

Maundy Thursday
Church of the Good Shepherd, Silver City, NM

April 2, 2015
Rev. Paul Moore

Holy Food, Holy Life

We sat around on balsa benches around the perimeter of the room. The heat of the tropical mid-day was a bit stifling. If you listened to it, the drone of crickets and jungle insects was almost deafening. Chickens scratched; audible over the half-wall with no screen or window to keep out the outside. People chit-chatted in twos and threes around the room.

Soon the matriarch of the extended family came out bearing a large half-gourd of something liquid. The gourd probably contained close to a quart of greyish, lumpy soup. But it wasn't soup. I knew what it was. The Siona people do as almost all the Amazonian peoples do. They drink a lot of liquids to withstand the heat of their environments. Water from the streams was not always pure, so the women would boil manioc root, let it cool, chew it, and then spit it back out into a large earthenware pot. After three days it had a bite to it, the alcohol killing most of the beasties that would otherwise give you Montezuma's revenge.

I also knew the protocol, the way to be a good guest. When the gourd came to me I tipped it to my mouth. I did not bring it back down again until I had drunk all that I could of it. Handing back an empty gourd, murmurs of approbation rippled through the room. This Gringo knew how to be a good Jungle Person. He was, in spite of his skin, somehow part of us!

Meals have been a way of constituting community since we first gathered to eat together as a species. Giving another food is a gift of life; it embodies a desire that the other thrive and grow rather than waste away and die of starvation. Giving another a gift of one's own food is to give one's own livelihood, one's own life for the life of another. It is a sharing of life on one of the most fundamental levels of our humanity.

The context and nature, then, of the gift of food, creates the space in which the specific meanings of a ceremonial meal are known. In the case of the Siona household on the Cuyabeno River that day it was a shared cultural context. It was an acknowledgment of a given environment with its constraints—the Jungles of the Amazon, and it was a recognition and honoring of a tradition by which one deals with the environment—chicha. In the case of the meal we celebrate tonight Jesus' introductory action recorded in the Gospel of John creates the same space. The meal, that will become the constituent meal of the Church, the Sacrament of our Pilgrimage, is an act of mutual service. Just

like his own death for us would be the supreme act of loving service and the resurrection the greatest gift to the world ever made after our creation, so the meal that commemorates, and participates in those realities makes of us a certain kind of people. It makes of us a people that "share our food." It makes of us a people who serve, who give our lives for the lives of others.

This is not what we often know ourselves to be. Our world is fraught with pain and suffering, injustice and oppression, violence and discord. Yet in the midst of all of that we sit down around this meal of exactly the opposite: Self-giving love, life given for the sake of another. It makes us a counterculture, a place where a different reality is known, the reality of heaven.

And so it remakes us according to the true nature of ultimate reality, the love of God that is life-giving and peace-waging. The broken world, in response, comes to know a different way of being as we live the new humanity that God has wrought in Christ Jesus. Slowly but surely, it remakes our world as it remakes us.

We come to the rail tonight to an open invitation. It is for all who see in Jesus a great and new way of being human, and who wish to be remade from what we so often experience into this heavenly sort of experience. It is for those who seek to be reborn. If we are reborn we are new creations, a greater and fuller humanity, living into a greater and fuller world as we do as Christ did for us, and wash one another's feet—and not only ours, but everyone who at their deepest heart of hearts is created after the image of God, all of creation that also bears the imprint of the divine heart and that is being caught up in our redemption.

Come, then, brothers and sisters, let us wash one another's feet and hands and let us partake of sacred food. In a world that feeds on other people rather than feeds them, in a world that consumes rather than commends, in a world that destroys rather than builds up, let us partake of the food of a different reality, one that is emerging as the Kingdom of God, one that stands in contrast to the world around us, one that loves rather than consumes.

Let us commit ourselves to washing the world's feet and hands in Christ's name.