

Serving a Lasting Supper

Imagine the scene of the Last Supper, as if you are present there yourself. Believe that what is taking place is happening now, not in the past. Do not merely watch. Let yourself become consciously engaged in the real life-drama. You are in this. Soak up the calm of the evening. Around you, imagine the noise of table-ware slowly diminishing, and muffled voices dwindling. Allow yourself to begin to be aware that something significant is building. Ask yourself,

“Why is there a sense of expectancy in the air? It feels as if I could ‘cut it with a knife!’”

From where you sit, you begin to track more consciously what Jesus is doing. You watch him take bread into his hands, bless and distribute it. You see him take the cup of blessing, pray over it and over you and your companions, then begin to hand it around. When he comes to you with the bread and cup, you hold them a moment in your hands thoughtfully. You find yourself chewing over the many possible meanings lying within these gifts.

You recall times in your life when tasty bread and ‘fun times’ failed to satisfy you. You also remember what it was like to know the pangs of hunger, when food was short at home. You bring to mind other times when conversations with a friend felt just like eating a good meal, when you found yourself sensing companionship-becoming-communion. You hold together all these tones, undertones and overtones of meaning as you sense something is happening. You grow in realisation that there is more to this than meets the eye and the ear and the taste buds. Mystery is here.

Then you hear Jesus say to you, *“Take and eat”,* then *“Take and drink”.*

Allow yourself to feel what you feel, taste what you taste,
sense what you sense. Hear the growing questions inside you,

“Who is he [really] saying he feeds us with his life & quenches our thirst?”

*“Who is this who welcomes and deliberately includes
even the betrayer and the deny-er among us,
and the betrayer and deny-er and the doubter in each of us?”*



Then you remember his words spoken earlier,

“Can you drink the cup I will drink? Can you drink it to the dregs?”

Let new significance surround those words. Ask yourself,

“What might he mean? What is about to happen to him and to us?”

Admit you feel a bit scared. Let yourself hope you will be among those whom he promises will drink the cup of joy with him again in the company of the One he calls ‘Abba’. Feel the pull of his promise that you too and all of you will be One with Abba.

Then see him remove his outer garment. Hear water flow into a basin, and deliberate steps moving from one to the other. Allow the same question to come forward in you as it does in Peter,

"You are not seriously going to wash my feet, Lord. You're my leader, not my servant! Get a grip on yourself. You're going far too far. I am very uncomfortable!"

And Jesus says, *"Come on bro, this is a deal-breaker! Are you in or out?"*
Peter squirms, *"Golly, Lord, if it means so much to you, wash the lot!"*



Then it is you before whom Jesus bends low. Your confusion could not be higher, when his calm, steady presence takes you in hand. You find yourself feeling you are the only one to whom is he giving his attention. Then in the cooling water and the brisk movement of the towel, you feel held respectfully, tenderly even, in holiness.

It feels a bit like when your mother washed and dried you as a child. You remember what it felt like then, and here you sense a new healing sense of homely wholeness washing over you, and you are aware of the extraordinary reality that you might be experiencing something Godly.

And what's more amazing, you find yourself willing to respond with all your being to him. In the glow of it all, you notice light sweeping around like a flame, revealing others' faces - faces mirroring yours: wondering, expectant, struggling, awe-full, overwhelmed, hoping. You hear Jesus stress each word,

*"If I, your Lord, have washed your feet this night, with whom are you going to serve humbly?
Whom will you welcome as servant, as peer? Whom will you bring into sister-brotherhood?
If I, your Lord, have bathed and fed you and given you the cup of blessing,
with whom will you share your table? Who will know the healing gift of your forgiveness?
Who will taste God's companionship-become-communion through you?
Who will be able to savour God's compassionate flavour in your pilgrim serving?
Who will learn the example of life-poured-out-for-the-sake-of-Goodness through you?"*



Then - eventually – other things take over. You go out from this gathering, yet find its claim on your life never leaves you.

You know you are called to follow Jesus, to get up again after your failures.

You know there is a Sacred trust he has left you to take your part in serving and sharing with others across following generations: his presence of love, forgiveness, justice and compassion in the world, until God winds up God's will for the world, as God ever wanted it to be.

In this paper I have attempted an imaginative reflection. It conflates the accounts of Jesus' last meal from the 4 Gospels. In the coming zoom session, [date to be advertised], I will focus a little on what can be learned about servanthood when we note the telling difference between John's account and that of the other 3 evangelists. Before the zoom, perhaps read John, ch 13 and either Matt 26:17-35, Mark 14:12-31, or Luke 22: 7-13. Bring to the zoom "The Servant Song" accompanying this reflection.

If you'd like to contact me about anything here, you are welcome. virginia.bourke@sosj.org.au

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The Servant Song, [Richard Gillard]

Will you let me be your servant,
Let me be as Christ to you;
Pray that I may have the grace to
Let you be my servant, too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
We are trav'lers on the road;
We are here to help each other
Walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christ-light for you
In the night-time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
Speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
When you laugh I'll laugh with you.
I will share your joy and sorrow
'Til we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven
We shall find such harmony,
Born of all we've known together
Of Christ's love and agony.

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