

Together we are a Great Feast

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by Rev. Nancy Landauer

It was a lovely clear spring evening in Paris. I was with the American Red Cross stationed in Heidelberg Germany. My best friend from grade school to high school in Minnesota had come to Germany to visit me. I think we were 24. I took a week's leave and my friend Sharon and I took a trip to Paris. We had gotten in late the night before. Fortunately we had found a small pension that was still accepting guests. We woke to the most beautiful spring morning possible. The air was delightful, the birds were singing outside our window. We had a lovely light breakfast that was provided by the pension and then we set out to go sight seeing.

By mid afternoon we were back at the pension. Our feet were sore and our calf muscles ached and we needed a nap. When we woke up we were hungry. We dressed and went out to the street to find a place for dinner. We strolled down the street, but we weren't really in the strolling frame of mind. We were really hungry. We tried several restaurants that didn't seem to be open. Then we stopped at a rustic looking restaurant. It looked like a good place to eat. Wonderful aromas were seeping out from the door. Boy, were we hungry. I tried to open the door and discovered it locked. What's the matter I wondered? Then a man came out of the restaurant and then several more men followed. We didn't speak French, but we managed to convey we wanted to come in, we were hungry. No Mademoiselles the men told us. It was only 5 pm we don't open for hours.

No restaurant will open for hours. Our faces fell. Hours, we didn't think we could wait hours.

The aromas hit us full blast as the restaurant door opened again. More men came out and started bringing food out to a wooden table sitting outside on the sidewalk in front of the restaurant. We tried to look very hungry. Finally one of the men made a grand gesture inviting us to sit at their table. Sharon and I gratefully sat down and joined the men. We all ate together a hearty stew, wonderful bread and a carafe of red wine. It felt like the best food I had ever tasted. Despite the language difference we managed to communicate and share some laughs. All too soon, the men had to get up and return to the restaurant to start their work for the evening. When we tried to give them some money for sharing their meal with us, they waved it away. Here we were experiencing hospitality that was beyond what we could have imagined.

We couldn't speak each other's language, but we surely experienced community, sitting out on the street as the Paris sky slowly began to move toward evening. That evening meal as I later wrote in my journal was a glimpse of a perfect world, the kind of world the book of Acts was talking about, where Christians shared whatever they had. That was true inclusion. I will always remember the city of Paris with great fondness because of that evening when we were the invited guests of a group of men who shared their dinner with us. Not because of the Eiffel tower, or the museums or the beautiful bridges.

In our call to worship this morning we read psalm 133. Psalm 133 is a song of God's abundant blessings in communal harmony. Walter Bruggeman, my all time favorite scholar, called psalm 133 a psalm of orientation. He means that it expresses a

people's firm and confident sense of God's orderly rule. The vision in 133 is a metaphor that tells us that communal harmony is like precious oil that is so abundant, it is poured on the head of the priest until it soaks into his full heavy beard and runs down over his collar and stains his robe. Oil was a precious and rare commodity in early Israel. It was so precious it could only be used for two things, light and heat. When we picture oil being so abundant that it is poured over the head and down the beard, we are picturing a time when God' abundance and self giving would more than suffice for every need of the people.

Israel always had an image of God's justice that included a world where everyone's needs were met. The early Christian Jewish church carried on this tradition. As we read in Acts today, the early house churches were sharing all they had. Rich and poor, everyone was included in their community. No government safety net was needed because they all took care of each other. They gathered for common meals and all shared what they had. The early Jesus followers believed that the end of time was very near. They felt no need to hoard belongings. When imminent death is on the horizon we realize the value of our worldly goods is of no importance.

It isn't just food for the hungry that needs to be shared. Acts makes us aware that we all have gifts to share. It is a choice. We can use our gifts and talents and skills to make a more peaceful and harmonies community, to we can choose not to. Some of us are born with musical talent, some of are born with a gift for mathematics, to some of us, fixing an engine is a delight, to some of us creating patterns for material is a joy, artistic talent is a gift, the ability to use tools is a gift. Hand eye coordination is a gift. We are all given gifts and talents to share; we just aren't given the same gifts and talents. Whatever

our talents and gifts are they are assets to be used to multiply and benefit our community's faith beyond our wildest dreams. It's important to give, but it is divine to give with a glad heart. The spirit of such giving transforms our mere gifts into grace.

This is the main point coming from both our reading from the Hebrew Bible and from the New Testament. We may feel as if we aren't particularly talented, or particularly smart, or particularly worthy in the world. Mother Teresa tells us that there are no great acts in the world. She says there are only small acts transformed by great love. Our gifts to each other may be small, simple, and unseen, but when simple gifts are passed through grace-filled hearts and hands, these small acts are transformed into a bold sense of harmony and peace and abundance for all. Gifts energized by grace are ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit in our midst.

Resurrection is the power of God to overcome death. Death is the one certainty that equalizes all of us. Death comes to rich and poor alike. Death is a basis of unity, empathy, and humanity. Because the early church had a sense of death's imminence, and they had such a sense of equality of all people, we see in them a remarkable witness. Sometimes unfortunately we say oh well that is only a story about an ideal world. We say to ourselves well, we live in the real world. We put our faith in medicine and our 401K's and hope that social security won't run out before we need it.

Jesus tells us otherwise. In Luke 12: 48, Jesus tells us that to those whom much has been given, much will be required. We are like the acorn that can be held in the hand. In the tiny seed is the DNA of the great oak. The gifts and talents we have been given will be enough. Our individual gifts and graces are enough to produce a great

abundant feast for all of us. There is overflowing abundance for every one of us when we pool our gifts, both in this world and in the world that is to come. Amen.