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Readings Selected for Pentecost 2
Isaiah 25:6-9, Luke 22:14-26

14 June 2020
Salem, Bridgeport

“The Fastest Way to the Feast”

What do we do when our dreams disappear, when our visions vanish, when our hopes are hacked to pieces?
What do we do when the core beliefs around which we’ve constructed our lives seem to be crumbling?

Our world is experiencing so much loss and so much grief.

Whether it’s from the virus, the economic shutdown, racial injustice, the call to defund police,
or the lack of cohesive leadership In government, we are all experiencing trauma.

So many things have been taken from us –

the ability to hug our grandchildren, the freedom to travel to see our children,
the opportunity to participate in social activities in our assisted living communities,
the chance to worship like we used to – just to name a few.

And then there’s all the civil unrest as our society is shaken to its core.

All of this has taken a toll on our emotional and mental health,

as people suffer with doubt and despair, fear and frustration, anger and angst.

And I understand.

Because there are times I feel those things.

One morning last week I found myself crying out to God, saying,,

“All those dreams that you planted in my heart – are they gone for good?
Did I get it wrong? Were those simply my delusions?”

And what I heard back was this:

“Crazy kid – I gave you those hopes, those dreams, those visions.

The reason you desire the feast is because I’ve fed you before,
allowed you to sample different dishes, given you various treats to taste.

That way I know what will delight you.

And you know what I am capable of preparing for you.”

“But”, I replied,

“I don’t think I have the right ingredients.

I’m not sure I have the skill,

I’m not sure I have enough time left....”

“Would you stop?!” God cut in.

“I’m the one preparing the feast! Not you!

Now get out of my kitchen! Get out of my way!”

And all of the sudden I remembered our first reading for today:

“God will prepare for all peoples a banquet of rich food, a banquet of fine wines,
food rich & succulent, & fine, aged wines.

God will swallow up death forever.

God will wipe away the tears from all faces.”

Sometimes it can seem as if there’s no way from here to there,

no way from dream to reality, no way from the vision to its manifestation.

But often the problem is that we’re in the way.

God is trying to prepare a delectable dish for us,

and there we are, dumping wrong ingredients into the mixing bowl.

Gods trying to stir and we’re trying to wrestle the spoon away.

Gods trying to put it in the oven but we’re blocking the way.

I get that.

But then the question arises: what am I – what are we – supposed to be doing while God's busy in the kitchen?

I found the answer to that in our second reading.

Here is Jesus having the last meal he will have before he dies.

Talk about dreams disappearing or visions vanishing or hopes being hacked apart!

Jesus was 100% human.

From the time he was born until the time he died he was 100% human,
which meant he experienced life just as we do.

He felt every fear and terror that we would have felt in his position.

It had taken him 30 years to figure out what he was supposed to be doing.

But then God had spoken to him at his baptism and called him God's beloved child.

And again at his transfiguration God had spoken those same words.

God had fed him before. God had let him taste the food. God had planted the desire for more within him.

Jesus knew that God was preparing the feast and he knew he had to get out of the way.

He needed to play his role, just as the disciples would need to play theirs, and we need to play ours.

And the role you and I are called to play is the role of one who serves.

I always thought I knew what that meant: it meant taking care of those in need.

I grew up in Lutheran Church

so to me serving meant food pantries and soup kitchens and habitat for humanity and workcamps.

Lutherans have the largest social ministry network in the country.

We're the ones he started hospitals and orphanages and nursing homes.

We've got the Lutheran World Hunger Appeal and Lutheran World Relief and Lutheran Disaster Response.

But while these things are a kind of serving,

they are not the kind of serving that Jesus is talking about or demonstrating here.

Because all of these things put us in the place of power.

We are the ones with the wealth, the abundance, the choice.

We decide what we want to give and when we want to give it and to whom we wish it to go.

Now I'm not saying community suppers and workcamps are bad things. They're not.

They are good things and I plan to continue to support them.

But if that is all we do, nothing ever changes.

Giving from a place of power is at most only half of the equation.

And it's not what Jesus was doing that night in the upper room.

And it's not what he was telling his disciples to do.

Jesus was telling the disciples that they needed to see themselves

as slaves relating to a master or as children relating to adults.

I think this is the first time in my life that I finally got what Jesus was saying.

A servant, you see, is not the one who provides the stuff.

A servant does not determine the menu.

A servant does not put together a guest list.

The master does all that.

The servant simply does what he or she is told to do.

And that changed how I look at everything.

Take worship, for example.

I've always felt that Lutherans have this treasure trove of theology, liturgy, and hymnody
that we can bestow upon the world.

But that's me acting as master, not as slave.

If I am a slave to God, then God determines what the worship menu should include,
what the various courses should be,
and who will be at the table.

If I am a slave to the neighbor, the visitor, the guest, the same thing applies.

I serve what they want to eat.

So if a Hispanic family comes to worship, and I am in the role of slave,
and God and they are in the role of master, then I will likely be asked to sing Hispanic songs.

But here's the thing: I hate Hispanic songs!

And that's the point.

The master doesn't choose the menu to please the servants. The master chooses it to please the guests.

Jesus said that being a servant is like being a slave in relationship to a master,
like a child in relationship to a parent or teacher or other adult.

And what does that mean?

A child is eager for knowledge.

A child just soaks it up from everyone and everything around.

A child just wants to learn everything there is to know.

And how do we learn the most?

From people who know what we don't.

From people who are different from us.

As I've said before, if I'm in a Bible study with white American Lutherans,

we already agree on 95% of things so my chance of learning something new is 5%.

But if I'm in a Bible study with people of different races or from different countries
or from different denominations or faith traditions,

then we might agree on only 50% of things

which means I have a 50% chance of learning something new and so do they.

What Jesus was saying is that the fastest, most direct way

for God to get us to the wonderful things God is preparing for us,
is to allow God to be in charge – in charge of us and in charge of others.

That's what Jesus did.

He gave up every single bit power that he had, and allowed people to do whatever they wanted with him.

He let them betray him, arrest him, deny him, abandon him, accuse him, convict him, torture him, kill him.

If that's what the master wanted, then Jesus would obey.

It's not easy to be a servant – not when it means giving up power or control or the things we desire.

And it's not easy to be a child – not when it means letting go of our self-righteousness and arrogance
and the conviction that we're right and others are wrong.

But that's the role to which we are called.

It's by no means an easy road.

But the more we pay attention to what God is saying and the closer we heed God's instructions,
the faster the feast will be set before us.

My prayer for us this week is that

we will each be drawn deeper into relationship with someone who is different from us,

a relationship in which we can play our role of a child eager to learn or a slave eager to please.

I promise you that if you do that, God will not only change your life,

but God will change our church and the world around us.

And it's that change that will get us to our hopes and dreams and visions.

for even now, God is in the kitchen preparing the feast. **Amen**