

One of the greatest risks of my childhood was eating food somebody else's mother had prepared. I enjoyed meatloaf and grilled cheese sandwiches the way Mom made them, and even though I forced down the few green beans she made us eat, I took comfort in their familiarity. But eating someplace else raised fearful questions: Why are they serving ketchup with hotdogs? Are they going to put broccoli on my plate? Do they expect me to eat both the leafy part and the stem part? What are those dark things in this soup? Growing up, I learned the powerful relationship between meals and friendship. If I want to be your friend I have to eat the food you give me. If I refuse, I risk losing you. In the name of friendship I have eaten squid ink, roast horse, cow brain, and rocky mountain oysters, soaked in a brandy sauce. But in every case, two different worlds met at the meal, and my life was nourished by food and friends.

There's a lot I could say about the Last Supper. It was the Passover meal, the Seder, which our Jewish brothers and sisters continue to eat once a year to this day. It recalls the Exodus, the decision by Pharaoh to let Israel go from slavery into the freedom of their own promised land. The Jews hastened to leave, before Pharaoh changed his mind, so they prepared unleavened bread, unyeasted bread; anxious for their freedom, they didn't wait for yeast to rise. In the Seder, the Jews make present once again the excitement of passover. It's a meal that joins two worlds--the first passover with the present passover.

Also at the Last Supper, two worlds meet. Jesus gives the disciples a meal unlike any their mothers ever prepared. He gives them his body; he gives them his blood. The all-powerful God who lives beyond time and space took on flesh in the person of Jesus, and now the all-powerful God who lives beyond time and space takes the appearance of bread and wine. In laying this banquet, God unites food and friendship. God says to us, "I know we're from two different worlds, but I ache to become one with you." And when we eat, in the name of friendship we become one with God.

The meal carries a price. Every meal does. Once you eat squid ink you'll never be the same again; it increases what you can tolerate. When we eat eucharist, we join the two worlds. We become like God. We become people who serve and people who love, because we took the risk to eat strange food with friends.