

Sunday, December 4, 2016

Matthew 26:6-16; 17-30

The Taste of Christmas

Christmas celebrations often include people gathering together and of course- food of various kinds based upon tradition, culture and choices of likes and dislikes. Fruitcake has been a part of Christmas for centuries. The oldest reference that can be found regarding a fruitcake dates back to Roman times. The recipe included pomegranate seeds, pine nuts, and raisins that were mixed into barley mash. Honey, spices, and preserved fruits were added during the Middle Ages. Crusaders and hunters were reported to have carried this type of cake to sustain themselves over long periods of time away from home.

Not everyone enjoys this kind of cake but when one suggests other bread or sweets such as shortbread or gingerbread again we understand that a significant part of Christmas gatherings is in the eating of special food, sweets or candy. What tastes do you associate with Christmas?

There are some families which a certain casserole must be on the menu for Christmas day; or carrot pudding and nutmeg sauce, other families have pie or cake. But no matter what tastes we do eat we need to remember why we have these celebrations.

Psalm 34: 8 reads "O taste and see that the Lord is good." But what does this mean for us as we anticipate Christ's coming to us this Advent season? How do we know that the Lord is good? There are some things, especially in the depths of faith, which are only understood by being experienced, and which even then are incapable of being adequately embodied in words. O taste and see that the Lord is good.

We need to remember the reason why Jesus came to this world. John 15:13 states "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends. God sent Jesus into the world not to condemn the world but to save the world. God loved the world and its people and so he gave his one and Only Son, Jesus to be born into the world as human so that he could live life as we do. Yet his purpose was to die, that is he was to give his life for his friends and all those who believe in him. In order that we who believe could be reconciled with God.

Before Jesus was born in the stable his purpose was already laid out. He was to live a human life and die in order to be the one who could reconcile all people with God. But before he died he shared the Passover meal with his closest followers. As we read in Matthew 26 the events of that Last Supper unfolded in such a way that Jesus shared a special time and moment with his disciples.

They had completed their main meal when Jesus tells them that one of them would betray him and the one who would do this would dip his hand in a bowl with Jesus. He knew he would be betrayed and by whom. In that moment he knew that as he ate with these people whom he loved, one would have planned to betray him and he was just waiting for this to happen.

Jesus knew that it was Judas yet what he did next is what we call the great thanksgiving which the Church of Jesus has shared for generations. It is Jesus words that are spoken and shared as we remember why he came and what he was supposed to do. After the meal was over, Jesus took the

bread, broke it and gave it to his disciples. Take and eat this is my body. And then they tasted the bread just as we will taste the bread today. What does this bread remind us of?

Jesus became like us and began life as an infant and yet was God's Son. His nativity story is beloved and made known each year as children tell the story of the baby born in a stable. And yet often that part of the story is not shared. Why did Jesus come and live a human life? After all the Christmas cake, cookies and all the decorations and gift buying is commercially bigger than just candy at Easter so why is it made so much larger than the gift and promise of the resurrection? Because it is difficult to market this to everyone.

But we are here and continuing in our Advent journey to Christmas. And today we are asked to Taste and see that God is good. We will eat bread and rick crackers together. They will taste good but it is not how they taste, but it is in the enjoyment which comes and then illumination. For by faith the act of sharing in holy communion is sacramental. And fully understanding this sharing of bread and juice is to be enjoyed, experienced and then we will be illuminated in its meaning, For there are things that must be loved before we can know them to be worthy of our love; things to be believed before we can understand them to be worthy of belief and tasting the bread of life is one such act. Taste and see who Christ is for you.

After Jesus shared the bread, he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to the disciples and said, "Drink from this cup, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out or many for the forgiveness of sins." The taste of juice which we shall have today reminds us of the blood of Christ as it ran from the sores in his head, his hands his feet. The drops of sweat that were so intense when he prayed in the garden of Gethsemane before his arrest. The physical pain he endured with blood flowing out of his body left Jesus in pain. So when we drink the juice we are reminded of the blood of life which was slowly leaving Jesus' body as he hung on the cross to die. Bread and juice tastes of Jesus betrayed, dying and bleeding.

But there is good news in these tastes of bread and juice. There is good news because through Jesus' death and resurrection, we are forgiven of all sins. It is because of the sharing of the juice, that there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ. We are also aware of this Good news because Jesus is the one through which we are reconciled with God. God made this possible because he loves us and wants us to live as he first intended- without sin- and we can be reconciled with God. Sharing in these tastes for Christmas enables us to do this with peace in our hearts.

Jesus shared this special meal with his disciples and we shall share together as a sacred meal instituted by Jesus and encouraged by the church share it often. This is so that we are reminded of why we as churches exist and why Jesus came to live a human life.

Before they leave the supper he tells the disciples, "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom." Jesus tells the disciples that this is not the end of his life; he will return and they shall drink and share together again in God's kingdom. And we know that this happens because after his resurrection, Jesus ate with the disciples a beach breakfast where he showed them his scars. He reinstated Simon Peter and then told them their next tasks of telling others about him as Saviour and Lord.

But what does it mean to share in the tastes of Christmas during this advent season? By the sacred act instituted by Jesus we are united in Christ on a personal level—we can taste the bread and it is good. We can taste the juice and it is good. But this goodness goes beyond the physical taste on our tongues. This goodness is also experienced spiritually for we are taking in the sacred bread and juice we are remembering the baby in the manger and the Christ on the cross. We are remembering the angels' song to the shepherds and the crying at the foot of the cross. We are remembering the woman at the tomb and crying and we remember Jesus' cries for the needs of his people as all search for peace.

As we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we also are united as the body of Christ together. We are one- because of this mutually shared experience whereby we have given thanks together, the bread was broken and the cup poured out for you. And we taste and see that God is with us.

And after our time of prayer we might simply ask, now what are we to do? We are to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again (I Cor. 11:26) We are to tell others about Jesus- not just as the adorable baby in the manger, but the one for whom we celebrate his presence amongst people. During this advent season we take extra effort to have those special tastes in the house because we recall special memories of past years when they were enjoyed before and again. We need to have something that binds us as families together and food does this. Yet are we really sharing the tastes of Christmas? When we break bread together over special meals is your family focused on why you are doing this? Or are you simply eating the chocolate, the sweets, and the special dishes because of habit and tradition? What are your tastes of Christmas saying about your faith in Jesus the Son of God, the Saviour and the baby in the manger, the Prince of Peace?

Let us pray>

Holy God of grace and love thank you that we may taste and see Christ Jesus in the bread and juice which we shall soon eat and drink together. Thank you for your goodness to us and enable to enjoy the company of family and friends who will gather and share the tastes of Christmas. Remind us always to know your Spirit is present when we share these moments in faith and hope. We ask this in the name of the Infant King and Saviour, Jesus. Amen.