

Easter 3 Year A: 29 / 30 April 2017
St. James Episcopal Church, Clinton NY
The Rev. Gary Cyr, Rector

Eucharist with a Small 'e': A Moment of Thanksgiving

Psalm 116:1-3, 10-17
Acts 2:14a,36-41;
1 Peter 1:17-23
Luke 24:13-35

"...receive the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you...[for] everyone whom the Lord our God calls to [God's Self]."

One of the customs that has gone by the wayside during the past generation is the concept of a family meal. In today's fast-pace world where productivity is prized over contemplation, where reward is offered to those who give the most of themselves, who sacrifice personal time in dedication to their labors, the common meal, or family meal, has gone the way of the Dodo bird. Or should I say: the no-no bird.

No, we don't have time for that; no, I can't be there for the music recital or a particular sporting event, I have a deadline to meet; this project is important and I can't spare the time but I'll make it up to you. Does any of this sound familiar? Our fast pace productivity driven culture makes demands upon us, sells us a fictitious lifestyle we buy into and questions how we spend our personal time that leaves very little room for community building, much less connecting as family or time for couples to enjoy each other's company. Carrying this further, we measure success with material goods and job promotions, even the vacations we take. Things are so fast paced eating is a chore, much less the idea of taking time to cook a meal, whether for ourselves or for others. So, we dine out more, eat on the run, get something on the way to that next important appointment. What is it, anyway, to sit down with others and share a common meal? Nothing but a waste of time, our culture's most precious commodity.

Imagine if the followers of Jesus had such an attitude. Imagine Jesus' followers who are walking along the road to their homes, feeling dejected and forlorn, discouraged and heartbroken, saddened by recent events where they saw Jesus crucified and buried only to be told his body might have been taken from its burial place, if they hadn't taken time to invite the stranger (who we know is Jesus) to supper with them. What if they were too busy, they just had to get back to tent making, bread

baking, fishing the seas. The loss would be that they would not have encountered the living Christ. They would have sacrificed a resurrection experience that is most notably found in the breaking of bread – the sharing of a common meal.

We sacrifice much in our busy lives when we don't take the time to share a meal together, to get to know one another, to hear each other's stories, our struggles and our accomplishments. We sacrifice knowing our neighbor. These are the ideas that Marian Winter, a Roman Catholic nun and professor of liturgics and ritual study, explores in her book *Eucharist with a small "e"*.

By describing eucharist (which is a Greek word that translates as thanksgiving; to give thanks) as being with a small "e," Winter explores the varied times in the New Testament (Second Testament) where Jesus shares a meal with others and determines that each of these moments of breaking bread is a eucharist – a giving of thanks – a eucharist as vital and genuine as any Sunday Eucharist (the kind we describe with a capital E). We call the eucharist with the capital E sacramental. Winter argues that eucharist with a small "e" is equally sacramental – maybe even more so, for it happens in the ordinariness of a lived life, in the midst of family or friends. Even in the midst of strangers.

The two unnamed individuals in today's gospel invited a stranger to share a meal with them and in the moment of breaking bread, they experience the living Christ. It is a sacred moment, a sacramental moment on par with the last meal Jesus had with his disciples.

Imagine, if you will, embodying Jesus' actions – particularly his many instances of sharing in a meal with marginalized and ostracized individuals and communities – is it too hard to see these as sacred moments in Jesus' ministry, to see and experience them as sacramental moments where the veil between the sacred and the secular is so thin one cannot discern any difference? That is the crux of Winter's argument about eucharist with a small "e".

I am heartened by today's gospel reading, as it speaks to me of receiving the other as if they were Christ. Chapter 53 of the Rule of St. Benedict (a document that is one of the primary cornerstones of my faith and spiritual practice) begins: "All guests who present themselves are to be welcomed as Christ, for he himself will say: *I was a stranger and you welcomed me.*" This simple idea of receiving the other as Christ lies at the fundamental core of Christian hospitality. It is relational without being conditional.

The followers of Jesus, who were walking on the road to their homes, found a kindred spirit in a fellow traveler who seemed not to know what had recently transpired. They didn't ask what the stranger did for a living, where they came from, what their religious belief or practice was. They simply invited that stranger on the road to share a meal with them, to stay the night (for travel during this period of time was unsafe, especially at night). Their act of hospitality was returned in experiencing the risen Christ who is revealed in the breaking of the bread.

What do we lose in no longer sharing a common meal? What do we sacrifice at the altar of commerce and business, to the gods of productivity and efficiency? What do we sacrifice when we no longer take time to be in the moment with friends, loved ones, family and our spouses, partners, companions?

A moment of thanksgiving. A moment of experiencing the living Christ in our loved ones, our friends, our neighbors and most especially the stranger. We give up a moment to offer thanks to God for those we share life with.

One reviewer of Winter's book describes it as "a clarion call for Christians to live sacramental lives always giving thanks to G-d." The story of the Road to Emmaus embodies this idea of sacramental living, of taking time to share with the other a moment that can become grace-filled, where we can experience the living Christ in each other. How are you and I living sacramental lives always giving things to G-d? If we were walking on that road to Emmaus, would we take time to speak to the stranger and invite them into our lives by sharing a meal together? What do you and I give up when we don't take time to share in a common meal together or to be present to one another? Where do you find the risen Christ in your life?

Fr. Gary †