

Maundy Thursday 2021

April 1, 2021

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

Do you remember how cold Inauguration Day was? If you watched any coverage at all, either on regular TV or cable, you probably saw Bernie Sanders wearing a now famous pair of mittens given to him by a Vermont schoolteacher. Regardless of your political leanings or lack thereof, the sight of that very serious man in a mask and a giant pair of mittens was an invitation to smile. The image went viral. It created a cascade of light-hearted memes, including Bernie and his mittens sitting on the other end of a bench from Forrest Gump, Bernie sitting in Bran's wheelchair in *Game of Thrones*, Bernie and Big Bird, Bernie standing on the moon by the American flag, Bernie perched on a steel girder high above Manhattan with lunching workmen, Bernie playing chess in *The Queen's Gambit*, Bernie behind a little table piled high with Girl Scout cookies for sale, Bernie tucked between Gandalf and Bilbo in a scene from *The Hobbit*, Bernie posing with FDR, Churchill and Stalin at Yalta, Bernie sunning in his mittens in the George Seuratt painting, *An Afternoon at the Grande Jatte*, and yes, Bernie photoshopped sitting right behind Jesus and the beloved disciple in daVinci's mural of the Last Supper.

That last one made me smile, but then I was brought up short, almost wondering if I **should** be smiling. It's pretty serious subject matter, after all. I got to thinking, though: why not photoshop **ourselves** into that painting of our Lord with His disciples at the Last Supper? After all, the **Last** Supper was also the first **Lord's** Supper, at which we are blessed to dine tonight. We are the guests of Jesus Christ, as surely as the twelve were the night before our Lord died. We received our invitation to this holy Meal when we were baptized.

When lockdown started in mid-March of 2020, we began a "fast" from Eucharist which extended far beyond Lent and has lasted for a full year. Maybe it's a good thing we didn't know

then what we know now. Remember, initially we thought we'd all be up and running again by late spring, early summer? Then we hoped for Labor Day. Then Christmas.... For some of us, it's been an intermittent fast, since we have now reinitiated worship 3 separate times.... Many of our church friends haven't received Holy Communion, though, since the beginning of the lockdown. We're hopeful that as more folks get fully vaccinated there'll be more of us back at the Table, but we're also grateful people are being cautious and wise. On Monday the CDC director was near tears urging Americans to keep wearing masks and observing social distancing. She cautioned us not to let down our guard so that we **don't** grab defeat from the jaws of victory.

Maundy Thursday seems like the right time to reflect on how we've felt to be unable to receive the Lord's Supper. I don't know about you, but I've remembered pre-pandemic vacations when I could have worshiped, could have received Holy Communion, but chose not to. We've all been there. I hope I'm now not as likely to take the Sacrament for granted. We're still limited to receiving Holy Communion under one species, the Bread. I'll be so very glad, when it's safe, to share the Blood of Christ with you as well as the Body of Christ.

Our Sacramental sharing in the Lord's Body and Blood makes a difference to us as **individuals** and also as a **community** of faith. We are what we eat. We're more apt to be faithful to the call of being "little Christs" in the world if Christ is literally "embodied" in us because we have received Him in, with and under the consecrated Bread and Wine of Eucharist. For us this Holy Supper is not a historical reenactment, like Civil War buffs recreating the Battle of Monmouth. We're not just remembering what happened **then**. We're celebrating what's happening **now**: our Lord present with us tonight, in Word and in Sacrament. The shorthand we teach our elementary grade kids is, "Jesus loves us, Jesus feeds us, Jesus forgives us." That's why people of faith of all ages come: to soak up Jesus' love, to be fed by Him, to be forgiven by Him.

Going forward, my favorite memories of our community celebrating Holy Communion will include scenes from Sunday 10:30 outdoor winter worship. Our church friends have been so bundled with blankets, coats, hats, hoods, mufflers, sunglasses, and yes, mittens, that there have been times I've had no idea who I was communing. Accurate ID on my part doesn't matter, though. You are all, near and far, "the beloved." The Lord sees each person under all those layers; the Lord sees each heart, no matter what deep cover we may be under. The Lord's Supper montage in my mind includes all of you, who are among my favorite dinner partners, along with loved ones who have gone ahead (some of them this past year), and who are with us in Spirit as they enjoy a heavenly banquet. They feast, they cheer us along, they patiently await us, before the full family photo can be taken, with our Lord Jesus in the center.

The Lord's Supper is a comfort, but there's no question it's also a challenge. If we were in charge of the guest list, we'd pick all our favorite people, right? And we'd arrange to be seated closest to those nearest and dearest. But we're not in charge, Jesus is, and He's quite indiscriminate in the guest list. He invites everyone. So think of the folks you might be tempted to avoid in the supermarket, for instance. Think of the people in the news whose appearance makes you turn off the TV, or loudly sigh, or worse. Think of whoever it is you just can't **abide**. Then picture them seated next to you in that painting of the Last Supper. Because that's probably where Jesus would put them. To remind us that "This cup is the the new covenant in my blood, shed for you **and for all people**, for the forgiveness of sin. Do this to remember me." We remember Him, we proclaim His death until He comes again, not just by eating and drinking but by lengthening the Table, extending the welcome we have received. The Holy Spirit opens doors; we just have to walk through them. We belong here. And so does everyone else who chooses to come. No need for us to photo bomb this holy scene, for we belong. All of God's children belong. Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham