

Boldly welcoming all to the table

Psalm 63: 1-8; Luke 13: 1-9

So often we want to open the Bible and trust that there, there shall be a word of hope. However, sometimes you open the Bible and Jesus says something very confusing. In a week where yet more bad news rolled in, I was very grateful that this Lent we have been pondering rituals; ways to contain the good and the bad that happen to us, to remind us these too have meaning, are sacred. If you feel like you have bore no fruit this week remember that God is going to add some water, some sun, and even some manure, dig around a little, open you up a little, and just when you think, "well this isn't fun at all," God's going to find a way to pour love on those sore spots. It might be a conversation, it might be a strange morning when you wake up and the city has disappeared into fog, it might be a smile from a stranger, a song on the internet. Remember, this is how God waters us, tends us.

Communion is one of our most central rituals as a Christian family and, as I said with Spock (in *Celebrate God's Presence*), it is a both/and. It is a moment where ordinary collides with extraordinary. This is a ritual that is supposed to startle us, which can be difficult if you are someone who has done it before a lot of times before. As I was teaching the membership class, in the bodies of churches that created the United Church there were folk who thought we needed to do communion as often as possible, because some people would not know Jesus until they tasted this bread, we had to share the bread as often and as widely as possible. There also were people who helped create our denomination, my grandmother among them, who said this is holy, it is supposed to startle you, it is not regular, four times a year: maximum. (At first, I was pretty sure she only wanted to do it four times a year because in her church they used the little glasses, and if you have ever had to wash the little glasses you'd think, 'oh, four times a year, I get it.')

As a classic United Church made, born, raised and ordained woman, I can say that they are both right. I have celebrated communion with Lutherans because the day ended in 'y', and I have celebrated with Presbyterians who have not tasted that juice, who have not tasted that bread, who have not come to this table for so long that they truly are thirsty; hungry to hear about God's love.

I heard a definition once which is only true of our western, post-European culture, but the difference is between a ceremony and a ritual. Ceremony in other cultures I believe is the same word we use for ritual. Usually in our culture though, a ceremony celebrates the status quo. It says, 'Look at us, we're amazing.' Rituals on the other hand - while not disagreeing that we are amazing - are actually meant to startle us. So remember when you come this morning to this table, that in Jesus' day blood was thought of as unclean, unholy; blood had the power to -with one drop- make you unholy. And Jesus said, "this is my blood and you are to drink it for it is good. You are good. This bread seems regular, ordinary, poor people's food. And it is my body, because bodies are good, sacred, from God." We are to bring our whole bodies to this table remembering that.

Most importantly, (and startling to some) all are welcome at this table. No matter who you love or how you found faith. No matter how you dress, or how much make-up you wear or don't wear, you are welcome at this table, for you are beloved; made by God. You are meant for this ritual as much as it was meant for you. May Communion startle you this morning, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.