

Dead Man Eating

March 20, 2008

(Maundy Thursday - Year A)

1 Corinthians 11: 23-26

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

It seems that there is a tradition in prisons around this country for the people who are on death row, waiting to be executed.

A final request is granted to them on the night before they die.

The death row inmate is granted a request to eat whatever he would like to as his last meal.

I don't know why I am always surprised by what all you can find on the Internet.

But, I found out that there is a website that lists out the final meal requests of death row inmates.

The website is called [dead man eating. com](http://deadmaneating.com).

On this website, I discovered that on the night before Calvin Schuler of South Carolina was executed on June 22 last year, he chose:

A T-bone steak (well-done with A-1 sauce), a baked potato, french fries, grape drink and chocolate cake.

On the night before Jimmy Dale Bland of Oklahoma was executed on June 26, he chose:

Hot and spicy chicken breasts, 2 slices of sausage pizza with extra cheese, a slice of German chocolate cake, a pint of vanilla ice cream and a Dr. Pepper.

And on the night before Jesus was executed, he chose:

Bread and wine.

In the very first written account of the Last Supper that now exists, St. Paul writes in First Corinthians, giving us the tradition that Paul now hands on to us -

That on the night before he died for us, Jesus ate bread and wine.

On the website “dead man eating. com,” there is a link where you can share *your* request for *your* last meal, if you knew you were going to die the next day.

Which makes me wonder:

What *you* would choose as your last meal?

Chicken fried steak, cream gravy and mashed potatoes?

A warm chocolate brownie and Blue Bell vanilla ice cream?

Or the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation?

Last month, Flomar Derrick, a beloved woman in this congregation, began to slip considerably in her health.

I called up her son, Paul, and told him that I would bring communion over to Flomar at their house.

I had shared communion many times with Flomar before - either here at church or in her home.

When I entered her house this time, however, Flomar was lying in bed and barely lucid.

She was nearing death and she was talking out of her head.

I told her that we were going to share communion together.

I went through the short service, not knowing if she had any idea what was going on.

When I got to the Lord’s Prayer, she began to move her mouth, trying to say the words with me, even though her eyes were obviously in a very different place, either in or out of this world.

I took the bread and dipped it in wine and put it in her mouth.

Immediately, I wondered if this was a mistake, because she seemed to panic, as if she might choke on it.

Then, thankfully, she realized what it was and got a big grin on her face. She munched the wafer around and around with her gums, until it finally went down.

As I left, I kissed her on the forehead, knowing full well that it was the last time that I would see Flomar alive.

Sure enough, Flomar's burial service was here at the church three weeks ago.

And last week, her son, Paul, wrote me a thank you note.

And this is an excerpt of what Paul said:

Dear Jeff:

Thank you for your assistance and kindness during Mom's decline and death.

When you visited and gave her communion on the afternoon of February 13th, that was the last communication she had with anyone.

Perhaps that gave her the release she needed to begin the dying process, As she took no more food or drink after [having received the bread and wine].

Love and regards,

Paul & Jane Derrick & family

Flomar made an unspoken request, not to "dead man eating. com," but to herself and to her God,

That her last meal on earth be the Body and Blood of Christ, rather than a t-bone steak.

For Flomar and Jesus both knew that the bread and wine that we share at the Table - is the food and drink of our common life together, as a church, and as a community.

You all know how important Christian community is to me.

And when we gather together as a community on Sundays, our main activity is *always* to share the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation, as an appetizer of the heavenly banquet that we will one day share together.

For it is right, and a good and joyful thing, always and everywhere to share bread and wine when we gather,

When we come to this altar rail with folks we love, but might not like or agree with,

When we share communion together at casual Eucharists in the Mahan Commons or at the park or by the river,

When we are on our death bed and have to mush up the bread with our

toothless gums.

For this is the tradition that we have been given by St. Paul:

That on the night before he died, our Lord Jesus Christ chose bread as his last meal.

He took, blessed, broke and gave it to his friends, saying:

“Take, eat. This is my Body, this is my Community, that is given for you.

Do this often, in remembrance of me.”

Therefore, it is my prayer for each of you tonight, that on the night before you die, that your greatest hunger will not be for chicken fried steak.

But that on the night before you die, that your greatest hunger will be for one more taste of that food and drink that has sustained you the most through this life,

That your greatest hunger will be for Jesus Christ,

That we may evermore dwell in him, and he in us.

AMEN.

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