

Maundy Thursday 2017 from 2009

It is an incredible privilege to accompany individuals in their last months, days or hours. The strength of the human spirit is powerful, especially in the face of death.

Even in the midst of pain and suffering, it is not unusual that a person will hang on to life, long enough for one final life affirming experience, one more affirmation that life has meaning, one final good bye.

- I've witnessed many people, nonresponsive or in a coma who lingered until the final relative had flown in from a far away state.
- I know of more than one person struggling with cancer who hung on to life until the first grandchild was born and another who seemed to wait until he received the photo of a newly adopted granddaughter.
- Sometimes it's sheer curiosity that keeps them going. Early in my ministry, one old farmer west of Omro told me he wanted to live long enough to see how the state of WI was going to lay out hwy 21 across his south pasture., which had been in his family for over 100 years
- Another farmer wanted to see his crops come in.
- But by far the most common though, is the desire to live to see one more Christmas...or one more Easter.

These two holidays are deeply rooted in the minds and hearts of faithful Christians, especially our elderly.

They represent far more than Christmas trees and colored eggs, family get togethers, great food and good music.(Though I'm guessng that's part of it.)

Just think about a person of faith who has been to worship for 65 or 80 or even 97 years. Remembering Jesus' birth and

Jesus' death and resurrection puts our own lives from birth to death in the context of God's promises.

Celebrating one more Christmas or one more Easter can bring Joy to the awful reality of a hospice bed.

There is more to come.

There is more to life than this...whatever this might be.

For Jesus, it was Passover. He wanted to celebrate one more passover meal with those who were closest to him, his disciples.

Long before Jesus' time, Jews would celebrate Passover for a week but the highlight was the Sedar meal. It commemorated that time when the Jews were in bondage in Egypt. Moses warned Pharaoh to let his people go, but Pharaoh hardened his heart. So God sent an angel of death over the land of Egypt, as the final plague. However, Moses had instructed the Jews to paint the doorposts with the blood of a lamb. Miraculously the angel of death passed over the homes of the Jews and they readied themselves for their exodus through the red sea and into the desert wilderness. Thus, the season of Passover was given birth.

The meal itself was a symbolic one reminding the Jews of the sufferings of their forefathers and the power of God's deliverance. The foods that were eaten were symbols to remind the Jews of their captivity in Egypt. Apple sauce was eaten to remind them of brick mortar and the fact that they were forced to make bricks with no straw. A bitter herb like parsley, is eaten to remind them of the bitterness of their captivity. Salt water reminds them of their tears and of course they eat lamb and drink good wine. It was this

Passover Meal that the disciples were eating in the upper room.

Like Christmas and Easter celebrations, The Passover is a family holiday, rich with tradition and good food.

Like Christmas and Easter, the Passover story has themes of life and death and rebirth.

Passover, then, would be as important to Jesus and his disciples as Christmas and Easter are to us.

It's no surprise that Jesus celebrated Passover once more before his death.

It was at the conclusion of that meal that Jesus himself added two more symbols. He took a loaf and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying:

Take eat, this is my body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of me. Then he took a cup with wine. He drank from it and gave it to his disciples saying, "Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sin."

This is how Jesus instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

Now Jesus becomes the lamb.

Now Jesus' blood replaces the Lamb's blood

It's still a story of escape but this time escape from eternal death.

Two thousand years later, when we Eat the Bread and Drink the wine, in a unique, way we enter into the death and resurrection of Jesus.

For us, Holy Communion is a family meal but not just for our nuclear family and not only for our congregational family but ultimately for the whole Christian Family throughout history. In this meal, time and space collapse and we eat with those loved ones who have gone on before us and those that are yet to follow.

In this Sacred meal we find all that we long for.

A few years ago a nationwide poll asked, "What word or phrase would you most like to hear uttered to you, sincerely?"

Can you guess the first thing people wanted to hear? You're right: "I love you." The second was, "You are forgiven." Number three, believe it or not, was, "Supper is ready." (With thanks to James A. Harnish, "Walking With Jesus: Forgiveness," Tampa, Fla., March 22, 1998.)

How long has it been since we have heard these words spoken to us?

"I love you" -- God's unconditional love.

"You are forgiven" -- God's unmerited grace.

"Supper is ready" -- God's unsurpassed invitation.

Hear them now. Believe them now. Trust them now so that they may bring comfort to you in life and death.

This is the good news of the gospel. Amen