

“Meeting Jesus at the Table: A Meal with Chosen Family”
John 12:1-19

We normally begin Palm Sunday with a focus on the parade of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem. We remember the palms being waved, the donkey he rode, and all the people who lined the streets of Jerusalem shouting “Hosanna” hoping for Jesus to save them from the oppression of the Roman Empire. But today, since we have been focusing on meeting Jesus at the table, we will begin with the meal he had the night before his entry into Jerusalem.

Jesus had been on the radar of the religious leaders in Jerusalem as a potential agitator. They had been monitoring him, knowing that he could be a threat to the fragile stability they had established with the Roman occupiers. It was not the ideal situation that they had hoped for but one that gave them relative stability from the threat of violence by the Roman Empire. They were a small nation, and the Roman Empire was mighty and impossible to defeat. And Jesus was entering Jerusalem at a volatile time for the Jewish people. This was the time of the festival of the Passover when the people remembered their freedom from slavery in Egypt. It was a time of heightened security because of the Jewish hope for liberation. Many were hoping for a Messiah, a military leader blessed by God to enter Jerusalem to lead a revolution.

Jesus was aware of the fears and the hostilities and knew that, even though he was not planning on a military type of revolution. His mission of redeeming the human systems of violence and exploitation through love was seen as a major threat. In order to prepare for his entry into Jerusalem, Jesus sought refuge and spiritual nourishment in the house of his friends and by sharing a meal with them.

Let’s watch a video of this whole scene from John 12:1-19

<https://youtu.be/caQiDZzT3nU>

Six days before the Passover Jesus came to Bethany, the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ² There they gave a dinner for him. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him. ³ Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus’s feet, and wiped them^[a] with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. ⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (the one who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ “Why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii and the money given to the poor?” ⁶ (He said this not because he cared about the poor but because he was a thief; he kept the common purse and used to steal what was put into it.) ⁷ Jesus said, “Leave her alone. She bought it^[b] so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.”

⁹ When the great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there, they came not only because of Jesus but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ since it was on account of him that many of the Jews were deserting and were believing in Jesus.

¹² The next day the great crowd that had come to the festival heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. ¹³ So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting,

“Hosanna!

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord—
the King of Israel!”

¹⁴ Jesus found a young donkey and sat on it, as it is written:

¹⁵ “Do not be afraid, daughter of Zion.

Look, your king is coming,
sitting on a donkey’s colt!”

¹⁶ His disciples did not understand these things at first, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written of him and had been done to him. ¹⁷ So the crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to testify. ¹⁸ It was also because they heard that he had performed this sign that the crowd went to meet him. ¹⁹ The Pharisees then said to one another, “You see, you can do nothing. Look, the world has gone after him!”

These two stories are so connected. The meal and the anointing were essential for Jesus’ next move of entering Jerusalem. When one is faced with the fears and violence of the world, the nourishment of love is essential. Jesus was taking on the systems of hate and fear through what seemed to be a weakness to the world. No one would say to a soldier, arm yourself with love because we think mastery of weapons is the answer, but we know that when a loved one has to go to war, the strongest power they can take with them is the love of their family and friends. We survive incredible hardships in life when we know and feel that we are loved and connected.

Jesus was about to face the toughest week of his life. The dinner is the backbone of Palm Sunday. It is what he needed to propel him forward. Family was everything in that time and culture, but Jesus was called away from family. His life’s calling involved living on the road. His second family was that of his friends, people who believed in him and in his mission, people who saw his soul.

The meal was an incredible experience of love. This was the house of his chosen family as Jesus had to leave his family behind in Galilee. These were the people who loved him unconditionally and supported his vision.

Meeting Jesus at the table this week is a reminder for us about the importance of nourishing communities and meals. If we are to do the hard work of love in the world, we need time with the people who know and love us deeply.

Last Sunday St. George's Church in Bloudan, Syria was attacked. The church windows were smashed, the pews were sprayed with gasoline, and bombs were thrown inside. The fire was extinguished immediately after it started, and the bombs did not explode.

Despite the fear that gripped the worshippers that day, they continued on with worship later that day. They gathered around the table of Jesus and shared in his feast of love because they knew that they could not survive without being nourished in love.



Love connects our past to our present and to our future. Love is the constant we can count on. Life changes all the time. We never know when or how the next challenge will come to us, but what we can hold onto is love. Let the palm branches today remind you of that love, which seems fragile but in the right hands can bring a revolution of love.

And so today, I am going to give you a recipe called “Love Soup” that uses the ingredients of Chicken Noodle Soup. I was inspired by Osheta Moore’s recipe for reconciliation soup.

Prepare Chicken: Just like we take care of the dangers of raw chicken, may Christ help you handle love with care. Love is full of possibilities to hurt. May God help you to respond with care to the raw words of fear and pride. Then may you have the courage to thoroughly wash every interaction in grace.

Dice Onions: There will be tears in your life. May Christ help you to embrace the tears remembering that tears are not your enemy. They are reminders of prayers needing to be prayed. Remind others to pray when your tears come.

Slice Carrots: Some say eating carrots gives you good eyesight. Let the carrots remind you to see others as God's beloved. May you never forget to look deeply into the soul of the people of your life.

Chop Celery: We don't always understand and appreciate celery. It reminds us of the things that are bitter and sharp and which make us angry. Yet, when simmered with the other ingredients, it helps create a healing broth. Remember to use your anger to create something useful by letting it simmer mixed in with your love and wisdom until it creates something life-giving.

Toss in any leftover frozen veggies: Remember that in God's economy, nothing is ever wasted! Not our fears, not our tears, not our questions, and definitely, not our prayers. All the pieces of your life can become part of this life-giving love soup.

Sautee in butter and spices: Butter and spices add flavor to the soup. Let them remind you of the importance of the things that add flavor and fun to your relationships.

Add Water: Water is an essential part of life. Without it there would be no soup. Water reminds us also of our baptism. It reminds us of who we are at our core. Always remember to nurture your soul through prayer and service. Let your life be a place where your soul and the souls of others flourish.

Add Noodles: Let the noodles remind you that your life and the lives of others are intertwined. You will bump into others in this broth of love, but remember that over time, this bumping will soften you to God's will for your life.

Bring to Boil: Remember that the ingredients of a life of love are only changed under pressure when the heat seems unbearable. Remember to submit your life to the heat of your calling to bring the warmth of wholeness, the warmth of the Kingdom of God here on earth as it is in heaven.

Finally, simmer and let the aroma of love and peace fill your kitchen and your life!
Amen.