

The Things we Prepare

Vanessa Cardinale 8/1/10

Hosea 11:1-11

Luke 12:13-21

“Perhaps the world begins here, at the table. No matter what, we must eat to live”

These are the opening words of a poem by Joy Harjo - it is speaking about a kitchen table, but I am going to take the liberty of using it when we talk about our table - the altar, the communion table.

the poet continues: “The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table so it has been since creation, and it will go on.”

What are the gifts we bring to this table? We gather round it weekly, and once a month we come to share a meal together, to remember a story together.

And so many of our faith community’s stories have to do with food and meals. Today’s text is no exception. For what is the grain being stored but food?

All the talk of grain and whether there is enough, or of someone hoarding grain. This story line is a thread that binds together our sacred text, the text that tells our story. We look to the book of Genesis. The systems of grain distribution that develop out of abundance or famine shape the course of our story - for it is because Joseph did not simply give grain to those who were hungry during the seven years of famine, but rather had them sell their land, and then themselves, to the Pharaoh to eat, that the people of Israel became an enslaved people. It is not until the Exodus when God’s food distribution system, that of Manna, is spelled out: take as much as you need and share the rest. There is enough. Trust God. Jesus’ ministry took God’s message of abundance and ran with it, for can we imagine Jesus without his ministry of sharing meals with all sorts of people and feeding thousands of hungry people?

My time living in Las Anonas, our sister community in El Salvador, taught me a lot about the biblical world. All this talk of grain, and storing it. I actually lived in the room with the family’s grain silo. Someone from the family I lived with would come in everyday, take some corn out, walk down the street to grind it in the community corn grinder, and then bring it home to start making the tortillas for the day. In Los Anonas, a family’s grain was shared with an elderly person or young mother, or anyone who had fallen on hard times. If there was grain, it was shared among the number of those gathered. When food was prepared, it was prepared in quantities that spoke to the communal nature of eating - I have a great picture of me stirring a pot of food and the pot was sitting on the ground on a fire, and it literally came up almost to my chest. Tamales are never prepared in quantities of less than 50, and often more.

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This Sunday we gather together around the table to share a particular liturgical act: share a meal and remember the story, our story, of a meal that Jesus shared. We enact this meal together, as a symbol of our faith. Liturgy is the greek word for “the work of the people.” It might be difficult to think of worship time as work, since for so many it is actually a sabbath time, a time away from work, but in a sense if our work is in partnership with God and each other to build the kingdom of God here on earth, what better place to start than right here?

Another way we can think about worship and in particular this sacred meal is that this time, right here every week, is our practice space for the kingdom of God. When we come together to worship, we show up to try on the part, to live into this work that is required of us - the work that we are called to do in love. We come here to practice the work to be done to build the kingdom, and we also come here to glimpse that very kingdom, here, together.

And it is with that work and that presence that we are confronted with the question God poses in Jesus’ parable: It is at the thought that the rich man would store up his grain that God answers: ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’

These gifts, brought forth and prepared, set on this table, whose will they be? The gifts we bring to the table are the very tangible, but also the less tangible. We bring food, and we also bring ourselves.

Harjo’s poem continues in talking about the table:

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under it.

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

A table becomes a place where all who gather around it become family. Any of us who have hosted or been a guest at a holiday meal can attest to this. It is the act of sharing food that binds us together. The words of the prophet Hosea call us to images of a family, of God caring for God’s people as a parent for her child. He channels the voice of God in saying “I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks. I bent down to them and fed them.” We gather here as family, and through this act we practice how we are called to function within the larger human family: we share of God’s abundance. We feed each other. We offer up our selves to be of service

to one other. We love one another. Recalling the words of the poet, we instruct each other on how to be human. It is here, at this table, that we put ourselves back together again. It is at this table that we find healing and wholeness, and in turn we are commissioned to feed and heal.

In that putting ourselves together again, we are also committing ourselves to the task of serving God in the work of serving a broken community. Locally, hunger is a daily reality of many of our brothers and sisters. How is it that we encounter these people as well at the communion table?

There has been some exciting conversation happening within the Tabernacle community about how to connect communion with feeding hungry people. Jean has shared with us this morning from her own experience what it means to feed people.

Some of the ways in which individuals and communities have lived out the call of the communion table can help us find inspiration as we consider how to connect our communion with the larger community. One example is Sara Miles, author of the books *Jesus Freak* and *Take this Bread*. She is the founder of the Food Pantry at St. Gregory of Nissa Episcopal church in San Francisco. Sara had a conversion experience while taking communion and felt called to open a food pantry where farm fresh food distributed to the community right from the altar of the church.

Over the next months I hope we can continue to process what this call of the communion table means to our community and how we will respond. Because, this very morning, our lives are being demanded of us - how will we respond? What have we prepared?

Harjo's poem ends recalling the complexity of experiences that are brought to the table:

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella
in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place
to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate
the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared
our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow.
We pray of suffering and remorse.
We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table,
while we are laughing and crying,
eating of the last sweet bite.

At this table, where we encounter God's kingdom both here and not yet, let us present our whole selves in service of God, each other, and the world.

Perhaps the World Ends Here

by Joy Harjo

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