



Sermon

Good Friday, April 18, 2025, noon

1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 18:1-19:42

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It all started at the table, where they had shared many meals and much conversation, where they had shared and borne each other up amid their challenges, and multiplied their joys. It all started at the table, yet tables can be a threat. "Tables" can be "a threat," writes Diana Butler Bass, "to the empire."¹

Nevertheless, last night Jesus spent time at the table with his beloved friends, his chosen family, as they celebrated that Passover together: a time of connection, vulnerability, and sacrifice of energy, resource, skill—everything it takes to bring a meal to the table. A time to share challenges, frustrations, discovery, humor, and joy—all the stuff of life—because at the table, we are human. We all need to eat, which means we need to sacrifice of ourselves in order to be nourished.

It all started at the table: to serve, be served, and become renewed by calories and conversation to do the work ahead. Tables are where it all begins; tables are where it ends, and begins again.

At the table we are human in all our vulnerability, sacrifice, joy, and challenge; at the table we are literally all on one level in the same place and time. And thus, the table can be a threat to powers that would design power otherwise. It all starts and ends and begins again at the table.

Jesus, last night with his chosen family, taught them to continue to eat together, to share everything together, to be human together, to remember repeatedly their time together, yes, and moreover to remember and continue to become who they are—who they really are—and whose they are.

¹ "Good Friday", Diana Butler Bass, April 15, 2022, <https://dianabutlerbass.substack.com/p/good-friday>

Who are they? Who are we, at a table? We're members of one body: in it and through it and living all together. At a table, all on one level in the same place and time, we are not divided, not separate; we are not other, no one is alien. Everyone belongs. Everyone has a place. A table is a sharing of common life; there is no control, no one dominates, no one manipulates, all are together as one.

And yet, last night Jesus knew one would leave the table. We do not and will never know what exactly motivated Judas to leave the table and to get up and do what he was going to do. Was he motivated by greed, insecurity, simple disagreement? We will never know exactly why he did what he did, but as Butler Bass writes, "he turned his back on communion to collaborate with the empire".

One thing leads to another, one thing is connected to another, and the empire, the Roman Empire, maintained his power through violence; its wealth was also multiplied by violence.² In such "hierarchical arrangements" with "a few" oligarchs "at the top", and "many at the bottom, where the few own the most, and the many possess little" resource and power, "New Testament scholar John Dominic Crossan" points out this is called 'escalatory violence': when violence builds upon violence, in such a strategic way as to concentrate power in a few destructive hands; this "destructive logic," as it were, "of domination."³

Butler Bass writes that "empires are built on [this] domination, one group over others, seeing those outside the circle," seeing those beyond the table, "as 'alien,' needing to be separated and controlled, unworthy of the goods of society."

"The cross," she writes, becomes the empire's resounding "NO to the table," its response and retaliation to the table where life is shared, and where vulnerability, challenge, and yes, power, are held in common, beheld and respected by all.

"The cross" becomes "Rome's NO to the table." Judas left the table and went to the empire, and the cross was the empire's response.

Where are we on this day? Do we linger, hunger, and yearn for the table of connection and shared life, bearing sorrows and joys and challenges and discoveries and laughter and everything, all together? Do we hear those words in our minds, "Take and eat and do this to remember"?⁴ Or, like Judas, and many others, do we seek alternatives? Butler Bass writes, "Tables are a threat to empire. Tables can be frightening. Tables can be destroyed or abandoned. On this Friday, the table is deserted, and the cross laden with sorrow."

² Ibid., paraphrase

³ Ibid.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:23-25; Mark 14:22-24; Matthew 26:26-28