

A reflection for Maundy Thursday 2020

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me

Meals matter, don't they.

As humans, we enjoy eating together and one of the great sadnesses of our current situation is that many people are eating alone, every day, every meal. Children (and some of us who are older!) cannot have birthday parties. There have been no wakes after the recent funerals I have conducted. Our friends at the synagogue cannot share the Passover together this year. And some families, in our own parish, are struggling to provide meals for their children, or receiving help to do so.

Meals matter.

Jesus' disciples were used to eating and drinking with him. Living where they did, doing what they did, they were used to fish suppers by the sea – obviously without chips and with rather bony fish!

Jesus' first miracle was at a wedding party at Cana – with good and lots of wine. He ate a meal with Zacchaeus, the tax collector and another with Simon, a leper – at which meal his feet were anointed by a woman.

And here were rather less intimate gatherings such as the feeding of 5000 people on the Galilean hillside.

Jesus' disciples were used to eating and drinking with him.

Meals mattered to them too.

This evening we would usually be gathering to remember perhaps his most famous meal – which was to be his last. Sadly, we can't do that and so we will have an Agape meal alone or with those we live with, but not our whole family. Or we will participate in an online Eucharist.

The Eucharist that we would celebrate is all about eating and drinking together – to remember. To remember Jesus' last meal, which was very likely a Passover meal – at which Jesus and his friends remembered the Passover of the Angel of Death 1200 years earlier and the Exodus of their ancestors from Egypt to the Promised Land. The food eaten and the songs sung and the

words from scripture re-told remembered God's goodness to the people and inspired them to work for the good of the nation.

Jesus gave that food and drink new meaning, which probably shocked them. How could they eat and drink his body and blood? What on earth did he mean? But Jesus did what he had done at all meals before and what was always done at Passover – he broke the bread at supper and that image was imprinted on their minds so that when, on the evening of the resurrection, two disciples met a stranger, they recognised him as Jesus the minute he took the bread into his hands and broke it. They remembered – and they were re-membered – put back together again (Luke 24).

Jesus had said 'whenever you eat and drink, do in remembrance of me'. It was such a simple thing to do – something we have to do – but a powerful way to remember.

And of course today, when we can, we remember things with meals all the time such as birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, Christmas, funerals... And those meals too 'put us back together' because they draw families and friends together, they heal hurts and offer community.

So, in our symbolic meal the words of the Eucharistic prayer are very powerful and deeply imbued with meaning. They tell the story of our deliverance – it is called anamnesis – remembering.

For Jews at the heart of the Passover was the annual thankful remembrance of God's mighty act of deliverance. In the last supper Jesus gave that new meaning as he prepared them for an even greater deliverance – the coming of God's kingdom through his atoning death and resurrection.

The German scholar Joachim Jeremias wrote, '*do this in my remembrance means that, when the community comes together for the breaking of the bread, God is being sought to 'remember his Messiah' and to remember his Messiah by bringing about his Kingdom, so that the Eucharist becomes a kind of dramatisation of the prayer, 'thy kingdom come'*'.

For the early Christians there was a double poignancy to their keeping of the Eucharist. At a very simple level they remembered Jesus. As the very first disciples kept the Eucharist there will have flooded back memories of meals with him – and that re-membered them as they were made whole, refreshed and healed. Memories are important, they can help us to live life in the present.

But people cannot live in the past, they must also look to the future and so for the early Christians there was a deeper level of remembering in the Eucharist. It was a reminder that they were charged with being the vessels through which God was to bring in his kingdom.

And that is true for us too.

We cannot physically be together for a Eucharist this night of all nights, but we can remember.

We can remember the other members of our fellowship, scattered across the town. We can remember our whole parish, our nation, our world. We can remember in prayer those who are suffering in these so difficult times- sick bereaved, scared. We can remember in prayer those who are caring and nursing and healing the sick – and burying the dead and comforting the bereaved.

And even if we cannot eat the bread and drink the wine of the kingdom, in what we can do, together and alone, we can each be re-remembered through our union with Christ and all Christians – past present and future. We are tired and broken people, all of us carrying burdens known and unknown to others – here we are re-made and nurtured through the meals we eat and through the prayers we offer. As we turn to him in remembrance, we are re-made in his likeness and joined to his body.

What we do tonight is at the heart of our faith, whether we do it alone or online or in our families, we join ourselves with all Christians in all time.

At end of the Passover meal Jesus' disciples were scattered just as we are now. But that did not prevent them from being part of his body. They were re-remembered through him. We are too.

If you choose to have an Agape meal, or if you watch online, be aware of the breaking of the bread and of its reminder of the brokenness of the world – so obvious right now – which is healed through Jesus' broken body. Whatever form our meal takes, through it we are called to remember and to help in remembering the world.