

Title: *Christ, Our Passover*

Text: Luke 22:7-23

It's interesting to see how the Holy Spirit puts sermon series together sometimes. We are nearing the conclusion of a series entitled *Jesus: Lamb of God* and before that, we preached a series entitled *Jesus and the Kingdom*. I wish I could say it was my brilliance and strategic planning that brought me to this topic today but it was just the Holy Spirit working. The theme for this morning is kind of the confluence of those two series.

One of the things that makes Luke's story unique is the emphasis that he puts on the kingdom of God.

In a few moments we will partake of the Lord's Supper. Isn't it interesting how much significance is invested in just a little cup of juice and a little wafer of bread?

In her memoir *Take This Bread*, author Sara Miles shares how the first time she ever took Communion changed her life forever. She writes:

One early, cloudy morning, when I was forty-six, I walked into a church, ate a piece of bread, took a sip of wine. A routine Sunday activity for tens of millions of Americans—except that up until that moment I'd led a thoroughly secular life, at best indifferent to religion, more often appalled by its fundamentalist crusades. This was my first communion. It changed everything.

Eating Jesus, as I did that day to my great astonishment, led me against all my expectations to a faith I'd scorned and work I'd never imagined. The mysterious sacrament turned out to be not as symbolic wafer but actual food—indeed, the bread of life. In that shocking moment of communion, filled with a deep desire to reach for and become part of a body, I realized that what I'd been doing with my life all along was what I was meant to do: feed people.

And so I did. I took communion, I passed the bread to others, and then I kept going, compelled to find new ways to share what I had experienced.

It started with something that Jesus instituted on the last night of his life prior to his betrayal and crucifixion. It has its roots in the Passover meal that we talked about several weeks ago, now. The Hebrews were groaning under their affliction in Egypt, but the God to whom they belonged heard their groaning and their affliction. After a series of plagues, God sent an angel of death to pass through the land of Egypt and to strike the firstborn son in every household. Those who put the blood of a lamb on their doorposts would be spared as death passed over them. It would be an act of faith that they believed God enough to act on what they were being told to do.

Jesus is now coming to the last night of his life. The storm clouds are gathering and he knows what's about to happen. It was a busy season in Jerusalem. Devout pilgrims wanted to be in the Holy City, near the Temple to observe the Passover. It was a crowded city and it could be a real challenge to find a place for you and your family and your friends to eat the Passover meal.

The disciples knew that Jesus was intent on making to Jerusalem by the Passover. Since they had a tendency to be pretty clueless about some important stuff, you have to wonder if it was beginning to dawn on them just how significant this Passover would be.

On the day of Unleavened Bread, Jesus told Peter and John, the two main leaders among the disciples to go and make preparations to eat the Passover. Jesus said to them, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters,¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat

the Passover with my disciples?’¹² He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there.”

Jesus has amazing powers and we look at him saying this to the disciples and we wonder, “How did he know that?” Truth be told it was probably a pre-arranged signal that Jesus had worked out with the man. To be carrying water in that very patriarchal society would be viewed as women’s work so a man carrying a water jug would be highly unusual.

Peter and John found things just the way Jesus told them they would be and isn’t that just the way that it always is? Can you ever say that Jesus has misled you or given you a bum steer? We may have times in our lives when we wonder about certain things and his will turns out to be not what we thought it would be, but he is absolutely faithful to do as he promised and to live up to his word.

Peter and John then proceeded to make the preparations for the Passover which Jesus and his disciples would observe together. There was no more tender night in the life of Jesus than the night that he sat down with the 12 to partake of his last Passover feast with them. It was all veiled in mystery and secrecy. The city was full of people who had come from all over to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. The disciples had heard Jesus talk about death and his death and they may well have thought that they would die, too. How else do you explain the fact that they all ran when the law came after Jesus to arrest him?

The disciples prepared for the Passover on this special night. When the hour came for them to dine, they reclined at the table. They would lay on the floor kind of on one elbow with their heads at the table and their feet away from the table. They partook of a Passover meal that was infused with meaning unlike any other they had ever eaten before. In this simple act of taking the bread and the cup, we see some past present and future dimensions of our life with God. There is one interesting wrinkle in Luke that is different from the accounts in the other gospels. That is there are two different places where the cup is taken. In the actual Passover Seder, there would be 4 different cups. Luke just abbreviates all that happened. He doesn’t record all of the conversation that took place, but he does mention two cups.

Jesus begins by saying, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you because I won’t eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God. This is the last night of his life and there is no one he would rather spend it with than this group of men whom he had been pouring his life into for these past 3 years. He says, “This is the last one before the fulfillment in the kingdom of God. I believe he’s saying here, “I won’t eat this meal again until the marriage supper of the lamb. That’s going to be out there at some future date, but I’m eating it now with you and it is and always will be a special time. We’ll remember together. He took the elements and passed the bread and the cup and set them up for us forever as a reminder of what Jesus Christ has done for us.

