

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST in SIMI VALLEY
Fifth Sunday of Easter - May 9, 2004 - Mothers' Day
Theme for May: Everyday Spirituality
Anne G. Cohen

Acts 11:1-18
John 13:31-35

For Our Reflection

The Chinese character for peace, "wa," means harmony.
It derives from the combination of two words: "rice" and "mouth."
When no one is hungry, then truly there is peace.
- Anonymous, Gifts of Many Cultures p.67

Everyday Spirituality: Suppertime

My best friend in high school was in a performance of "You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown." Based on the Charles Schultz cartoon, this is a wonderful children's musical that promotes wholesome family values, emphasizes universal human truths and entertains - as the critics would say - with "heartwarming humor and pathos." I will never forget the red-headed young Snoopy dancing around the stage with his dog dish singing, "Suppa, suppa, suppa-time." He performed canine enthusiasm with fervor and realism - memorable, as you can see.

There is something about suppertime that brings out canine enthusiasm in the best of us. At the end of the day - we are tired - many of our carefully constructed defenses are down. Our mammalian bodies - having converted all previously applied fuels into expended energy by this point - signal the need for immediate fueling action - with appetite, hunger, pathetic whimpering and unimpeded salivation.

My mom had an old school bell that she rang from the front steps to call us home to dinner from the neighborhood. Like Pavlov's dogs, we would physically respond to the sound of that bell. And then the smell of baking meat loaf, dinner rolls, melted butter, baked potatoes, gravy, and anything that might have dripped and burned - enveloped us and drew us in through the door to the kitchen table.

We never had designated seating - but there was always enough space for all of us - and, later, for friends we brought home for dinner. Boards on two piles of gray bricks made great benches - and provided cement holding compartments for vitamins, brussel sprouts, and anything else we deemed inedible and unworthy of the feast - to be found the next time we moved to a new house necessitating the dismantling of the furniture.

Once the meal was on the table and everyone seated, there was an atmosphere of relaxation and expectation. Most of our work was done for the day - except maybe some homework. We were all safe and sound at home - and we knew there was enough of everything to go around. Dad would always say, "Well gang, how was school today?" Todd would always tell some kind of story that would get Mom laughing so hard she'd start to slide off her chair and have to hold

onto something. Pete would have to repeat himself to be heard over the cross talk. Jean would slip the vitamins into the bricks unnoticed. And Dad would always clear the table before I was done eating so I would finish dinner with one hand holding onto my plate. Supper time was when we communicated - not always well or coherently - but we communicated as a family. The best fights happened then, the best jokes were told, stories related, plans made, lives mapped out, relationships reviewed, expectations set and mostly understood.

We always said grace before we began eating - which leveled the playing field for the young and the slow - and we would begin to eat at the same time. We were made aware on a regular basis - of all the hands that touched the food before it got to us - all the labor and the sacrifice that went into a leaf of lettuce with Peter dressing - one chicken leg - one glass of milk, powdered or real. And, of course, we were to remember all those who had no dinner - as we ate ours - a ritual that induced some amount of guilt - along with humble gratitude - but never kept us from eating what Mom put on the table (unless, of course, it was liver - which we refused to eat for a whole other set of reasons which are self-evident).

What I understand now is the sense of Interbeing that was being ingrained in us. We are not separate from any other - plant, animal or human - especially at table. In Jewish homes, the table is the altar of sacrifice. Just as food is blessed and burned on the temple altar as a sacrifice to God, food is blessed and consumed on the home altar as a sacrifice to God. Fire or digestion oxidize raw materials into energy to do the work that we are meant to do. We feed the fire of our own life - which is a blessing to God.

In Christian homes, the table is the place of Sacrament, Holy Communion, First and Last Words. It is the place of betrayal and the place where we are taught to love one another - even in the midst of that brokenness. And, as always, we are reminded that we are each a part of the whole - one piece of one loaf - responsible for and to each other in our work to repair the cumulative damage humans have done to each other, to the world.

The community dinners served here in the fireside room on the third and fifth Tuesdays of the month - and every night as some church or synagogue in Simi Valley - are declarations of love, reparations for damage done, sacraments of Interbeing and blessing.

As the Apostle Peter (not to be confused with my brother Peter), as the Apostle discovered through his vision and his experience eating with non-Jews whom he considered by cultural standards to be unclean - God's Love makes all of Creation worthy of the feast. To eat with Gentiles did not make Peter a lesser Jew - but it did make him a better, more connected, more blessed human being - a conduit for the Love of God as he understood it.

In 1984 I visited families living in refugee camps in El Salvador. Women offered me cups of water and food. Having been warned about disease and unclean water, I chose to refuse the gift - a good decision health wise - an agonizing decision in terms of my relationships with people with whom I deeply wished to communicate love and Interbeing. Their food may have made me sick - but I do wonder if accepting their hospitality would not have made me a better, more connected, more blessed human being.

I made spaghetti this week for friends who came to dinner one evening. They are a family of five, the youngest is three. While I was cooking, my friend Cat came by to drop off items for a rummage sale we're having May 29th to benefit For Grace, a favorite non-profit of ours. I invited Cat and her dog Rufus to stay, set another plate at the table, and had a lovely evening together over garlic bread, salad from the garden my Mom has cultivated almost daily for two years now - and ice cream. We even had a little cat food for Rufus, which he refused to touch after he'd had some of the spaghetti.

