

Body and Blood of Christ  
Cycle C – 2019

This season is one of commemorations. It's been 15 years since marriage equality came to Massachusetts and several couples in our community are celebrating anniversaries. And of course, it's Stonewall 50! Four years ago we said goodbye to St. John's, which had been the only spiritual home for Dignity most of us had known, and made the move here to St. Stephen's. Many of you were there that Sunday at St. John's when we gathered in the church to tell stories about our experiences there. One of the final gestures was our gathering around the altar to remember by name the many who had come through our doors and had since gone to new horizons.

The Eucharist has its roots in remembering. St. Paul's simple description, c. the year 55, is the oldest and earliest account of what Jesus did with his friends at the Last Supper:

"I received from God what I passed on to you, namely, that Our Savior Jesus Christ on the night of his betrayal, took bread, gave thanks, and broke it, saying "This is my body, which is for you. "Do this as a memorial of me", In the same way he took the cup saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Whenever you drink it. So it as a memorial of me."

Each Sunday we fulfill these words – we gather, we remember, we re-enter into the life giving mystery of God's abundant nourishing love made manifest in Jesus' breaking bread and offering the cup – an early and ancient tradition passed on to us.

The gospel story of the loaves and fishes was a well-remembered event: it is found all 4 gospels. In St. Luke's version, chapter 9, consider what is else in going on. Jesus is gradually preparing new leadership for the people: there is a leadership vacuum in the religious establishment where Jesus has faced rejection. Who will lead the people? Earlier in the chapter he entrusts power and authority to his circle of disciples and sends them on their way with the commission of proclaiming the reign of God and healing. And so they do: they went through the villages preaching the good news and healing in every place, and return to Jesus and report all they had done.

It is then they are followed by the large and eventually hungry crowd. Jesus challenges the disciples: "Give them something to eat yourselves" (leadership is epitomized in table service: preaching, healing AND feeding) and the amazing abundance of food leftover stands as a lesson to the disciples: they have more to give than they think, and what they offer is not purchased but simply granted- God's unfailing generosity

When we recite the Eucharistic prayer together, there is a key element called *epiclesis* –it refers to the invocation of the Holy Spirit.

The epiclesis, not the words of institution, are the heart and soul of the eucharist. Who invokes the Holy Spirit? Well, it's worded a bit differently in each eucharistic prayer – but WE invoke the Holy Spirit: the people of God, gathered in worship. It is our privilege and responsibility. We invoke the Spirit's transformative power. After all, the Holy Spirit is the agent of creativity, the agent for change and transformation. We invoke the Spirit twice: first, upon the gifts that they be transformed into the very body and blood of Christ – Christ broken and shared, poured out in love.

The second invocation we proclaim is over us – that we be transformed into the Body of Christ, commissioned and nourished and sustained to be agents of proclaiming, healing, and serving.

Subsequently all are invited to the table. Eucharist is not a reward for good behavior. It is food, substance for those who strive, who struggle, who labor, and who hunger: who hunger for justice, for healing, for wholeness, for transformation.

In the old Latin mass some of us grew up with – the priest at the end would say “Ite, missa est” Go, the mass is over ----- the word “mass” comes from this Latin expression. It's a dismissal – go now- go and offer, go and be what you have received. The mission is entrusted to you – in whatever corner of the world you call your own: go – proclaim, heal, serve.