

Message for February 18, 2018

"The Last Supper"

Luke 22:14-20

¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you"

Prayer:

1. Video
2. Today we are beginning our series called "24 Hours That Changed the World". Each week during the season of Lent we are going to be looking at one event that took place during the last 24 hours of Jesus' life.
 - a. Next week Sue Shorb-Sterling will speak on "The Garden"
 - b. Then I will speak on The Courtroom and the Courtyard
 - c. Bishop LaTrelle Easterling will speak on a Lenten theme
 - d. As we move towards Good Friday, the theme will be about the crucifixion and then into the Resurrection at Easter.
3. That 24 hour period that changed the world began in the Upper Room... When Jesus broke the Bread and said, "This is my body" and when he picked up the Cup saying "This is my Blood of the New Covenant... shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins...", *everything he did, everything he said* that night had a connection to the history of the people in that room.
4. That night was part of the stories of all these men, the 12 Disciples. And in turn, what happened in that room has become part of *our* story...the story that defines and shapes *us*. This is a story of service and freedom that originates in the Old Testament story of the Exodus and continues into the New Testament and into today.
5. When the disciples gathered in that upper room, they came, as many Jewish people still do today, to participate in an evening that was meant to be a time of joy and celebration. It was the night that they celebrated the Passover. The celebration was the Seder.
6. This night – the Seder – was when as a community they would retell the story of how God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt. Also, this night the Last Super would enter in the

passion of Jesus which was God's answer to the slavery to sin that all humans have. Let's see how this unfolds.

- a. The Passover story and the meal that the Seder is was a story that was open-ended – i.e., it was incomplete, **in that it hinted at the coming of the One that God would one day send to set *all* people free. The Jewish belief is that Elijah will return heralding the coming of the Messiah.**
 - b. The One who would be the deliverer of God's people.
7. When those disciples went into the place that Jesus had arranged in advance for them, they came to participate in a feast that remembered the most important act that God had done for Israel – an event recorded in Exodus 3 – 13. The Israelites had been slaves for over 400 years when God raised up Moses to deliver them.
8. And you remember the story – (maybe you've even seen the movie!) As Pharaoh's heart is hardened against God's plan for these people, he refuses to let them go.
 - a. As a result, God sends a series of plagues on the Egyptians, increasing in their intensity.
 - b. But Pharaoh is still unmoved until God says to Moses that he was going to perform one last terrible deed in that land; after that, Pharaoh would *have* to let the people go: God would strike down the firstborn in every household, even to the very flocks and cattle throughout the entire land of Egypt.
9. On that terrible night, the Israelites were to sacrifice a lamb to God. And the blood of a lamb was to be placed on the doorpost of their houses, so when the angel of Death passed through the land, it would 'pass over' the homes that were marked in that way - by the blood of a lamb. And then the firstborn in those homes would be spared.
10. That was exactly what happened to these people – all the way up to Pharaoh's own palace. Pharaoh finally relented. He ordered the Israelites to leave Egypt. But knowing how fickle he was, the Israelites prepared their escape so quickly that there was no time to leaven their bread dough and allow it to rise; so the bread they took with them was unleavened.
11. The Passover Seder, then, even to this day, is for Jews a time to retell this formative story; this story that defines who they are as a people. Sharing unleavened bread, bitter herbs and many other rituals, this is a night to tell the story of the birth of the Jewish people.
12. So, when the disciples got together on **this** particular night to celebrate the Seder, to remember their history, they came together joyfully. This is meant to be a happy night. It's a time to remember and retell a story of a great deliverance; it's a story of a God who kept the promises he made to Abraham, Isaac, and to Moses.

13. But can you imagine how dramatically the tone, the atmosphere, of the room that night must have changed when Jesus looked over the room, in the company of these men who claimed to be his most devoted followers, men who had given up careers and family and reputation for him.
- 14. It was a fascinating night. Explain the table – a big difference from the one that Da Vinci paints in the Last Supper. The table was U shaped and the guests reclined on pillows on the floor – there were no chairs and Jesus would be on the left of the table --- in the center – one on his right and one on his left.**
- a. Remember last week as we talked that John and James asked to be seated on the righthand and the left hand of Jesus when he came into his kingdom. This request came as they were being seated for the Passover dinner. So, they asked Jesus to give them the important jobs in the new kingdom. This happens often in the world today. Notice what the request means. They wanted great honor and power for themselves. They did not ask to be servants in the kingdom. They did not ask Jesus to use them. They asked for honor and power.
 - b. And Jesus' answer was: 'You will drink the cup that I drink. You can have the same *baptism as I have. But I do not choose who sits at my right or left. God chooses the people who will receive these honors.
15. Also, Jesus had taken a towel and washed the feet of the disciples – no one wanted to wash the feet of the other as that was the servant's role --- Jesus show what was required of his followers --- that they had to be servants to others – that their power would come from service. Jesus said for them to model their life after what he was doing for them.
16. The Passover meal and the Last Supper show us just what service is all about – it is in humility not a power broker.
17. Later on Jesus says, *"One of you will betray me."*
- a. *"The echoes of Jesus' prediction and of the acts of betrayal by those closest to him are still discomfiting. In our own age, when church leaders have abused children, embezzled funds and more, we realize that such betrayals are commonplace. Jesus might well have said, "All of you will betray me"; and with that realization, we must look finally at ourselves..."¹*
18. You see, the story of the Upper Room has become *our* story. So, as we think of what happened that night around *that* Table at the Last Supper, whenever we come together for Holy Communion, part of our remembering at some point, needs to be a place where we ask ourselves, "When have I been Judas to Jesus?... when have I betrayed my Lord?" We have

not been in service to others, we have sought to be powerful in so many small but distinguished ways.

- a. This is why we always include a prayer of confession when we are going to celebrate Communion. Because in re-telling this formative story, this story that defines who we are as a Community in Christ, we need to acknowledge this uncomfortable part: that we are all capable of being Judas. We are sinners.

19. But fortunately, the story does not end there... our Community is not built simply on the common knowledge that we are all messed up.

- a. *We are*. But that's the *context* of our story, not the 'meat' of it. This is Good News, not Bad News!

20. Even though what came next must have also been very difficult – even impossible – for the disciples to understand. Jesus took a loaf of bread, and he broke it... and he said, *"This is my Body, broken for you"*. *Jesus looked again at those around that table and said, "This is my blood... shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins."*

21. It was later, after the Crucifixion, after his Resurrection, that the people of God began to understand the full significance of what happened that night. That amazing night when these men gathered to remember an act of redemption that took place long before...in the midst of an ancient ritual in which a lamb was slain year after year to remind the people how the blood of a lamb protected them long before... they came to realize that they were in the midst of God's Lamb, the one whose sacrificial death would be the means of eternal life for all who were covered by it in faith.

22. Jesus, is the Lamb of God...and the Seder itself was transformed that night. It became a remembrance of another act of redemption – one that defeated death itself for all people.

23. We come to the realization of how the repetition of this holy meal shapes *us* as God's people. It's not just a onetime thing... but in a cumulative way, as we come again and again to this table we are reminded of important things.

24. It's our story: we remember the seriousness of sin to God... we are reminded and encouraged to confess and repent. We are reminded in a way that we can see, and taste, and smell, that God has provided the answer for our deepest needs, and so we are made aware – again and again and again – of the depth of God's amazing love for us. In this meal.

25. Of all the rituals, all the symbols that are ours in our faith tradition...the most powerful one is the one that we remember today...The Last Supper. It is our story.

26. Thanks be to God.