

Two invitations and an example to live by.

First invitation:

Come to dinner! Come, eat, be full!

We are serving roast lamb on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of Nisan!

Come one, come all!

If your household can't eat a whole lamb, include the neighbors! Come eat a whole roasted lamb, with unleavened bread and bitter herbs on the side.

Expected attire: sandals, loins girded

(your loins, not the lamb), with your staff in your hand.

Arrival time: dusk. Slaughter your lamb at dusk and put the blood of the lamb on your lintel and door posts – so no disaster will touch you. (sometimes a little superstition pays off).

This meal will be so memorable – I want you to do it again and again every year so that you remember God's mercy for you.

And so they did - centuries later Jesus and his friends celebrated the Passover of the worst disaster of all that happened to the Egyptians – their first born children and animals died.

God's angel of death passed over the Hebrew households that had blood of the lamb on the doorposts and lintel. The Hebrews were suddenly no longer welcome in Egypt and had to leave. They had prepared the food and clothing.

Then they began their long journey into the desert, into the wilderness, and finally into the land. But this is not about the journey; it is about God's mercy.

Hebrews have been re-living this Passover for centuries. Every year afterwards, on the 14th day of Nisan was to be kept as a memorial. 'You shall say, "It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when the Lord slew the Egyptians and delivered our houses.'" (Ex.Ch.12). Jesus and his friends prayed the prayers of the Passover meal – a jovial time of expectation. On each plate is roast lamb, symbolic of deliverance; parsley dipped in salt water, symbolic of the tears shed by the Hebrew slaves; haroseth, a sweet paste made from apples, nuts, honey, wine and spice, symbolic of the bricks the Israelites were forced to make; bitter herbs, symbolic for the bitterness of slavery, and a roast egg, symbolic of new life.

After the ritual of hand washing, the Matzah, that is, the unleavened bread is blessed and broken but eaten later as dessert with the third cup of wine drunk after a blessing over the wine.

At the end of the meal, the door is opened because there is a belief that Elijah will enter their homes, ushering in the Messiah.

Perhaps this was the end of the meal, and it was time to open the door. But Jesus hesitated. Jesus changed the ending of the Passover meal. The way Jesus blessed the bread and wine were not familiar words – this was an entirely new concept.

He invited his friends to a new way to celebrate God's mercy: by eating flesh and drinking blood. Jesus then invited his disciples to an unbloody sacrifice

to show God's mercy: use bread and wine. Bless it. Break it. Share it with one another. Pour out the abundance of God's mercy on all who are with you.

#### Second invitation

Come to the table! Come celebrate the Lord's Supper of bread and wine! In spite of loss or betrayal or unworthiness, come, enjoy the life of the new covenant! The new covenant that proclaims the Lord's death! Arrival time: at least once a week, more often if possible. Attire: anything.

This celebration is to experience and remember the new covenant established by God, kept by the members who have the law of God written in their hearts, written in their thinking and their affections. The members of the new covenant know that God opens membership to all the peoples of the world. The members are further invited to know God intimately. They live knowing that their sins are forgiven and will **never** be recalled by God.

This bread and this cup are the symbols of the new relationship we are to have with God. Wheat dies in order for bread to be made, grapes die in order for wine to be made. Something in each one of us needs to die so we can become new bread and new wine, blessed, broken and shared with others.

And now the example to live by:

go and do likewise.

Be present to those who hurt, to those who have walked on unpaved streets where animals – donkeys, sheep, camels, horses – also walk. Go and do likewise to those who walk on unpaved streets where sewage may be thrown, unpaved streets where disease breeds. Wash their feet.

Be present to those who hurt, to those who walk the valley of death or despair or dementia or depression.

Go and do likewise to those who hunger and thirst for equality, good jobs, decent plumbing: wash their feet.

Go and do likewise to the brother or daughter or dad you haven't spoken to for a long time.

Go and do likewise to the boss you just don't like, the family of an incarcerated neighbor, the class of people you avoid. Wash their feet. Be Christ for them. As Christ washed us clean, so we are to go and wash others.

We are invited this night to experience the pain of death. We are invited this night to experience the smell of roasting lamb, see the blood drip on the lintels and doorposts, feel the tension in the air – will this work? Will pharaoh now let us go? We are slaves in this land and God will have mercy on us?

We are invited this night to partake physically in washing one another's feet – a moment with a hint of intimacy with God. Foot washing and being washed are experiences of humility in order to recognize that no person loves or does any good without the help of God. No one is in a position to look down on another from a superior height because of her or his hard work or piety or mental superiority. We are all vulnerable, all limited, and we each have a different struggle to know God, and only God can judge our motives. This is what Jesus did for his friends, and what Jesus calls us to tonight. Wash one another's feet.

Take the office of a slave for each other in a physical, experiential moment of complete vulnerability.

We are also invited this night to taste the bread of angels and sweet wine, to partake of the body and blood of Christ so we may be the body and the kingdom of Christ in this world here and now. We are invited to feel God's mercy. It may bring us to tears.

How do we respond to God's invitation?

How do we respond to Jesus' example?

How do we respond to God's mercy?