

Shall We Gather Round the Table

Matthew 26:17-20a

St. Mark's & St. James UCC ~ October 4, 2020

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In our home, growing up, was a central gathering place for the family. It was a place where we did our homework – books spread out and pencils scattered. It was a place we clustered around for family discussions. It was where my mom could be found most afternoons, getting supper ready and listening as Paul Harvey told “*rest of the story*”.

It was our kitchen. A large, farmer-style kitchen designed to be the hub of the home. In this kitchen was a large, round, beautifully made, heavy table. This is where the family gathered and meals were eaten; family games played and decisions sometimes made.

It's where riveting stories of our school sports, or hunting trips, and Christmas planning were often held over a hot cup of tea, or chocolate or coffee.

It's where mom did her schoolwork as a teacher – grading papers and filling out reports. Where we ate supper together with new dishes occasionally tried. Where we laughed and cried.

The table was a place of gathering. It was a place for family. It was a place for good times and bad, for happiness and sad.

It's where I would sit in the very early morning with only a dim light on, while mom prepared dad's breakfast and packed his lunch. The coffee pot percolating, breakfast bowl and cereal out... And then dad would come downstairs and I sat there while he ate his breakfast. When he left for work, I went back to bed.

At this table my brothers and sister and I sat, drinking coffee, talking quietly, while Dad lay in a hospice bed in another part of the home. He died of cancer age 60.

That table connects me to many memories where important family time was spent.

The other day I visited Mary Ellen Schnelle and we sat at her kitchen table looking out of this large, picture view window where she often sits. She told me this was Lloyd's chair – right where you're sitting today. And then it was Joel's chair. And from that view she could see the comings and goings of family and farm workers. She recognizes my car every time I drive by. And lately I've taken to waving ~ whether I can see her or not.

Do you have a table like that? Where babies and toddlers in their highchairs are pulled close to eat with the family? Where Thanksgiving meals take place. Or early morning coffee is had along with talks about the day, the farm, the fields, the calves, the coming ice storm or how it's turned so very warm?

I imagine Jesus and his followers often had meals at the table. The table at Simon Peter's when his mother-in-law was sick. Jesus healed her and she got up and began to serve them.

On *this* day of the Passover meal, they once again made plans to gather around the table to eat.

We know parts of the conversation that took place.

Talk of a betrayal followed by a foot washing;

along with Simon Peter's saying no to the washing and then saying wash my

whole body, Lord!

Peter who said he would stand by Jesus all the way to prison and even unto death.

Only to be rebuked by our Lord and told he would deny knowing Jesus three times before the rooster crowed.

It was at this table the words of *the Institution of the Lord's Supper* were given.

He took a loaf of bread, gave thanks and broke it giving it to his disciples saying, "*This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*"

And likewise, the cup which was poured out and Jesus said, "*This is the new covenant made in my blood.*"

Mysterious words. Portents of what was to come. Hard to understand in the moment.

We often think of this Supper through the lens of Leonardo D' Vinci who gave us the painting "*The Last Supper*". It's a beautiful painting, but not very close to how the supper would have really looked.

They would have sat on the floor, not in chairs. They would have been around the table, not in a line on the far side.

Clear glasses holding the wine would not have been used and given that it was a Passover Meal, flat (unrisen) bread would have been used and not rounded loaves.

On our Table I have a picture showing the disciples *around* the table; a table lower to the ground where everyone could sit. The glasses for wine were solid. The bread was a flat, unrisen bread.

And! With the disciples, around this table, are women and children. One has a child in his lap. Another standing close to a disciple indicating perhaps that he was the boy's father.

Everyone is looking raptly at Jesus – as if listening and straining to hear everything He was saying.

Now, lest we say that's ridiculous. It didn't happen that way. Consider this possibility: we know women traveled with Jesus. That he ministered to them and they supported his ministry out of their own pockets.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna.

The Samaritan woman at the well.

Simon Peter's mother-in-law; Mary mother of Jesus.

Mary and Martha – sisters.

The woman who anointed Jesus' feet with tears and oils and wiped them clean with her hair.

Or the woman whose little daughter was possessed by an evil spirit.

We know that Jesus particularly cared for the children. In those days' children were not usually valued like we value them today. Rather for what they could contribute to the family and the income they would earn as they grew older.

It makes sense to me that more than 12 men would be sitting there with Jesus.

It makes sense that Jesus would gather more than just the guys – especially as he was emphasizing that he was there for all – men, women and children.

It makes sense that as important as family was ~ wives, sisters, mothers, children would be at the table for this meal – especially as Jesus knew it was their last supper together, until he came again.

Jesus knew the importance of this last meal together. So, they ate and drank together. Jesus shared bread and wine which institute for us today – the Eucharist or Holy Communion.

It's a Sacrament we hold dear. It is a promise that Jesus's sacrifice is for all. And there is a place in the Heavenly Kingdom for all. And He will return.

No matter our trials and tribulations here –

there is the promise of something better to come.

On this World Communion Sunday let us rejoice. Shall we gather around the table?