

**Eat This Bread, Drink This Wine
(Mark 11:1-11)**

It's almost lunch time. Are you getting hungry? Is your tummy growling like a cranky cat? But remember now, it's Sunday morning. What is it that you are really hungry for? I hope it's something more than brunch at Cantigny. And I really hope it's much more than a Big Mac and an order fries.

I have never had a very reliable tummy clock. I get hungry eventually, but not at regularly appointed times. It may have something to do with the fact that for most of my adult life I have never maintained a regular schedule. In the days when I traveled around the world the term "regular schedule" was really an oxymoron. The word "regular" just never matched up with the word "schedule."

Now I don't want to be negative. I'm not complaining just because my eating schedule is different from the most of the rest of the civilized world. You see, I don't particularly eat to nourish my body. Mealtime for me has always been a time to nourish my mind and spirit as well. Rarely will you see me drive through a McDonalds just because it's noon time. In fact, eating on the run is something I have never enjoyed. And I hate sitting alone in a restaurant. For me, it's the company that counts most in my nourishment. It's biblical and can be traced back to my Jewish roots – that is to say – our Jewish roots!

A rushed meal may compress calories into our bodies, but it can leave the mind and spirit hungering for more. What we really crave is table fellowship.

Table fellowship is the oldest form of hospitality and it has its roots in the Torah – the first five books of the Hebrew Bible. It's also one of our legacies from Christ. Please pray with me.

O God you have fed us from the abundance of your Creation. On this Sunday before the celebration of your resurrection we ask that you feed our spirits and minds as well as our bodies. Gather us around your table. Be in communion with us. Help us to be in communion with you. Help us to remember who we are and that we belong to you. Through Jesus the Christ we pray. Amen.

Before we were Congregationalist, before we were United Methodist, before we were EUB, before we were Protestant, even before we were Catholic we were all Jewish. That's right. We were all Jewish. God chose the Israelites from whom we have descended. Before we had the New Testament and the New Covenant, we were given the Old Testament and those first covenants.

Two years ago I had the opportunity to visit an exhibit of the Dead Sea Scrolls. In a related lecture by a Jewish scholar I was reminded that the scrolls are *not* Christian antiquity. The Qumran community that copied the scrolls, preserved them in clay jars, and hid them in caves was a Jewish community. Dr. Larry Shiffman, the

lecturer and expert on the Dead Sea Scrolls, warned our audience to avoid the temptation to “Christianize” the scrolls.

As I wandered through the exhibit I felt drawn back to my Jewish roots – to our Jewish roots. Each artifact in the exhibit, each fragment of the original scrolls reminded me that I descended from Abraham. Before you were United Methodist, before you were EUB, before you were a Congregationalist, you were Jewish.

Some folks like to remind me that they are still EUB after all these years since the merger, the premise being that we never really lose our roots. If that is true then we must all still be Jewish because before we where Christians we were Jews just as Jesus was a Jew.

We heard the familiar story of the Palms this morning. Jesus returns to Jerusalem for the last time. He returned to fulfill his legacy to us. As he prepared for his appointment with the cross, he gathered his disciples and close followers around a table, not so much for a last meal, but for a *lasting* meal.

It was the Passover or Seder meal – when Jews remember their deliverance from slavery in Egypt. The purpose of the Seder meal is not simply to nourish the body. The Seder is a meal that nourishes the mind and the spirit. It is a meal that calls to mind God’s might acts in history! We will relive the Passover this Thursday evening as we prepare for Easter, just as Jesus prepared for Easter by gathering in table fellowship.

Each item of food included in the Seder is a metaphor for the struggle the Jews experienced in escaping from slavery in Egypt. The words spoken during the meal are deliberately chosen and passed down over the years. The

foods and the words remind the Jews who they are and to whom they belong.

One purpose of the Seder is to pass on ancient memories to the children of the present day. Those memories become their children’s memories. The tradition has been preserved for nearly three thousand years. It’s alive and well today in the twenty-first century.

As Jesus gathered his faithful followers around the table he said, “I have longed to eat this meal with you.” And after he had shared the Passover meal – the Seder – he instituted another form of table fellowship.

He took bread, gave thanks to God, broke the bread, and gave it to his disciples, saying “Eat this bread and remember me.” And then he took a cup of wine, gave thanks to God, gave it to his disciples, saying “Drink this wine and remember me.”

On the day God raised Jesus from the tomb he was recognized by his disciples in the breaking of the bread at table and in table fellowship. Out of our Jewish roots in the Passover meal, Jesus links us to yet another meal. Through this meal we know as the Eucharist – the Last Supper – God’s Holy Spirit continues to live on in the breaking of the bread and in the sharing of the cup. It is in this sense that the Eucharist is a *lasting* meal and not a last meal.

God’s spirit lives in us through the Jewish tradition of breaking bread around a common table and remembering who we are, where we come from, and to whom we belong. We cannot hope to understand the Eucharist until we understand the Jewish tradition to which we are inexorably linked forever.

Eat this bread. Drink this wine. Remember you were a slave, but now are free. You were homeless, but now you have a home. You were no people, but now are God's people. You were forsaken, but now are forgiven. Eat this bread. Drink this wine. It is new life. It is eternal life. Eat this bread. Drink this wine. Come to the Seder meal this Thursday evening and learn about your roots in Judaism. Eat this bread. Drink this wine. And embrace your Jewish roots.