

# Sermon: Easter 5

The Rev. Mike Wernick

April 24, 2016

Year C

Acts 11:1-18

Psalm 148

Revelation 21:1-6

John 13:31-35

Today's reading from Acts... tells us about Peter's experience of inclusion... he avoided certain foods as being unclean... but he explained that in a vision... a voice from heaven said: *What God has made clean... you must not call profane...* and when he was questioned by some about those with whom he ate... he told the story about how three outsiders from Caesarea... a Roman city where allegiances might be suspect... about how these three were told by an angel... to find Peter... so they and their families could be saved... their concerns were silenced... and they praised God and said: *Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life...*

Peter told this story to those who questioned his actions... they didn't argue... they didn't erect defenses... but simply told a story... and listened... made connections... and the circle had grown... those who were thought to be standing outside the circle... were now included...

There was a story in *The Christian Century* that reminded me of a similar experience of inclusion during seminary... on every Thursday evening during the academic year... the Lutherans and the Episcopalians broke bread together... we gathered at Bexley House... a house right across the street from Trinity Lutheran Seminary... a house that contained bedrooms converted into offices... and a large living room that was used as a classroom... and a kitchen that was used as a kitchen... and we gathered on Thursday evenings during the academic year... we gathered as the week wound down our collective energy... we gathered for the transition from weekday classes... to weekend formation and fieldwork... for Common Meal... and in that transition... the house itself became an expression of the Heavenly Banquet...

Bexley Hall began the practice of hosting Thursday evening meals... perhaps out of gratitude for its shared relationship with the Lutherans... seminarians took turns hosting a meal for the entire community... we either cooked a meal... or brought in Chinese... or pizza... or Mexican food... and beer and wine... and other equally attractive non-alcoholic beverages... and we sat on the half-brick wall that encircled the front porch... we sat on the living room furniture... and the extra folding chairs that had been brought over... we sat on the stairs... we sat in a room that had been converted into the St. Helena Chapel... we sat wherever we could... because there were often more of us... upwards for fifty each week... than there were respectable places to sit... but we sat where we could because we were community...

We were Lutherans and Episcopalians... we were Christians with differences... but we didn't think of them as being divisive or problems... we just experienced them as part of God's diversity... the Called to Common Mission covenant filled in the valleys and made the high places low... so there was a road for us to travel on... together... our differences didn't divide us... but unified us...

And in this article... Trinity Lutheran Seminary professor Emlyn Ott wrote: *Common Meal is about ecumenical commitment... but not just that... it is about offering a morsel to others regardless of our agreements or disagreements... but not just that... it is about servant leadership... but not just that...*

There is grief in that community now... because Bexley Seabury is leaving Columbus and moving to Chicago... and many are wondering how they will be able to retain the experience of Common Meal... of the Heavenly Banquet... when that fifteen-year relationship ends... when the Episcopal perspectives that formed Lutheran seminarians... and the Lutheran perspectives that formed Episcopal seminarians... no longer move both ways... when Common Meal becomes a single Lutheran meal... if it continues at all...

Jesus and the disciples had just finished their own Heavenly Banquet... the Last Supper... the Institution of the Eucharist was their own Common Meal... breaking bread and sharing wine in a way that made all of them One... that made what connected them more important than what divided them... a Common Meal that made the stories of their lives points of unity... instead of arguments for division... a Common Meal that united the disciples... who like us... almost always had a hard time understanding... incorporating... and living out... what Jesus was talking about...

There are more arguments in the world these days... than stories... the world is full of people positioning themselves to be right... which means that some will be wrong... there are arguments meant to include... which means that some will be excluded... and there are some who don't tell their stories... because they've been hurt so much... or hurt so often by those who are close to them... or by their workplaces... or by other communities... that the pain they feel will make their stories sound like arguments... but Peter didn't argue with those who questioned him... he told a story... and his transparency made him vulnerable... and it was his vulnerability that changed their hearts...

This is where the glory of the world exists [head]... this is where God's Glory lives [heart]... this is where the commandments of the world exist [head]... this is where God's commandments live [heart]... this is where what the world loves exists [head]... this is where God's love lives [heart]... our transformation doesn't take place here [head]... it takes place here [heart]... and as we grow in our willingness to be hurt... not a seeking after... not an eagerness... but a willingness to be hurt... as we let go of expecting that things will always go our way... but are appreciative when they do... as we do what we can to secure a particular outcome... but then get out of our own ways so the Holy Spirit can direct that outcome... we move from the mind of the world here [head]... to the mind of Christ here [heart]... to the mind of Christ here [heart]... when we consider it from the world's guideposts... the journey from here to here is a difficult

one... it seems to offer little return on investment... but we seek treasures in heaven... where there are no moths... or rust... or thieves...

Jesus' commandment to us... is to love one another... and love is patient and kind... it avoids arguments and seeks unity... he also said that we could not go where he was going... I'm adding the word "Yet..." because in the next chapter of John... he says: *In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so... would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you... I will come again and will take you to myself... so that where I am... there you may be also.* We were all together with Jesus at Common Meal... we could share who we were... and tell our stories... without argument... we could acknowledge our differences but still say to each other... *sawu bona*... I see you... and in every connection we made... in every common experience we shared... in every meal we shared... we washed away more of the "you can't come..." so we could see more of the "can't come yet..." we washed away more of the boundaries that our histories had erected out of mud and fear... and did the best we could to move from here [head] to here [heart]... it's what we do here too... as we seek integration instead of separation... as we weave our traditions into a richer tapestry... and as we learn to recapture storytelling and find unity within our diversity...

The outer sign of our baptism... is water... God invites you to remember your baptismal vows every time you wash your hands... or bathe... or drink a glass of water... to let that water wash away the boundaries society erects with mud and fear... to remember that every time anyone draws a line between themselves and the Other... that God is on the other side of that line... and to remember that Jesus came to teach us... that the protected inner circles of the past and the present... aren't God's inner circles... the diameter of God's sheepfold is so broad... that there's no one outside of it... and the Common Meal we share here... is for everyone who comes...

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