

THE NEW COVENANT

Luke 22:7-20

Maundy Thursday (Series C)

April 14, 2022

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

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The gospel lesson for Maundy Thursday comes from *The Gospel According to Luke*, chapter 22, verses 7 through 20. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Luke 22, beginning at verse 7, we read in Jesus' name.

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." ⁹ They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" ¹⁰ He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters ¹¹ and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹² And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there." ¹³ And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

¹⁴ And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.
You may be seated.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as the feast of his new covenant. It is his body and blood, which was given into death and raised for the forgiveness of our sins.

This is the beginning of Christ's passion.

It begins with the old Passover meal. But, as the disciples will soon see, this will be no ordinary Passover. It is not merely time for the ancient observance of the Passover. It is time for the new event that the Passover had foreshadowed for nearly 1500 years. It is time for Christ's passion.

This Passover meal is really the beginning of Good Friday. According to the Jewish reckoning of time, a new day began, not at midnight, nor at the rising of the sun, but at sundown. And the Passover meal was to be observed just after sundown, at what they considered to be the beginning of the day. Preparations were made during the daylight hours. And then, when the sun set, marking the beginning of the Passover, they sat down for the meal. So this meal takes place at the beginning of a new day, and it also happens to be the day of Christ's death.

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Whereas we separate the days into Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, for Jesus and his disciples, this all took place on the same day. The Passover meal and the institution of the Lord's Supper, the prayers on the Mount of Olives, the betrayal and arrest, the trials, the beatings, the crucifixion, the death, the burial, this all took place on one day: the Passover. For Jesus and his disciples, this was all Good Friday.

So in verse 14, where Luke says, "And when the hour came," he's not merely saying that it was the appointed time for the Passover. More importantly, it was the appointed time for Christ's passion. The word "hour" is sometimes used in a literal sense, and sometimes in a metaphorical sense. We usually use it in the literal sense, where it refers to a sixty-minute period of time. That's man's time. But Luke uses it here to refer to God's time. God sees all of history at once. And this is the appointed time for salvation. It is the appointed time for Christ's Passion. It's Good Friday.

At sundown, the beginning of the day, Jesus observed the Passover meal with his disciples. But before the sun could set again, marking the end of the Passover and the beginning of the Sabbath day, the true Passover Lamb would be laid in a tomb.

The observance of the Passover was a remembrance of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. But even more than that, it was a prophecy of Christ, the true Passover Lamb.

I'll give you a quick rundown of the Exodus, and especially the Passover. At the time of the first Passover, the Israelites were slaves in Egypt, and the Pharaoh refused to let them go. So God was working to free them from their bondage. God had already sent nine plagues on the land of Egypt, but Pharaoh still refused to let the people go. So God was preparing to send the tenth, the plague of the firstborn. In this tenth plague, God would go out by night into the midst of Egypt, and every firstborn in the land would die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, to the firstborn of the slave girl behind the mill, and even the firstborn of the cattle. But no harm would come upon the people of Israel, neither them, nor their cattle. (Ex. 11:4-7)

So in order to mark the Israelites as his protected people, God commanded them to kill a lamb and paint the blood on the doorposts of their homes. So when God swept through the land that night, he would pass over the doors of the Israelites. That's where the name "Passover" comes from. The LORD said, "The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt" (Ex. 12:13).

Meanwhile, inside their houses, they gathered as families. They ate the roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread. "Unleavened" means there was no yeast in the bread. There was no time to let the yeast spread through the dough. They would have to leave soon.

So the people ate the meal while the LORD swept through the land of Egypt, killing all the firstborn, but passing over every house with blood on the doorposts. Then, while it was still night, he commanded Moses and Aaron to take the people and go (Ex. 12:31-32). So they left.

The LORD led the Israelites to the Red Sea. Pharaoh's army chased them. Despite all the plagues, Pharaoh was unwilling to let his slaves go free. So the LORD opened the sea, which was maybe five or ten miles wide at this point, and the people passed through. When Pharaoh's army pursued them through the sea, the LORD closed the waters and drowned them. Thus he delivered his people from Egypt.

So the LORD commanded the Israelites to keep the Passover as a memorial feast. It was a reminder of how he had delivered them.

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But even more so, whether they realized it or not, this meal was a prophecy of the Lamb of God who would be slain for the forgiveness of their sins. The Passover meal looked both backward and forward. It looked back to the Exodus, remembering how God saved them from death, and it looked forward to the true Lamb of God. This is what Jesus taught the disciples when he celebrated the Passover with them that night. He was instituting a New Covenant.

Traditionally, when the Israelites observed the Passover as a remembrance, they gathered together as families. But the disciples did not gather with their biological families in their own houses. It was Jesus and his twelve disciples. This teaches us that the Church is Jesus' family. These twelve men were Jesus' family, and so he celebrated the Passover with them.

