

The Table of Gratitude
Luke 22:14-20
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
September 17, 2023
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They were gathered around the table. It was a special meal...a meal that Jewish people for centuries had shared...a meal remembering that once they were slaves but then they were set free...a meal honoring the experience of their ancestors, recognizing their own identity, holding out hope for a better world yet to be.

This was the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples that night.

And often we forget this...or at least we lose track of it. We, who know best the stories of Jesus, we hear what Mary Anne read and know this as the Last Supper.

We, who live two thousand years later, we know what is coming next...we know to anticipate Jesus' death on the cross. And so we are often looking ahead when we hear the story of this meal.

Even though we come to the table each week and remember that Jesus shared a final meal with his friends, we often forget that it was the Passover meal.

Part of what I love about Luke's telling of this story is that Luke mentions two cups - one before the bread and one after. This mention, if we are paying attention, can call us back to the Passover table. After all, in the Passover meal, there are four cups that move the people through the stages of the story.

If you look at a Haggadah, a telling of the story, essentially a script for the retelling that happens around the Jewish table, you will discover that the bread falls between the second and third cups.

The second cup of wine is blessed, "We praise You, Eternal God, Creator of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine" (Ellen Schechter, *The Family Haggadah*, New York: Viking, 1999; 48). And those gathered "lean back and rest to show [they] are no longer [slaves], for in ancient times slaves served others, and only free people could recline while they ate" (Schechter, 48).

And soon it is time to eat the bread, but not without first giving thanks. "Blessed are You, Eternal God, Creator of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth" (Schechter, 49).

And after eating, the time comes for the third cup. And again those around the table hear those words of gratitude, "Blessed are You, Eternal God, Creator of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine" (Schechter, 54).

So, perhaps, when we hear that Jesus gave thanks, one could say that Jesus is simply leading the ritual at the Passover table. Perhaps one could wonder if they weren't just going through the motions of the ritual, like we sometimes go through the motions...praying familiar prayers, doing familiar actions, singing familiar songs.

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And certainly, that is possible. It is possible that Jesus gave thanks because the Haggadah told him to, because the tradition expected it.

It is possible that we do the same when we bless the food at our family tables or at the communion table.

But, what if it is something more?

See, we come to this table and we often focus on the fact that it was Jesus' last supper. Even though we hear each week that he took the bread and blessed it - gave thanks for it - we rarely focus there. We treat that mention of thanks as a transition or a simple acknowledgement of a common act of blessing.

But if we remember what is happening at this table, then we are reminded that it is a table of gratitude. It is a table where the stories of God's presence with the people are told and retold. It is a table where the memory of how God accompanied the people on their journey is shared again and again with each generation. It is a table where the people name all that God has done for them and how when they already thought it was enough, God did even more.

In fact, there is a song that is sung around the Passover table, a song called "Dayenu."

Dayenu - it would have been enough.

And so the history is retold in song. It would have been enough if God had simply brought us out of Egypt...but God did more. It would have been enough if God had only split the sea...but accompanied us through it. It would have been enough if God had met our needs in the wilderness...but God also gave us manna. It would have been enough if God had given us manna...but God then gifted us with the sabbath.

The story goes on and on recognizing God's presence and activity in the lives of the people, naming that God doesn't just do what is enough, but that God is always doing more.

At the heart of the Passover experience is gratitude.

And so, what happens when we come to this table remembering that it is rooted in gratitude, that Jesus and his friends were gathered with gratitude?

And what happens when we wonder, while Jesus and his friends were reciting the historic experiences of the Jewish people, recalling God's action and activity, how God moved them from bondage to freedom, what happens when we wonder what else Jesus was grateful for.

Maybe in the quiet of his heart as he looked around the table Jesus said, "Dayenu. It would have been enough for you to call me to ministry, but then you surrounded me with people who would share the work."

Maybe in the depths of his soul as he knew the end was near Jesus said, "Dayenu. It would have been enough if you had given me the courage to live in the ways of the prophets before me, but then you accompanied me on this journey, companionship with me especially as things have gotten difficult."

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And what happens when we come to this table ready to recite the history of God's presence with us?

Dayenu. It would have been enough for Jesus to share God's love, but then we were invited to continue doing his work, sharing God's love in this world.

Dayenu. It would have been enough for us to hear of a loving God, but then we have experienced the touch of God's love through caring neighbors and so much more.

Dayenu. It would have been enough for God to set the world in motion, but then God showed up for us in the midst of our lives.

Dayenu. It would have been enough for God to act in the past, but then God called us into partnership to make a difference in the future.

And I wonder what your "Dayenu" experience is. What can you name that is God's gift of abundance for you? When have you been able to look at your life and say, "That would have been enough, but...God kept on working in me"? "That would have been enough, but...God gave me even more." When have you been able to realize that what you received would have been enough, but God helped you learn to share, to pass it on, to experience abundance and to share it?

Friends, this is not only a table of remembrance. It is not only a table of welcome. But it is a table of gratitude, a place where we gather to remember the presence of God in our lives and to celebrate, not only the history of our relationship with God, but to celebrate the ways God continues to call us, the world God continues to envision, the ways we are invited to continue in partnership with God so that the kingdom can come in its fullest.

Because gratitude is not just reflecting on what we have already received, but also anticipating what might be?

Gratitude is not just being okay with what is, but rather gratitude is an act of hope, an act that says it can be better...it will be better...an act in which we commit to participate in making the future better.

So, we are called to gather around the table of gratitude. We are invited to remember the ways God has been with us throughout history. We are invited to remember the ways God is with us now. We are invited to listen for the ways God is calling us into the future, to create a world of more than enough for all people. Amen.