

Eat drink and be merry?

14 April 2022 Exodus 12.1-4,11-14
Maundy Thursday 1 Corinthians 11.23-26
Revd. Alan Keeler John 13.1-17,31b-35

Food and drink

We all have to eat and drink to stay alive. But there is so much more to it than this.

You may take a newspaper or magazine and there will be a supplement or section for food and drink. Maybe you watch television programmes with celebrity chefs. In these places we find exotic ingredients, styles from other countries and plenty of gorgeous pictures.

But we are people who have meals and these are so much more than food and drink.

Meals

We pay attention to the place where we eat. It may be in our home, a restaurant or a hotel.

We pay attention to the format. It might be formal; at a table with cutlery and napkins. It might be flexible; we stand and circulate at a buffet. It might be casual; in the living room in front of the television.

We are careful who we eat with; choosing family friends or specially invited guests.

Meals express an occasion of life. It might be breakfast, lunch or dinner. But there will be nothing casual or random about how they take place with clear choices of food, times and company.

It could be a birthday or anniversary with the event crafted for the people to be honoured. Or it could be accompanying a baptism, wedding or funeral and great attention is given to the very infrequent gathering of the clans.

Meals are about food and drink but they are far more than just grazing on what is available and providing fuel for the body.

A masterpiece

I've been doing some research to produce a booklet that explains a church building. Someone wrote that if you simply paid attention to the architecture it would be like looking at a masterpiece and only admiring the frame. It is the same with meals and Jesus at the Last Supper drew his disciples to see the masterpiece of the

Passover being transformed by a new act of God through him.

The Passover

I think it is a fair description to describe the first Passover as fast food.

In our day and age fast food is a rather derogatory term. It is cheap. It is nutritionally poor. It is often eaten with disposable containers and maybe on the street. And if a meal is to be a value why be in a hurry?

But God's instructions to Moses were to be in a hurry. The Passover was to feed the people for an immediate journey because it was about being saved from slavery in Egypt. The food mattered but it was the means to a glorious and long hoped for end.

That first Passover did its job and the Hebrews began their journey to the Promised Land. But more than that they were on their way to being the people of God and the Passover was to be an annual event to keep them travelling with God into the future.

The beginning of the instructions that we heard included God saying 'This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you.'

This implied that each year in that month the Passover would be celebrated to remember that you had been saved from slavery. Your identity was not powerful, noble or worthy. You were a saved people.

The Passover reminded you that it was God who had saved you and that you are precious because you had been chosen.

As you celebrated the Passover each year these features were taken hold of afresh. You were to be humble, to acknowledge God's gracious choosing and receive a flourishing life with him. This was the purpose but by Jesus time much had happened and what was it then about?

Disillusion

When Jesus invited his disciples to celebrate the Passover I wonder what they thought they were doing? The nation had known the glories of the Exodus. In the years that followed their life had become wayward. There had been defeat and exile at the hands of Pagan nations. This was taken as God's judgement. As excited as the disciples were about Jesus; was the Passover now

just a comfortable ritual. Was the focus on getting the food and drink right the important thing and hoping to have a diverting time together the real aim?

The unexpected

There are times when a meal doesn't go as you expect. On one occasion Jesus had been invited to the home of a pharisee and a woman of low reputation came in and honoured Jesus. the pharisee had hoped his religious position would be honoured. But Jesus turned the tables gave the woman the blessing and the pharisee a challenge.

Have you ever come to the end of a meal out and someone from your party unexpectedly says 'I'll pay for this'? You may feel a mixture of being very touched at their generosity or maybe feeling they shouldn't do it and the bill should be shared. Either way the meal is now signifying something about your relationships which is much deeper and maybe complicated.

In recent years there has been the issue of who receives the tip on a bill. The convention is it goes to the waiting staff. But it became an item of news that some companies deny the tip to the waiting staff and take it as their profit. If you ask the person who waited on you 'will you get the tip?' they can be quite touched because quite often they do not get much respect from the customers.

At the Last Supper Jesus delivers the unexpected.

This is all about me

In One Corinthians Paul records how Jesus takes the bread and the wine and says they're all about him 'this is my body, this is my blood.' The disciples must have been totally baffled. For them the Passover is about the Exodus, the Passover is about God's actions. It maybe they have not realised that they have thought the Passover is just one of those things they do and they were not expecting much of it. But Jesus is saying in his body and by his blood something of Exodus is going to take place. I can imagine the disciples suddenly being shocked, excited maybe fearful.

In the reading we had from the gospel of John Jesus washes his disciples feet. He takes the place not simply of the waiting staff which would have been menial but of the lowest servant who would wash the guest's feet. In doing so he is illustrating how the anointed servant of God behaves. His notion of messiah stoops, puts aside their self regard and places the benefit of others first.

Jesus is demonstrating a salvation that is to have a far more transforming and fulfilling nature in being God's people than the Exodus. He sums this up with a new commandment.

Jesus says 'I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you.' it is about love and not just about the law which was given after the Exodus. It is about loving as Jesus loves with humble service not just tender feelings. It will be about suffering because Jesus love is an affront to the ways of the world.

It is about us

There is a quote I like of G.K. Chesterton. He said "There is a great person who makes everybody feel small. But the real great person is the one who makes everybody feel great."

Jesus invites us to dine. He knows of our needs from the simplest of food and drink. He knows our hearts with their hurts and fears and feeds us with healing. Before him lie our acts of shame and guilt that would tear us from being respected and welcomed. But he comes and places himself at our table to share in the reality of what we have been consuming, even the worst, even the cross. Jesus comes to make everyone feel great in our bodies, hearts and relationships.

Resurrection

The exodus brought salvation to a people so that they knew freedom.

From the Last Supper Jesus goes to the cross and then to a raised and glorified life. In this he meets each and every person in the common reality of being mortal and knowing death. So with the resurrection, the salvation of Christ is universal. Jesus demonstrates and offers eternal life. This life is not just a continued existence any more then food and drink is only to keeps our bodies going. Eternal life is the life of Jesus Christ, it is the love of God, it is to be received with joy and to be relished and shared as Christ has done that for us.