

In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer, and Renewing Spirit. Amen.

Jesus, in this holy week, has entered Jerusalem with shouts of praise and palms strewn in his path; he has driven the money changers and the animal sellers out of the Temple; he has found understanding in one of the scribes who agrees that the work of love is more important than the business of burnt offerings in the Temple; and he has had a disciple, holding nothing back, in an act of extravagant love break open a jar of costly ointment so that she can anoint Jesus for the events which will face him this week. Jesus has threatened the power structure of the Temple authorities, the delicate compromise they've made with the Roman occupiers to keep the daily life of the Jewish people firmly in the status quo: A few holding wealth, power and influence, and many struggling to face the daily task of survival.

And on the night before he dies, Jesus takes bread, blesses it and shares it with his disciples and calls it his body; then Jesus takes a cup of wine, and they all drink from it; he tells them that this is his blood. Jesus gives them, and us, a shared meal not just to remember him, but to bring us into something new, a new Way, a new covenant.

One of the things we've longed for in this year of pandemic was the Eucharist; we still cannot share a cup, as the twelve did at this meal. But we've come to associate the breaking of bread and the drinking of wine at the altar with what it means to be community, what it means to believe, what it means to be beloved. I so miss that. But returning to the last supper in the Gospel of Mark after a year of pandemic separation, I am reminded that what Jesus did that night was much more.

Jesus spent this holy week confronting the powers of the Roman state and their collaborators in the Temple in Jerusalem; it was the natural progression of his teaching. He confronts a power structure that is meant to benefit a few, and that has turned the activity of the Temple into a business and another arm of imperial power. Jesus not only teaches that God calls us to the work of love, Jesus acts out that truth. As scholar John Dominic Crossan puts it, Jesus makes it clear that worship is no substitute for justice. The ritual of the Temple is no substitute for the work of love. Our relationship with God is never to be part of a compromise in order to gain security, power, or wealth.

One of our Eucharistic prayers in the Prayer Book reminds us to come to the table not for solace only, but for strength; not for pardon only, but for renewal. The table at the Eucharist is meant to feed us so that we can be sent out from it strengthened and renewed in the Way Jesus showed us; the way of justice and love. On this last night with his disciples, Jesus tells them to eat and drink his very life, his teaching, his acts of love and justice. The word incorporate means to take into a body, to make into a body; Jesus asks us to incorporate his life into ours, to inwardly digest it, as the only food that will truly feed us. Jesus asks us to follow in his way so that we are transformed, so that we embody his Word of truth and of liberation and forgiveness. This is what the meal meant.

On that blessed, blessed day when we all can finally gather at the table for the rite of this meal, let us remember that as rich and regenerating it is for us to be community in that way, to be in communion that way -- let us remember that this meal is meant to point us further, to move us farther along the Way. Coming to the table is no substitute for the work of love and justice; Jesus poured himself out and fed us with this true bread and wine so that it would strengthen and renew us to bring his Word and live his Way in a world that refused to know him.

“Until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God”; following Jesus in the Way does not mean only going to church and taking communion, though that is where we find teaching, nourishment, and community.

Following Jesus in the Way means embodying his love, his justice, and his actions that even in anguish said “Abba, not what I want but what you want” until he returns to us again. Being away from the Lord’s table in this year of pandemic has *not* meant that we were prevented partaking in the Eucharist of being Christ’s body; because we were and are still called not to just meet at the table, but to make alive Jesus’ Way, to feed the world with justice and to pour out ourselves to one another in love. This is how we most deeply and truly remember Jesus’ last night. Amen.