

The Meal of Transformation

Proper 13, Year A (RCL). Isaiah 55:1-5. Matthew 14:13-21. The Seventh Sunday after Pentecost. July 31, 2011. The Episcopal Shared Ministry of Our Saviour, Salem, and Trinity, Alliance in the Diocese of Ohio. The Rev'd Jerome H. (Kip) Colegrove.

Last week I looked ahead to today's reading from Matthew's gospel, the feeding of the five thousand. I said that this story contains a challenge to us: "You give them something to eat." (Matthew 14:16b) You minister to these people. You've come up with a good idea; now offer it to God and see where his grace will take it. God will add value, and this will involve transforming the original idea, giving it a boost of energy and effectiveness. It will transform you, too.

The sacramental life of the church is an important part—I would say an essential part—of how that transformation is handled on a routine basis. The sacraments, especially baptism, and the Eucharist, provide support for us in meeting God's challenge to serve him for the life of the world. And this is signaled in the very passage from Scripture we're talking about. Look closely and you will find three famous key words that make a connection with the Holy Eucharist.

"Taking the five loaves and the two fish, [Jesus] looked up to heaven, and **blessed** and **broke** the loaves and **gave** them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds." (Matthew 14:19b)

Blessed, broke and gave. These are the three main actions in the Eucharist (or Communion, or any of the other names our tradition uses for it). We offer the bread and wine to God; he

blesses it. It is divided for distribution (which we always symbolize by formally breaking at least part of the bread). And then it is given to all present.

This represents God sharing his own life with us. Jesus offers himself—as he offered himself in service to others. Jesus’ body is broken—as it was broken on the cross. Jesus’ life is spread through the community of the faithful—as the Spirit was given on Pentecost, and as it still moves among us.

You see how many layers of meaning our sacred meal tradition has. It is virtually inexhaustible. It is like a meal on a hillside in Palestine. It is like a meal in an upper room on the eve of Jesus’ suffering and death. It is like people gathering around a table to remember and celebrate Jesus once-and-for all victory over sin and death and to affirm his power to change their lives and transform the world. It is like...

It is like God’s call to us to be fed, now and forever, by his gracious love. Isaiah gives voice to the heart of that generous God, as we heard today: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? ... Incline your ear and come to me; listen, so you may live.” (Isaiah 55:2a, 3a)

We can live, we can serve, we can do God’s work, we can accomplish his mission, because God will take the incomplete and make it complete, the partial and make it whole, the lacking and make it abundant, the distorted and make it true. We have to offer it to him. And then do what he tells us, discerning his voice through prayer, study and Godly conversation. The Eucharist is the ritual of faithful offering, of grateful remembering, of joyful sharing, where it all comes

together. Where *we* all come together, find our strength and purpose renewed, and go forth to do God's work in the world.