

Circuit At Home Service - Sunday 2 October 2021 - Prepared by Dr Peter Fox

Harvest, Love Feast, Holy Communion - and the love of God
A reflection on food.

Introduction: At the end of many Services of Holy Communion the congregation completes their contribution with the following prayer

*“We thank you Lord,
that you have fed us in this sacrament,
united us with Christ,
and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet
prepared for all people. Amen “*

At this time of year many of us will have celebrated the Harvest and this year we have come to realise the folly of not adequately preparing for gathering in the crops leaving some of them to rot in the fields. At the present there is a shortage of lorry drivers and harvesters. And food has gone to waste to be composted.

Ten years of my career as a doctor was spent at The London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine as a research fellow in the Nutrition Department. I had been appointed to assess the effect of the government's policy of withdrawing the provision of school milk to junior school children and to provide a number of short courses of lectures on the history of food, and most importantly Bread! I began more ignorant than my students and quickly realised how fundamentally food is linked to our faith.

Today I would like to share with you some thoughts which were enriched by the appreciation of God's goodness to his people.

A Prayer: Lord as we come to worship you we confess how often we come in ignorance. We fail to appreciate the many ways we benefit from the gifts you give to us as your children. Throughout our lives we benefit from the air which gives us life, the water which sustains life and the food which provides energy and growth. In all ways we are dependant on you and new every morning you make all things new. And so we open our minds and bring our praise and thanksgiving.

The Lord's Prayer

Hymn: Hymns and Psalms 756

Come, and let us sweetly join,
Christ to praise in hymns divine
Give we all with one accord
Glory to our common Lord.

Hands and hearts and voices raise
Sing as in the ancient days
Antedate the joys above
Celebrate the feast of love

Jesus, dear expected guest
Thou art bidden to the feast
For thyself our hearts prepare
Come and rest and banquet there.

Sanctify us, Lord, and bless
Breathe thy Spirit, give thy peace
Thou thyself within us move,
Make our feast a feast of love Charles Wesley

Reading: Acts Chapter 2 v 36- 47 (J B Phillips translation)

The reaction to Peter's speech

When they heard this they were cut to the quick, and they cried to Peter and the other apostles, "Men and fellow-Jews, what shall we do now?"

Peter told them, "You must repent and every one of you must be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ, so that you may have your sins forgiven and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For this great promise is for you and your children—yes, and for all who are far away, for as many as the Lord our God shall call to himself!"

Peter said much more than this as he gave his testimony and implored them, saying, "Save yourselves from this perverted generation!"

The first large-scale conversion

Then those who welcomed his message were baptised, and on that day alone about three thousand souls were added to the number of disciples. They continued steadily learning the teaching of the apostles, and joined in their fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer. Everyone felt a deep sense of awe, while many miracles and signs took place through the apostles. **All the believers shared everything in common; they sold their possessions and goods and divided the proceeds among the fellowship according to individual need. Day after day they met by common consent in the Temple; they broke bread together in their homes, sharing meals with simple joy.** They praised God continually and all the people respected them. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were finding salvation.

Reflection: The Acts of the apostles chapter 2 reports the members of the church sharing everything in common including having meals together. As you read through the account this clearly modified over time and not every meal was shared but a common meal was shared periodically as a common meeting of the early church - the Agape Feast or love feast - a time of fellowship combined with the Eucharist. Later on the two meals were held separately. St. Paul clearly had a difficult time with the members of the Corinthian church as does Jude over the behaviour at Agape Meals from some members of the church. Some exhibited excess in their feasting and drunkenness. However it does survive today remains an accepted service in a number of churches.

In 1959 I took part in a Work Camp organised by the World Council of Churches. At the time I was a second year medical student and with a newly ordained Congregational minister and his wife I travelled to the Netherlands to share in this camp at a centre in the north of the country. We arrived with around 40 other teachers, students and church staff in a rest centre run by the church. When we arrived we heard was occupied by a group of 'tired' housewives. As they seemed to be chatting away all night it didn't appear an accurate description. During August amongst a series of events we repainted the building, built an outdoor theatre and, a baseball pitch and in the evenings had discussions about what we believed. For that month we became friends and on the last evening created a space to provide a place for everyone in a communal meal. In the chapel at the centre all the chairs and tables were gathered together as though were the 'last supper' and together with the pastor shared with and ministered to our neighbours. the next day we went our separate ways. **It was the last time we met but briefly we had been one community of young christians - breaking bread together in an Agape Meal which became a Eucharist for all of us.**

Intercessions: Lord you created each of us - individual - but called as disciples to become one in you - made in your image . We pray for all of who have recently sensed your call afresh, especially at this time Covid 19

Those for whom family responsibility is especially acute because of stress within their family relationships. In silence we pause and now hold before - those who are ill, those who are bereaved - those who are sad - those who seek love - In silence let our hearts go out to all we feel called to remember at this time - that they may be fed by the Love of God and loved afresh Amen

Eternal Light, Shine in our hearts. Eternal Goodness, deliver us from evil. Eternal Power, be our support, Eternal Wisdom, scatter the darkness of our ignorance. Eternal Pity, have mercy on us through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Alcuin of York (c735-804)

“Remember: At your last supper, Lord there was a place for all.”

AMEN