

## “A MEAL FOR THE WOUNDED”

Maundy Thursday -- Pastor Nass

Texts: Exodus 12:1-14; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17 & 31b-35

Dear pilgrims of the passion, faithful followers of the unfolding drama of holy week:

Throughout this Lenten season our attention was and still is focused on the people who and events which administered physical and psychological blows that left visible wounds on the man from Galilee, the son of man, Jesus who is for us and the world, the Christ, God's own messiah. Beatings, betrayal, denials and abandonment each incrementally shoved him to the margin of existence and finally, over the precipice of death itself. But before that final and lethal wound was administered and knowing that the end was imminent, the wounded one turns from his own wounds and becomes the healer of the walking wounded who were there in the upper room and all those who would later become his followers.

On this Maundy Thursday -- which for Jesus and his disciples was already Friday -- only hours before he would be hung upon a cross to die for the sins of the world, in the celebrative setting of the Passover Seder (meal), Jesus institutes a new covenant, makes a new promise, a healing gift in a meal for the wounded who were there and for those who were yet to be in the upper room. As wounded recipients of that meal, I invite you to look once again and learn anew the promise of this meal and experience its healing power.

We look first at the setting for the meal. To read the story of Passover is to remember the moorings of our faith. The ritual of the Jewish Passover table, particularly its emphasis on a meal of remembrance, shapes our understanding of the Sacrament of Holy Communion. In it past, present, and future generations are invited to participate and to ask four questions, the most meaningful of which is: "From what tyranny has and is God delivering us? The Passover answer began with the deliverance of the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. When future generations celebrated Passover, their remembrance was not of some *past* event. For them, the past always becomes present. You and I are the ones whom God freed from slavery; you and I are the ones whom God redeems with an outstretched arm. Our meal for the wounded is not just a recollection of a past event, wonderful as it might be.

When Christians celebrate the Lord's Supper, the past becomes present. The bread and wine are not simply memory joggers that remind us of some significant event that happened long ago. Christ himself is present in the bread and wine to heal the wounds caused by our sin and to smother us with the kind of affection offered only to an intimate member of the family. As the menu of the Seder's bitter herbs, salty water, and sauce made the eater one with the slaves, so Christ becomes one with us in the menu of bread and the wine.

During the Seder four cups of wine are drunk at designated times during the meal. The four cups are reminders of God's four promises in Exodus 6: "I will free you from being slaves (cup 1), I will redeem you with an outstretched arm (cup 2), I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God (cup 3), and I will bring you to the land I swore ...to give to forefathers (cup 4).

Biblical scholars almost universally believe that it was the third cup after the meal which Jesus used to institute the Holy Supper. The promise of the third cup in Exodus 6 is: "I will take you as my own people and I will be your God." You see, not only has God chosen you, you are his favorite, unique, and precious person.

It is helpful to see this selection against the backdrop of courtship and marriage in biblical times among the Hebrew people. When a boy reached manhood and had finished his apprenticeship, he would look over the field of available and prospective maidens, make a priority list, and consult with his father. His father then would contact the father of girl number one and set up a meeting to first determine her availability and then to establish the "bride price." "How much you give me for my daughter," was the question asked. The boy's father would then begin by offering as little as possible; the girl's father would ask for more than he expected to get, and then the negotiation would begin and could last as long as three days. Once the 'bride price' was agreed upon, three cups of wine were poured, one for each of the fathers and one for the prospective groom who would then take his cup of wine and offer it to his prospective bride. By doing this in essence he was saying, "I love you and I want you to share your life with me." If the girl accepted and took a sip from the cup, that indicated she accepted his proposal. The boy would then say something that might sound familiar like this: *"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."*

In the scheme of salvation, we belonged to the family of Satan. God was so desirous for us to be in his family that he agreed to pay the devil's 'bride price' which was the very life of his own dear son. As the blood of a lamb saved the children of Israel's first born during the first Passover when the Egyptian first-born died, now it is God's own dear first born son who dies so that with his blood we might be spared from eternal death and given instead eternal life.

Now that our 'bride price' has been paid, Jesus offers us, his prospective bride, a cup of wine that has plastered all over it the words, "I love you and I want you to spend eternity with me." Every time you are offered that wine, imagine a voice from the present Christ saying to you: *"I love you and 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."* That can and should heal all our wounds.

But as you accept a sip from that wine, understand that you are making a commitment to love as well. There are collective brides of the heavenly bridegroom that together form the bride of the Church. You see them all around you and he loves each of us equally and to the same degree. The command that Jesus gives to us his bride is, "Now I expect you to love one another with the same intensity as I have demonstrated in my deep and fervent love for you." Early Christians referred to the Eucharist as 'the Agape Meal,' the love feast. Together with our wounded brothers and sisters we approach his table of grace to not only experience his healing love and forgiveness, but to share that comfort, that joy, that life with one another as we have opportunity to bind up each other's wounds whatever they might be. And finally, through your interceding as the kingdom of priests that you are, may many others not only know you are Jesus' disciples by your love, but be persuaded to become members of the heavenly family also. It is with love received and manifested that we enter these last three holy days. May God be with each of us on that journey, healing our wounds by his meal. Amen,