



Maundy Thursday 2010

Once, long ago in the year 1545 a priest in Kent climbed up into his pulpit and announced to his congregation in his sermon that there was not one Heaven but three one for the very poor and the second for those of “mean estate and condition” and the third for the nobility.

If this shocks us it shouldn't because it simply reflects the times and place. And England during this time was very class conscious. In fact, it was not uncommon for the more humble members of the church to stand and bow to the gentry as they filed into church and even God was referred to as the “Great Landlord”

The church simply mirrored the society that it was in. The women sat separated from the men – and the young sat separated from the old and where the rich – well, they sat in the front and the poor sat in the back.

And as for communion – the “better sort” would have the option of receiving the sacrament at another time so as to not have to cross paths with those of lesser rank – and if that wasn't the case then some parishes provided separate chalices so that their communion wine would be of a better quality than that of the poorer members.

All this today seems rather offensive to us insulting to the spirit of the service that forms the focal point of our worship week after week - a rather gross perversion of the sacrament of communion. Tonight we hold a special importance to this service because it is tonight we commemorate the fact that it is Jesus himself that asked us to remember him in the breaking of the bread and in the sharing of the cup.

At the communion service tell again the story and we remember that Jesus sacrificed his very life in order to demonstrate





to us beyond a shadow of a doubt how each and every person was beloved of God and in God's eyes was worth saving. When we gather in worship here we come, each of us to the table each of us kneeling or bowing our heads acknowledging that we are one and through the bread and the wine encounter God and in that meeting of hearts our souls receive his grace – this is what a sacrament is – a special encounter with God of his grace and his love.

We draw near to God – and as James reminds us when we draws near to God he draws near to us and there is a union, a meeting, a communion of Creator and Creation. And in this service we know so well there is an acknowledgement with one another – that all of us whether young or old rich or poor male or female all of us need to receive that grace and that mercy - rank and wealth not withstanding.

And it makes us wonder, how all those years ago, did they get it so wrong? How did they bring social class and differences into the sacrament? Because what happens when we start to claim differences between us is that suddenly some people are more important than other people and the progression of that thought is that we are less obligated to care for those who are not in our own particular class.

There is less of an ethical claim upon us to care for those who are “not as good” as we are. But when Jesus takes a towel and washes the feet of his disciples he showed us that all mattered regardless of rank and wealth and in the kingdom of Jesus the poor and the humble are worthy as well.

At this service – each of us share in the bread – each of us share in the cup and we share the same loaf and drink the same cup to show that we are equal in the sight of God and equally loved in the sight of God. As we share in “the common loaf and the common cup” we realize, or should realize that each of us belongs to each other and that we are in communion with each other and a





community – where each of us cares for the other or as in the words of Mother Theresa, “we belong to each other”.

And let us be warned, that it will do us no good if we keep the service of the communion and forget the intention behind the service which is that we are to be a community serving each another and honouring the most humble person as we would do so for Jesus.

Paul writes in 1st Corinthians 10.17 “The cup we use in the Lord’s Supper (and for which we give thanks to God) when we drink from it, we are sharing in the blood of Christ.

And the bread we break, when we eat it, we are sharing in the body of Christ [and] because there is the one loaf of bread we, though many, are one body for we all share in the one bread.”

Amen.

Rev. David Peterson

