

## SERMON, ST. JOHN'S MAUNDY THURSDAY

On the Klamath River in the far north of California, just down from Happy Camp, the river passes through a magnificent gorge and makes a great turn under a massive granite mountain reminiscent of Yosemite's Half Dome. This splendid place, far from any real town and still mercifully spared the invasion of marauding tourists, is called Katimiin, the center of the world and place of origins for the Karuk tribe. They are a small Native community that has likely dwelled in this place a minimum of 10,000 years, though they would say for eternity, since the Creator birthed them here. I have long loved that part of California and still make crazy detours that way when I travel north to see my brother who lives at the base of Mt. Shasta. One time, about twenty years ago, I saw a gathering beside the road at Katimiin and pulled over. I had happened upon the Karuk World Renewal ceremonies, which includes the stunning White Deer Skin dances, an annual religious rite that is never advertized abroad because the Karuk are a shy people who want no notoriety and certainly no crowds of gawking haoles! However, this gawking haole was welcomed warmly that day by the Medicine man, who invited me to sit next to him on a bench overlooking the terrace by the roaring Klamath where the dances take place. A group of six or so men wearing white deer heads and skins danced for hours, while a young seer stood on a high mound of sand chanted. It was mesmerizing! The Medicine man told me that his people have performed these ceremonies every year for aeons of time time to renew the earth. They enter into the sacred time of creation in this place of creation, in order to access the power of that sacred time and restore the flow of the river, the spawning of the salmon, and to ensure a bountiful acorn and hazelnut harvest.

"Enter into sacred time." I was reminded of what I had been taught about the Passover, when Jewish people enter "sacred time" each spring to renew the power and liberation of that original Passover, when God released them from bondage in Egypt. For them, the Passover is not simply a pious memorial of the key saving event of their people, but a re-presentation of that event through entry into sacred time that constitutes genuine liberation for them in the here and now. It is, as it is with the Karuk people, as if three thousand years have not passed since the first Passover and that the freedom and hope that it stands for renews the Jewish people now. And it has worked: through centuries of persecution, pogrom, and holocaust the Passover has sustained them and has enabled them to thrive as a people of hope.

The very same can be said about the Eucharist, which of course, has its origins in the Passover. It is not accidental that this is one of the few specific commandments (apart from loving one another!) that Jesus left us. "Do this for the remembrance of me." Notice that we no longer simply say, "In memory of me!" The reason for this is that the Church in her wisdom wanted to make it clear that the Eucharist isn't just a memorial supper when we piously think good thoughts about Jesus and his work – it has genuine spiritual power, like the Karuk World Renewal ceremony and the Jewish Passover. The Greek word that the rather awkward phrase "for the remembrance of me" translates is "anamnesis," which originally meant, not memory, but re-presentation. Christ is genuinely present in the Eucharist because here we re-present and re-participate in the great acts of God in Christ: his incarnation, his life poured out in loving service,

his suffering, his death and his resurrection. In the Eucharist we enter what we call “sacramental time,” where all that Jesus was and is becomes who we authentically are. In other words, just as in Baptism our nature as the divine daughters and sons of God is affirmed, here in the Eucharist our nature as his Body is affirmed and made real. We **become** Eucharist and go forth from this place to be all that Christ is for the life of the world. We are signs of Incarnation, like Jesus, the bearers of Good News, healing and joy to a broken world. We demonstrate in all our being the hope of Resurrection in a world of cruelty, despair and death, in places like Ukraine where there seems to be no hope. This is what it means to be his Body. Jesus is truly present here, not in a way that can be theologically formulated in any of the classic Christian definitions like “transubstantiation,” “consubstantiation,” or simple “memorial supper,” but in terms of our own embodiment of all that he is. I love Richard Hooker’s response to the theological controversies around the meaning of the Eucharist in the 16th century: “The real presence of Christ’s most blessed body and blood is not therefore to be sought in the sacrament, but in the worthy receiver of the sacrament.” He also writes so beautifully, “What these elements (bread and wine) are in themselves it skilleth not (doesn’t matter), it is enough that to me which take them they are the body and blood of Christ, his promise in witness hereof sufficeth, his word he knoweth which way to accomplish; why should any cogitation possess the mind of a faithful communicant but this, O my God thou art true, O my soul thou art happy.”

Finally, one of the most powerful truths of our Eucharistic faith is that, like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, we encounter the Risen Lord “in the breaking of the bread.” We know Jesus fundamentally in and through our love for one another, in and through our life in the Body of Christ. This is not a religion of personal enlightenment, but one lived and shared in community and, as I have said on multiple occasions before, Christ’s Body is more than the Church, for it embraces the whole created order. In a few moments we will wash one another’s feet, one of the strangest and yet most beautiful traditions that have come down to us from the First Eucharist at the Last Supper. This ritual demonstrates that to be his Body faithfully, we are called to serve one another, and that when we do so we are true to who we were created to be. It is not about “us,” but about one another, and not just one another, but all God’s hurt and broken creation.