

Luke 22:14-20, 24-30
Greatest?
Sunday October 1st, 2017

Throughout the Gospel of Luke you will find a reoccurring theme to be Jesus eating and drinking with all sorts of people. His first miracle of course was changing water into wine at a great wedding feast. This feast was a taste, I believe, of the great heavenly banquet yet to come.

In the Mideast culture from Old Testament times down to this day eating with someone is a sign of acceptance and respect. Table fellowship was part of very important incidents like Abram and the 3 visitors, Saul and David, the Quail and Manna in the wilderness, Elijah and the widow, Jesus feeding the 5000, and so many other stories.

Dr. Barclay helped me understand what sacrament was in terms of remembrance. He said in most people's houses they have what they call "a junk drawer." Now the things that are in that drawer are usually useless objects... except for the memories they recall when their owner picks them up. I have a "Junk basket" and boxes and more. I have tendency to hold onto things because of the memories they hold. In this sense these are sacraments to me. Not holy as in holy Communion, but they remind me.

One scholar referred to our scripture today as the "Last Passover". Most Bibles title it "The Last Supper", but for those following Christ into Christianity that day, for them, it was the Last Passover, for the unfolding events of that meal would change its meaning for Christians forever. In fact, a new sacrament was born that evening.

We as Christians don't celebrate Passover once a year. But we celebrate Communion monthly, some do it weekly, and most Christians celebrate World Communion Sunday yearly on this first Sunday of October.

Jesus sat at the table that night and said, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."

The original Greek rendering points out the phrasing actually saying, “**With desire, I have desired to eat the Passover with you.**” Jesus wanted the intimate fellowship that came with this meal. Jesus knew what was coming, but the disciples as a whole could not hear what he plainly said, “**He was to suffer, one would betray him, and he came to serve.**”



Overall it wasn't the placid, warm and fuzzy meal he wanted, or we imagine in our minds. It didn't have Leonardo Da Vinci's ordered symmetry. I believe it would have left most with heartburn.

Jesus spoke of suffering and death and gave new meaning to the elements of the Passover. Body given, Blood poured out which was a euphemism for death. Betrayal was next, and I left out those verses, and finally an argument over who was the greatest.

Plainly he spoke of what was to come, but they could not and would not hear what he said, instead they speculated over the identity of the betrayer, and then argued over who was to be the greatest in the Kingdom. It is a natural transition from eying each other suspiciously as to who was the traitor to “I am actually the greatest.”

Now the Passover meal is a time of remembrance. It is a time to remember the 400 years the Israelites spent in Egyptian slavery. It is a time to remember the 10 plagues, the stubbornness of Pharaoh, the deliverer sent from God: Moses and Aaron his right hand man.

Each and every aspect of the meal was symbolic in nature and recalled to mind some aspect of the **saving acts of God**. The very name of the meal “Passover” was a reminder of the angel of death passing over the children of Israel who had their doorposts marked with the blood of a lamb.

I can't go into all the aspects of the Passover ritual; but in it are some items that have lent themselves to new meaning for Christians.

During the Passover meal 4 cups of wine are used. We hear of two of them. The one at the beginning and the one after the supper called **the cup of “redemption”**. This cup took on new meaning when Jesus said, **“This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”** This cup of redemption became then more than a remembrance of the Israelites redemption from Egypt, it became a remembrance of a new covenant in Jesus blood that bought back the whole world from its sin. It truly became **“The Cup of Redemption.”**

A meal is a time of fellowship, closeness, and bonding. Most family reunions occur around a table, a meal. These meals deepen and strengthen our relationships with each others. God knows the value of meals for human relationship. Our Jewish brothers and sisters have a running joke about their holidays. They often say, **“The Jewish holidays all follow the same pattern: They tried to harm us, they failed, let’s eat!”**

We Methodist say, **“We meet to eat and eat to meet.”** Some kid, our religious symbol shouldn’t be a cross and flame, but a potluck dish.



And so the close human bond that is developed and strengthened during meals is why Judas’ betrayal is so complete. His betrayal would break all the bonds of all of the Disciples’ fellowship for a while. Judas betrayed everyone in that room.



We humans have a hard time wrapping our minds around that kind of betrayal. In general, we are repulsed by disloyalty and faithlessness, which makes it hard to comprehend. This is why at that meal it was so hard for Jesus to get his point across that he came to serve, suffer and die.

