

Sermon for Zion, March 08, 2020 – Lent 2 - Communion

Hymns: 313 – O Worship the King; We Will Glorify;

537 – ‘Twas on that night; May the Lord, Mighty God

Scripture: Luke 22:7-20

Sermon Title: The First Last Supper

*Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.”*

*“Where do you want us to prepare for it?” they asked.*

*He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 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?’ He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.”*

*They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.*

*When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”*

*After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”*

*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.”*

*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.”*

I wonder what it means to you, this Communion we are about to share. A ritual, either filled with or empty of meaning? A mystery, where something is going on you don't quite understand? A repetition of something you've done more times than you can count, whether or not you're sure why? A tangible link to those who have sat here in these pews on Sundays past, years past, generations past, who took the bread and the cup as you are doing today? I wonder what it means to you, this Communion we are about to share. I wonder about where you are – in your heart, in your mind, in your Spirit – as you sit in the pew, wondering how communion will be for you today. I suppose it all depends upon what you brought with you today.

Don't panic; this isn't pot luck. It used to be, you know, in the time of Paul, with folks bringing what they could to round out a Communion meal, but we make do with a bit of bread – gluten free! - and a taste of wine – alcohol free. You didn't have to bring that; it has been provided for you. No, I'm talking about the more important things you brought with you this morning: the stresses and strains of the week, the distractions, the worries, the joys. Maybe you're light as a feather; maybe the weight of the world is on your shoulders. Maybe last week saw a big problem solved; maybe it brought a set of new ones. Maybe we bring with us things of which we are proud. Maybe, things of which we are ashamed. Wherever we find ourselves this morning, with whatever we've brought, each of us will experience Communion differently. To each one of us – to each one here – it will mean something different. And it has always been so.

Cast your mind back to that first Communion. That very first Communion. To each one of them – to each one there – it meant something different. It started out much as each one had suspected it might, just as it had in the other years they had been together - a place apart, a quiet room, some songs, some reading, some food – a Passover like any other. But then - slowly, surely - but then it began to change.

What was it for Peter, this meal? Earlier on, he had been embarrassed and ashamed when Jesus had stripped down to a towel and insisted on washing Peter's feet, making the rough fisherman blush to turn the whole room red. There was a sense of finality, of the end of things, and Peter didn't like it much, and said so, and faced some harsh words from Jesus as a result. And so for Peter, it was a meal of thinking, and watching, and not quite liking what was going on.

For John, given the best seat in the house next to Jesus, it was a great time, a glorious time, a time spent with his Rabbi, his teacher, his friend. John was swept up by the prayers, the teachings, the farewells, which deep down inside he didn't quite believe – it couldn't possible be coming to an end. Nothing could change the feeling of this night, the closeness to the heart of all things.

For the others? For the others, it started out innocently enough, a Passover like any other, but then it soon became a very different Passover feast, as Jesus spoke words never spoken at Passover before; new words, dangerous words, about the bread being his body, the wine his blood. And then; "*Do this in remembrance of me;*" funeral words, and yet everyone alive and well – so far. So far. For the others - minds spinning, heads swimming, hearts aching – for the others, it was

something altogether new, and not a one of them was sure whether or not he liked it, not one bit.

One of them we know didn't care for it much; he made it plain, did Judas, leaving early, storming out, a suspicious errand, a backward glance, a slammed door - a sigh from the depth of Jesus' soul - and suddenly, talk of betrayal. Their number, constant at a baker's dozen for the past three long years, was down one, and whether or not they knew it, was soon to be down another again.

But one knew it, one knew it certain as he knew the sun would set that night, and he poured out his soul, as he gave of his all, as he himself preached the only funeral service he was ever to receive: *"This is me; my body, my blood: do this again, and remember. Remember me."*

To each one of them – to each one there – it meant something different. For each of us, here, today, gathered together some 2000 years late; for us, to each one here – it will mean something different again. For some, it might mean simply a different service; for others, nervousness about just what to do. For still others, it will be a joyful time, a celebration, and for others still, a time to be somber, to be a moment serious, to think hard thoughts about what it all might mean, and where we might fit in.

Some people will be flooded with memories of communions gone by, perhaps even communion shared with friends, families, partners now gone. Some will recall communions of a different kind; communions from a different church background, different liturgy, different words. For some, it will be a time of great meaning, for others, a time soon forgotten, an unusual moment in an otherwise ordinary day.

But still, for all, it will be, no matter how deep it sinks in, if at all; for all of us, for each of us, it will be a time of encountering Jesus Christ. Through the symbols of bread, of wine, Jesus Christ will be here - among us - here. For when Jesus imposed the rules of this meal – the bread, my body; the wine, my blood – he imposed his presence among us as surely as he imposed his presence on the disciples gathered round him in the lamp-lit Jerusalem night. With his words, *"Remember Me,"* he defined for us once and for all what we do when we gather in this time. No matter what we bring here with us, no matter what we take away, we are called to do this one thing, here, today: we are called to remember. We gather; we share; we encounter Jesus; we take him in; we remember. What he said; what he did; who he was: we remember. We remember.

And as we remember, by the grace of God, a miracle: As we remember, as we share the stories and memories of Christ, as we share this meal together, as we lift a cup in memory, in celebration; as we remember, we do not remember one who is dead and gone and far, far away. As we remember, it is not only *as though* Jesus is with us; the miracle of Communion is that Jesus *is* with us. The miracle is that Jesus, who once was dead, *is* alive. It is the very life of Jesus, among us, within us, the power of the Spirit in, under, around and through us, which gives us life, which gives us hope, which transforms us into the very children of God – it is that which makes this real. It is that which makes this holy – which makes *us* holy – as we remember. As we remember.

No matter where you are this morning, you are not there alone. Jesus is with you. No matter what you brought with you this morning - the stresses and strains of the week, the distractions, the worries, the joys – they are shared by him. Joy and sorrow, worry and relief, grief and celebration, you do not carry them alone. He carries them with you. The things of which we are proud, he celebrates with us; for those things of which we are ashamed, he offers forgiveness, a fresh start. The one who made you, the one who gave you life, the one who keeps you going and calls you his own; He is with us. Here. Within us. Not just here, but always, ever. Here, now, with this meal, through these reminders: Jesus. With us. Here. We bring that to mind. We make it a part of us. As we remember.

I wonder what it will mean to you, this Communion we are about to share. I pray that for each of us, for all of us, it will be a time of encountering Jesus Christ. That through the symbols of bread, of wine, Jesus Christ will be here, among us, here. That as we remember, it will not only be *as though* Jesus is with us; but that Jesus *is* with us. The very life of Jesus, among us, within us, the power of the Spirit in, under, around and through us, giving us life, giving us hope, transforming us into the very children of God, making this real. Making this holy – making *us* holy – as we remember. As we remember.

“This is my body, given for you...”

“This is my blood...”

“When you do this, remember me. And ‘Lo,’ I am with you, always.” Amen.