

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

March 29, 2018  
Rev. Paul Moore

## The Holy Meal

There are two central rites in the Christian tradition, Baptism, and Holy Eucharist, a bath and a meal. The bath is the rite of initiation, the holy birth into the family of God, washing away all that would separate us from that family, and the meal is the food of our journey, the gathering of the family around the Table we all share. Each of these roots back in our tradition to the records of the life of Jesus himself. Jesus was baptized, we are baptized. Jesus instituted the meal, and we follow the pattern. The focus of tonight is the second of those two rites, the Holy Eucharist, the meal of the family and the food for our journey.

Henri Nouwen wrote a wonderful little Lenten meditation that Karisse shared with me. I think it goes to the heart of what this evening is all about. He talks about the four actions of Jesus at the Eucharist that form the essential four actions of what this meal means. He does them when he turns water into wine. He does it when he heals the blind beggar and gets him in trouble with the Temple authorities. He does these things at the feeding of the 5000, which leads into the Gospel of John's theology of the Eucharist. Shortly after this moment Jesus says, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.... I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh." Nouwen's point is that this is what Jesus does, it's his *modus operandi*. It's never so prevalent or important as in the Last Supper, when Jesus takes the bread, gives thanks for the bread, breaks the bread, and gives the bread to his disciples. Jesus TAKES, gives THANKS, BREAKS, and GIVES. That is because Jesus himself takes up human flesh, gives thanks for human fulness, is broken on the cross and is given for the life of the world.

The same is true for us. In the Eucharist we take the bread, give thanks for it, break it and give it. The presider, acting on behalf of the people gathered, takes the bread and places it on the Altar. The Altar is the center of the Christian world. In placing bread on the Altar the priest takes up all of creation and places it on the Altar. The presider gives thanks. The word "Eucharist" means to give thanks. The whole Eucharistic prayer is a great act of thanksgiving to God for the saving work of Christ on the Cross. The presider breaks the bread. Reminiscent of the breaking of Christ's body on the Cross, if it were not for the Cross, where would our redemption be? It reminds us that breaking is not ruining, but rather breaking open. Finally, the presider gives the bread to the people. Christ is given for us, we give Christ's sacramental presence to God's people gathered in God's name.

This would all be nothing but empty ritual if it didn't have a deeper side to it, and of course it does. We, like Christ, are taken. We are taken up by God in creation. We are taken up by God in baptism. We are taken up by God by the Spirit to live in greater and greater depths of full humanity.

For us Christ gives thanks. Jesus told his disciples in the upper room, "I call you friends." Jesus calls the disciples away to be alone with them. It is clear from Scripture that Jesus desires the company of his disciples. I don't think it a stretch to say he was grateful for them. I don't think it's a stretch to think that God is grateful for us, for our love of God and for our relationship with God.

We are broken. This doesn't sound like fun, but the Christian faith does not gloss over the pain of the world. It does not deny what we suffer. Nouwen concludes that the injustices we suffer serve to break us open to the work of the Spirit, break through the rule of the ego and get us beyond it. We, too, are broken, lest we remain isolated and alienated. Tonight, we initiate the watch. Many of you have signed up to watch with the Blessed Sacramental presence of Christ in the Altar of Repose at the back of the Nave. This is an exercise in letting oneself be broken open.

Finally, we are given. We are given for the life of the world. The Church exists for those not yet in it. The world is our workshop, building toward a more just and loving society. This is where we repeat the pattern. We take the world into our hearts, with all the trouble and pain and suffering and glory and beauty and goodness. We give thanks to God for the gift of life and all it entails, not just ours, but every life in every place and time, and all that we might be tempted to think does not have life. We break the world away from its patterns of injustice, we break away from the ruts that destroy and hurt, and we break out a new way of living in the world that reflects the Kingdom of God, and we give the new life conceived in Christ to a hurting and suffering world.

Take, Give Thanks, Break and Give. This is the pattern of the Eucharistic meal. This is the pattern of Jesus' life. This is the pattern of our life following Jesus. This is the path to heaven.