After dinner we read stories to the kids, did sticker crafts, tumbled on the sofa and watched the sun go down. But the heart of the evening was supper - catching up, telling jokes, eating food I'd learned to make when I was a kid by watching my Mom - having enough for everyone, gratefully recognizing all those who contributed to our meal and were present through and around us.

It was a time of repair and refueling, blessing and sacrament, laughter and stories, canine enthusiasm and Interbeing. I wish such time for you and all creatures of the Earth. May the songs of supertime be sung by every child, heard in the heavens and echo through all time in every heart.

Bulletin

WE GATHER FOR PRAYER AND CELEBRATION

Music for Gathering

Welcome and Perspective on the Day

Musical Preparation for Worship - A Time for Centering

+ Call to Worship (unison)

It is time to let the Spirit have its way with us. This table is set, for sinners, lovers, dancers, and dreamers, the dying, divorced, suffering, and fearful. All who are weary and heavy laden, all who work for justice, all who seek resurrection. Come. Be not afraid, for hope is real, love is true, and God is good. Come, let us keep the feast!

+ Opening Hymn God Made From One Blood Hymnal # 427

+ Opening Prayer (unison)

God, food of the poor; Christ our bread Give us a taste of the tender bread from your creation's table; bread newly taken from your heart's oven, food that comforts and nourishes us. A loaf that makes us human, joined hand in hand, working and sharing. A sacrament of your body, A warm loaf that makes us a family; your wounded people.

+ Our Common Prayer (unison) adapted by Parker J. Palmer

Heavenly Father, heavenly Mother, Holy and blessed is your true name. We pray for your reign of peace to come, We pray that your good will be done, Let heaven and earth become one. Give us this day the bread we need, Give it to those who have none. Let forgiveness flow like a river between us, From each one to each one to each one. Lead us to holy innocence Beyond the evil

of our days - Come swiftly Mother, Father, come. For yours is the power and the glory and the mercy: Forever your name is All in One. Amen

Time for Silent Reflection (you may be seated)

One: My soul waits in silence.

All: God is my rock and my fortress. I will be at peace.

Silent Reflection

The Assurance of Good News (unison)

Be not afraid, for hope is real, love is true, and God is good.

Sung Response "Hallelujah. God be praised!" (CSB #5 Refrain)

We Offer Our Gifts So That Our Lives May Be Our Prayer

Offertory

Prayer of Dedication (unison)

I saw a stranger today I put food for her in the eating-place And drink in the drinking-place And music in the listening-place. In the Holy Name of God She blessed myself and my house My goods and my family. And the lark said in his warble Often, often, often Goes Christ in the stranger's guise Oh, oft and oft and oft, Goes Christ in the Stranger's guise.

WE TEACH, REFLECT AND PROCLAIM

The Just Peace Reflection was introduced to our worship service by our Just Peace Committee. It is a weekly reminder of the need for social justice in order to create a peaceful world.

Just Peace Reflection

Conversation with Our Children

Reading from the Christian Scriptures Acts 11:1-18

+ Hymn of Recognition Women Disciples CSB # 25

Sermon Everyday Spirituality: Suppertime

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S INVITATION

Celebration of Holy Communion

+ Welcome to the Table I Come With Joy Hymnal #349

Invitation

Sharing the Bread and the Cup

Communion will be served to you as you remain seated. Please wait until all have been served before eating the bread - and again before drinking the cup - to signify our unity with one another and with all who eat and drink at God's table this day.

Prayer of Thanksgiving (in unison)

We affirm the goodness of life and the openness of the future because our God is a God of life and love. As God comes to us in this act of communion, so let us go out to others in acts which bring healing, reconciliation and hope to our world. Amen.

Intercessions, Celebrations and Encouragements

Call to Prayer Be still and know that I am God Hymnal # 743

Time for Silence

Our Joys and Concerns and an Offering of Prayer

Sung Response In Solitude Hymnal #521 vv. 1 & 2

+ Sending Hymn Like a Mother Who Has Borne Us Hymnal # 583

+ Commissioning (unison)

For love shared and hope renewed, for promises remembered, and Christs among us, for the feasts of this life and those to come, we give you thanks, O God. Send us forth to reconcile and make new, praising life in the midst of death, bearing hope on angels' wings, and giving thanks always and everywhere that life is precious beyond all telling. Alleluia and Amen.

+ Sung Response (we gather in some semblance of a circle)

Hymnal # 236

Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja, Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja,

Halle, halle, halle - lu - ja, Halleluja, halleluja.

+ Postlude

WORSHIP NOTES

Call to Worship is by June Goudey, The Feast of Our Lives: Re-imagining Communion p.175
(June is a UCC minister currently serving our church in Woodland Hills)

Opening Prayer is by workers in community soup kitchens in the shanty towns of Lima, Peru, World Student Christian Federation, found in Gifts of Many Cultures, Ed. Miren Tirabassi p.189

Prayer of Dedication is a Celtic Rune of Hospitality, found in Ibid. p.134 (gender adapted)

Commissioning is by June Goudey, The Feast of Our Lives: Re-imagining Communion p.185