

Sermon for Thursday, April 2, 2015
St James Episcopal Church, St James NY
The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley

It was the night before he died
that Jesus took bread and broke it, and took wine and shared it,
and ever since then,
we have been doing the same thing,
as he asked us to do.
But tonight is different.

Normally
we celebrate the Eucharist
as part of an act of worship.
And the meal we share
is only symbolic,
bread and wine
a taste of Christ's body and blood
and of the coming kingdom of God.
But tonight
we celebrate in the context of a meal,
just as Jesus first celebrated it
in the context of a meal,
one of the many
that Jesus shared with his friends and followers.

Remember the first miracle, in the gospel according to John?
Jesus is at a wedding, and the wine runs out.
His mother asks him what he's going to do about it.
And after some protesting,
he takes over the role of the host,
begins ordering servants around,
and next thing
six huge stone water jars
were found to be full of wine.
And not just any wine - the very best.

And then there was the day
he was out in the countryside,

and huge crowds had gathered,
and he realized
that people were getting hungry.
So he told his disciples to ask around
if anyone had any food,
and when they came back and said, "All we got was five bread rolls and a couple of fish,"
he told them to share it out,
and when everyone was done eating,
they ended up with twelve baskets of leftovers.

And the time that he was traveling through Jericho
and there were crowds everywhere,
trying to catch a glimpse of him.
And there was one man, an important and wealthy man,
although not very popular - he was a tax collector -
this man really wanted to see Jesus,
but it didn't matter how much he pushed and shoved,
he couldn't get near.
So he ran ahead, and climbed up a tree,
and when Jesus came near
he looked up
and called out to the man,
and said,
"Aren't you going to invite me home?"

And then that day by the lakeside, after he had died,
when the disciples were out fishing,
and he shouted out to them from the shore
and told them to put their nets
on the other side of their boat,
and they hauled in a record catch,
and when they came to shore
Jesus was grilling them breakfast.

Time after time,
Jesus sharing meals
sometimes with friends,
sometimes with strangers.
Often with people
who the religious officials

considered unworthy.
It was one of the complaints that they had about him.
“This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them.”

Jesus welcomed everyone
to share his meals.
And he invited his followers
to invite others to join in these meals.
Whether it was dinner with the tax collector
or breakfast on the beach,
a wedding feast
or an impromptu picnic.
No wonder
it was a meal
that became the central act of worship and faith for us,
a place where Jesus invites us
to share in himself,
and asks us
to go on sharing that meal
until the end of time
when we will join God
in the heavenly banquet.

And so today, I want you to spend a few minutes talking at your table
about what this meal that we know as the Eucharist
means to you,
and what we could do
to share Jesus' hospitality
with the people around us.