to: could it be that we will be there with him?