And for us too, as Jesus gathers us tonight for the meal he instituted, we gather as family. Instead of being related to one another by blood, we are related by ... well ... better blood. What I mean is this: we are family, not by the blood that runs through our veins, but by better blood, the blood that ran through and out the veins of our Savior. As we eat his body and drink his blood, we commune with him and with one another. We are related by the blood we drink. This is a family meal.

When Israelite families gathered together for the Passover, the father or another head of the family would retell the story of the Exodus and interpret it along the way. There was a certain liturgy to it. Each part of the meal taught something about the Exodus.

Someone in the family might ask, "Why the bitter herbs?"

And the father would say, "Because of our bitter sufferings."

"Why unleavened bread?"

And the father would say, "Because of the haste of our journey."

"Why the lamb?"

And the father would say, "To pour out the blood and paint the doorposts, so God will pass over our house."

And so when Jesus serves the Passover meal to the disciples, as the head of the family, he also retells the Exodus story and interprets it. But his interpretation is different. His interpretation to the disciples is not a remembrance of what happened almost 1500 years earlier. It is a prophecy of what would happen later that day. Part of Jesus' interpretation is recorded in Scripture for us. Part of it we can only imagine.

We can imagine the disciples asking, "Why the bitter herbs?" And Jesus saying, "Because of my bitter sufferings."

"Why unleavened bread?"

"Because of the haste of my journey."

"Why the lamb?"

"Because I will pour out my blood, paint the earth with it, and God will pass over your sins."

This, as best as I can imagine, is how Jesus would have answered those questions. And I recognize it's completely speculative. But it's based on what we do know about how Jesus interpreted the Passover. That is how the Old Covenant looked forward to the New Covenant.

But at the end of the meal, Jesus adds something. And this isn't just an addition to the Passover meal, but this is a completely new meal. This is the New Covenant. And this is really the most scandalous part. Reinterpreting the Passover meal is one thing, but this is something else altogether. "He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in

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my blood' (22:19-20). **"This is my body. ... This is my blood."** Imagine how uncomfortable the disciples must have been, not merely to hear Jesus say this, but when Jesus made them eat it.

The Passover meal, which was a remembrance of the Exodus, has given way to a new meal, which is a proclamation of the death of Christ (1 Cor. 11:26). This meal comes from the Passover Jesus celebrated with his disciples, but it's different. The remembrance is different.

The food is similar, but also different. There are no bitter herbs, and there is no lamb. Instead, we have just bread and wine, which is the body and blood of the Lamb of God. And we are not commanded to eat it once a year as a memorial, but often, for the forgiveness of our sins. Because the problem is not simply that we forget about Christ's passion. We do forget; it fades into the back of our minds. But that's only part of our sin. The whole of our sin is the bigger problem. So this meal is not given to us merely as a remembrance. It is given to us as Jesus Christ himself, crucified and risen, for the forgiveness of our sins. Jesus says, **"This is my body. ... This is my blood. Given for you. ... Poured out for you."**

This is the New Covenant that Jeremiah prophesied of (Jer. 31:31-34). When Jesus adds this to the end of their Passover meal, and when he especially calls it "the New Covenant," he's indicating that the old is passing away. The ancient Passover is passing away. The deliverance from Egypt is just a shadow of the new thing Jesus is doing. He is establishing the New Covenant. This New Covenant is not based on the sacrifice of animals. And it does not depend on our faithfulness to the covenant. This is a covenant Jesus makes. And it depends solely on Jesus' sacrifice, as he was faithful to death. Now, here, at this altar, this New Covenant is given to you.

So as you come to the altar, there are two basic things you must believe: what it is and what it's for. And both of these truths are simply proclaimed by Jesus when he institutes this meal.

First, what it is: it is Jesus' true body and blood that was given into death for you, and also raised on the third day. That's what it is.

Second, what it's for: it is for the forgiveness of your sins. These are the two things you must believe. It is Jesus' true body and blood, and it is for the forgiveness of your sins.

As you come and kneel at this altar, you confess these two things to be true. You confess that you are a sinner, deserving of God's wrath. And you confess that Jesus Christ is here. And he is, as his promise declares, **"This is my body, which is given for you"** (Luke 22:19). And, **"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood"** (Luke 22:20).

So come believing this to be true. If you do not believe that Jesus is present with his body and blood as the words declare, or if you do not believe that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness, it would be better not to come. To do so would be to eat and drink in an unworthy manner (1 Cor. 11:27-29). So come believing that Jesus is here.

If you come believing you are innocent, you will leave guilty. But if you come believing you are guilty, you will leave innocent. This is what it means to eat and drink in a worthy manner. It doesn't mean that you are worthy of what Christ gives you. If you ever think that you are worthy of so great a gift, you are truly unworthy. But if you confess that you are unworthy, then you are worthy to receive the gift that makes you worthy.

Jesus has given himself for us to eat and drink so that we might receive all that he gained for us when he offered himself as the true Passover Lamb. This is the New Covenant. Amen.

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Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.