

Eucharistic Hospitality in the New Testament

Adult Formation - November 5-6, 2005

Presider:

"Today we have the last of three talks on hospitality in the Bible. [Name] will tell us about eucharistic hospitality in the New Testament."

What does the New Testament story tell us about hospitality? As you heard last week, the New Testament reminds us that Jesus is the new Adam, and the new Moses, and the Messiah. In other words, the first important point about New Testament hospitality is that it grows right out of Old Testament hospitality. The message is always the same: God is our Father. We are his sons and daughters. He keeps on welcoming us in this world—whether you call it Garden of Eden, Promised Land, or Exodus.

Today we want to go one step further and zero in on the eucharist. This eucharist that we share is where the whole Christian message comes together. So, what does it have to tell us about God's hospitality?

We all know the story of Jesus multiplying the loaves and fishes. It's a clue to the meaning of the eucharist. We remember the situation: The people were hungry. They'd been out all day long listening to Jesus. In other words, they were sorely in need of some good, old-fashioned hospitality.

What did Jesus do? He gave them plenty of bread and fish, more than they could ever possibly eat. It's like the wedding feast at Cana. Got wine? Sure, I do. I've saved the best for the last. Come feel at home. We're going to have all we want to drink. These are signs. God feeds us and gives us to drink. He wants us to feel welcome. He makes us at home. Now we can rest secure. Our every need is taken care of. We can count on God's hospitality—always.

Now let's focus on the Last Supper. What does this tell us about God's hospitality to us?

Jesus begins by getting down on his hands and knees to wash the feet of his disciples, even the disciple who was going to betray him. "I call you friends," he says. What a dramatic gesture of total hospitality! Ever Holy Thursday we, too, do this in memory of him—washing each other's feet, showing hospitality to one another.

Then Jesus leads the disciples in the Paschal meal, looking back to the Exodus and looking forward to his own saving death. The Paschal meal is a sacrifice—showing us the full extent of God's love for us. And it is a meal—showering us with food to eat and wine to drink.

The Paschal Lamb shows signs of great hospitality: as sacrifice and as meal. These are signs of how much God loves us. The message that began at Creation continues to this day: God is our Father; we are his sons and daughters. He welcomes us with boundless love.

No wonder we call this "eucharist"—"thank you." We have received so much. There's no mistaking it. God goes all out to show us how much he loves us. And life for us is meant to be one big "thank you"—showing over and over that we do get it, that we're prepared to be hospitable to others as he has been to us. As we have been loved, so let us love. God is love, and we who abide in love abide in God and God in us. Now, that's hospitality!