When we take communion today first we look back to what Jesus did for us. At the beginning of the meal, in Luke’s account, he took the cup and gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes.”

Then he said, “This is my body given (not broken, but given) for you; do this in remembrance of me.” It’s interesting that he would sound so funereal when he hasn’t died yet. The disciples had heard him talk about his death but this is now the time when it’s really going to happen. Whenever they gather and eat bread and drink the cup they will remember.

That’s why we’re supposed to partake of the Lord’s Supper, or Communion, or the

Eucharist if you're from a Catholic background on a regular basis. He didn't say we should have it every time we worship. He didn't say once a month or once a quarter. The difference between Salem Avenue and my previous church is that Greenbelt did business meeting quarterly and communion monthly. We did business meeting monthly and communion quarterly. My desire was that we do it more often than that.

When we take the bread and cup today, we look back. We remember. We give thanks which is from the Greek word *eucharizo* from which the Catholics get the word Eucharist. What do we remember? We remember a lot of things.

God remembers the covenant he made with Noah. After the flood, Genesis says, "Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, ¹⁵ I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. ¹⁶ Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth."

The writer to the Hebrews quotes the prophet Jeremiah and says, "¹⁶ "This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." ¹⁷ Then he adds: "Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more."

In Revelation 2, the risen Christ is speaking to a church that had left its first love and was in danger of losing their witness to their community, "Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first." Remember what it was like when you first met Christ and he was the passion of your life and there was nothing that was more important to you than him.

Why was that? It was because you came to an awareness that you had a need that you could not meet by yourself or for yourself. You knew that you had offended a holy God and that there was nothing you could do to make that right. You remember the words of the hymn that say *Jesus Paid it All, All to Him I Owe, Sin had left a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow*. And then one of my 5 best verses in the hymnal, *And when before the throne, I stand in him complete, Jesus died my soul to save, my lips shall still repeat*. If we had time, we could go into stark and gruesome detail about the physical cost that he paid. I could refer you to Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*. We mentioned a few weeks ago the irony of the fact that many would say that those pictures are too graphic to show in church.

Notice he says, this is my body given, not broken for you. Some theologians suggest that perhaps he phrased it that way because he lay down his life voluntarily and that as we are his body now, we should hope that there would be no more divisions in the body.

There's a second dimension we celebrate in the Lord's Supper and that is **the fellowship we share with Him**.

One writer says, "It is not the recalling of a figure of history who has long passed away, but the proclamation of the death of the risen Lord who is present in the church. He who invited the disciples to share the last Supper continues to be the real Host at each communion service. . . .The real presence of Christ in the Supper is thus no different than His real presence in the Word. In the one He encounters His people in visible elements and in the other (the Word) in the words of Scripture."

That's why we say he is the host, we are His invited guests and we invite all believers to join us for the feast.

It's also a reminder to us that it is possible to live in vital, constant fellowship with God. As Paul wrote in Romans, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all – how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?" He loves us perfectly, completely, unconditionally, he always has what is in our best interest at stake and when he gathered with his disciples there in that upper room, he said, "I've haven't hardly been able to wait to eat with you because there's no one else I'd rather be with. Maybe you've heard this that's been on the Internet, "If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring. He sends you a sunrise every morning. Whenever you want to talk, He listens. He can live anywhere in the universe, but He chose your heart. Face it, friend - He is crazy about you!" He'd rather die than live without you and that's what we celebrate this morning.

Finally, there's the future. He says we do this in hope until he comes again. The elements of the Lord's Supper ought to remind us that he didn't do this for nothing. He did this because he has a glorious eternity. I had breakfast one time with a friend who was crazy passionate about evangelism and loved to share his faith. When he paid for breakfast and the cashier said, "Have a nice day," Warren said, "And you have a nice eternity and handed him a tract." Jesus wants us to spend eternity with him.

He was handed over by his betrayer. Jesus knew what was coming but to those other disciples, it was unthinkable that someone would turn on him. Some people say that Judas was just fulfilling his role in some sort of divine script. He had to do what was prophesied, but no he didn't. Jesus arrest by the authorities didn't depend upon Judas' betrayal.

It is ironic isn't it that at this pivotal, crucial moment, the disciples begin to argue over who's the greatest. Don't be like the people who think their greatness is in their ability to lord it over others. You be a servant. The world would say the person being served is the greater, but I'm among you as one who serves.

We gather here today to celebrate that we have a new identity. We're concerned about identity theft and do what we can to avoid becoming victims of that but Jesus Christ has freely given us his identity. We are beloved of the father, adopted as sons and daughters of God because of what He has done for us. He asks us to be like him in serving and he promises us that he will confer on us a kingdom and we will eat and drink with him in his kingdom and sit on thrones with him one day.

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