

Come to the Table

Communion Meditation by D'Esta Love, Pepperdine University Chaplain

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The Gospel of John provides an account in the thirteenth chapter of a fellowship meal during which everything that transpires should be interpreted through the lens of the death of Jesus. It is a personal and intimate setting filled with Jesus' poignant awareness of betrayal and death, leaving and loving. John tells us that Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world. Furthermore, the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas to betray him. And so at supper, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come, that the Father had put all things into his hands and that he was going to the Father, rises from table and prepares to wash their feet.

We know this story well. We understand the teaching embedded in Jesus' action—an example of love that defines the character of our life lived with God. It is also a symbolic washing tied to Jesus' hour that has come. As Mary's anointing of Jesus' feet (John 12) is interpreted as the preparation of his body for burial, this is a symbolic cleansing which anticipates his death.

What Jesus does and the example he leaves draw their very meaning from the cross. The same verb that is used for laying aside his garments is used for laying down his life. He lays aside his garments, as surely as he laid aside equality with God as something to be grasped, and as surely as he lays aside his life to die on the cross. He takes upon himself a slave's apron as surely as he put on human flesh and as surely as he takes upon himself the sins of the world.

Jesus has demonstrated a way of life—the way of life to which the disciples and we have been called. It is the way of the cross that sets aside rights to head of

table and takes the slave's role to serve others. But there is more. He not only teaches them—leaves them an example—but through the washing of their feet—through his act of hospitality—he welcomes them into a divine fellowship, an abiding place in the world, a community of love lived in the presence of the Father. He prepares a table for them; he washes their feet and welcomes them into the divine fellowship of his Father. He welcomes them home.

We recall another scene from the sixth chapter of John's Gospel involving a meal and the hospitality of Jesus. It is the feeding of the five thousand in which Jesus also interprets that meal in light of the bread that he will give for the life of the world, which is his flesh. And so he says, "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them." He describes a mutual indwelling—an abiding place.

And so it is with us. We too have been drawn, through the death of Jesus, into a divine circle in which we share the mutual life of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. We live in the world but we are not of it. We have been welcomed into a new dwelling place, within the intimate and sanctified presence of God, in which we dwell secure in the love of God. This community of faith assembled here today is the dwelling place of God, in and among his people who have been called out of the world but sent to it. This is our abiding place and at its center is a table. And from this abiding place we rise from table as people of the cross to go forth each day sent by Jesus into the world to serve it, even to give our lives for its sake.

And so today, the table is set. This, too, is an intimate setting, pregnant with memory and meaning. We remember the death of Jesus, when water and blood, life

and cleansing, flowed from his riven side. And we remember our calling to a way of life that finds its meaning in that death. We remember who we are as people of the cross. The cross now becomes the lens through which we interpret our own lives as members of the called and sanctified community of God that abides in his presence. And we remember the words of Jesus that as we eat his flesh and drink his blood he abides in us and we in him. We also remember the example he left us to love one another as he has loved us. We have been welcomed by Jesus. He has washed our feet at the cross and he calls us home. The table is set; Jesus bids us come and eat.