His disciples were oblivious to this, and who could really blame them? They'd lived and traveled with each other for 3 years—who among them could possibly be so evil?

So they simply questioned each other as to who it could be and then began arguing over who would get the corner office in Jesus' new kingdom. In one sense it was a natural transition from who's the worst to "Not me! To, I'm the greatest!!"

And the Jesus was straight up with them. He said, "Yes, you will get that corner office, you will sit on thrones and rule over the 12 tribes of Israel." In other words be leaders in the future Kingdom of God.

But they missed his point that they were going to have to serve like him in order to get there, even unto their own deaths.

Now in most stories we identify with one of the characters. The story told on Passover night is meant to have the hearers and participants identify with the Israelites who are redeemed from their slavery in Egypt.

The disciples that night I believe were putting Jesus in the role of the new Moses for he miraculously fed the crowds, he healed with the touch of his hand, and he gave a new commandment that night to **"Love one another as I have loved you."** And he even raised people from the dead. Surely he must be the new Moses, the Messiah, the disciples thought, and one of us the new Aaron, and the rest the new elders of the tribes of Israel.

I don't think, even though Jesus said it plainly that he was going to suffer and die that they could grasp it, and so they argued over the seating arrangements in what they thought was going to be an earthly kingdom. Who would sit at the right and left hands of Jesus?

Jesus though with all this talk of **"giving his body"** and talk of **"the new covenant in his blood"** was telling them that he most identified with the poor lamb that was slaughtered and eaten, and its blood smeared on the doorposts; so the angel of death would pass over.

He was telling them he wasn't the new earthly Moses. He was "the Lamb slain since the creation of the world." Rev. 13:8



But the disciples couldn't see it or hear it for they argued over who was the greatest. Jesus tried to pull them back by telling them that the greatest was the one who served the most, that greatness comes through service but all they heard that night was, "new covenant, thrones, and judging others." They missed his words on "suffering, serving and giving his body."

Dr. _____ said he believes that as the disciples argued over greatness, Jesus simply got up and silently began washing the feet of the disciples, a service done by slaves.



Well a man reported that he saw a string of graffiti messages in a bathroom stall. The first line read "What would Jesus do?" The next line said, "Wash his hands." The third line read... "And your feet too." We all miss that third part, that greatness comes by service, and often is accompanied by great suffering.

Now this sacrament is called COMMUNION for a reason. It celebrates and reminds us of all sorts of connections.

"The supper, connects the community of believers physically and spiritually to the Lord, who laid down his life that they might live. It is a commemoration of the life and death of Jesus, a celebration of his real and spiritual presence now, and an affirmation of the hope that we shall eat and drink with him in the Kingdom of God. The experience of the supper, therefore, spans the breadth of God's love; the depth of Jesus' sufferings; the past, present, and future of God's mighty acts (of salvation)." NIB Luke p. 421

And so as we remember we are re-membered into the Body of Christ. Each one of us is the hands, the eyes, the arms, the legs, and the feet of Christ. When we come together for Holy Communion the Body of Christ comes together again before it is once again scattered into service in the world. That is why we have a sign over our exit door that says, “Entering the Mission Field.”

We come to be re-membered into the Body of Christ and as we remember who Christ is we rediscover who we are, and what we are called to do: **serve**.

We are servants, the hands and feet of Christ. We remember who we are and the message we proclaim is that ‘Jesus is the Savior of the world and whoever believes in him will not perish but have everlasting life.’

And indeed the greatest among us is the one who serves in the most humble fashion. I know today you are honoring me as your pastor with a potluck (And yes we meet to eat and eat to meet) and stuffing our trunk for our new grandson who I call “Snappea”. I know you are honoring me but that doesn’t make me “the greatest.”

It is my hope and prayer that as I serve you through my preaching and teaching about discipleship, leading worship, praying for you and visiting when you are sick, you see Jesus. I hope you see me as one who is trying to serve as Jesus did and not as the greatest.

I believe the greatest here today, by Jesus’ standards, will not be recognized here on earth. But they have welcomed the lonely with a smile.

They have given a word of encouragement to the suffering. They will wash the dishes and tables later, vacuum the floors and take out the trash. They will lock the doors and turn out the lights.

Indeed the one who wants to be great will be a servant of all.

What is God saying to you and what will you do? In Jesus’ name Amen.