

Maundy Thursday 2016  
St Mark 14:17-24

*And when it was evening, [Jesus] came with the twelve. And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me, one who is eating with Me." They began to be sorrowful and to say to Him one after another, "Is it I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with Me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of Him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."*

*And as they were eating, He took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is My body." And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."*

It is one of those things we tend not to think about a lot because we are so familiar with the story, but it really is odd that Jesus is eating the Passover meal alone with His disciples. Passover, you see, was very much a family holiday centered around this important meal. You did not worship at the synagogue or Temple for Passover, you celebrated in a home with family and close friends. And it isn't like Jesus *has* to celebrate Passover alone with His disciples because they are separated from family and friends; all during this week He has been staying in Bethany, very likely with His close friends Mary, Martha and Lazarus. Considering the fact that they've been there most of the week, the disciples probably expected to be celebrating the Passover with them. Then again, they aren't far from Bethlehem. Considering the fact that we know Jesus' mother is in town as well, why shouldn't Jesus travel the few miles to Bethlehem to celebrate Passover with His extended family? In fact, why shouldn't He invite His mother to *this* celebration, the meal He is having with His disciples? Jesus eating Passover alone with His disciples is akin to you saying to your family on Thanksgiving,

“Sorry, I’m not going to make it this year. I’ll be in town but a few friends of mine and I have decided to have Thanksgiving together at a restaurant down the street. I’m sure you understand.”

So this raises the question, Why is Jesus doing this? Why eat Passover alone with His disciples when He has family and friends nearby? There are probably some pragmatic reasons. We know Jesus had some private instruction and preparation He wished to give to the disciples; we read in our lesson how Jesus institutes the Lord’s Supper this night and St John records His dialogue in the upper room. And then there is Judas. Jesus is of course aware of his plans and doesn’t want the betrayal to come too early, plus He wants the opportunity to call Judas to repentance.

Which leads to what is even stranger behavior. Jesus does not only choose *to not eat* with His close friends and family, He chooses *to eat* with someone who is a false friend, an enemy. Think about how many times you have done this. How many times have you sat down to eat with someone you considered an enemy, someone you believed did not like you and in fact was working against you? I don’t mean “eat in the same room as them”, nor do I mean “been forced to eat with them”, like being forced by circumstances to eat with an estranged friend or family member at a wedding or holiday meal. I mean purposely gone out of your way to be at the same table with them in an intimate setting, shared a meal and shared a drink with them? I’m going to guess the number is “zero”. If it is greater than that, I’m going to guess you can easily count the number on one hand. And I do not mention this to make you feel guilty as if you should now feel obligated to invite people you don’t like to Thanksgiving or Christmas

dinner with your family. I do it to illustrate how the holiness of Jesus contrasts with our sin. We don't like to be in the same room as people we don't like, not to people who we feel have wronged us. Jesus sits down to share a meal with Judas. And not just any meal, but a meal whose very nature suggests intimacy, family, friendship, and most importantly, redemption. At this Passover meal Jesus and His disciples would recount how God acted to save His people from their slavery in Egypt to bring them freedom, and how their redemption from death was bought by the blood of a lamb. They would recount how this delivery from slavery in Egypt was a picture of their delivery from the slavery of sin by the blood of the Messiah, and there is Judas, sharing this meal with the one that he along with the other disciples had confessed to be the Christ, the Messiah. And there is Jesus, the Messiah, calling Judas to repent of his greed and bitterness to find redemption and forgiveness in the Lamb of God, inviting Judas to partake in the new supper of forgiveness and redemption, the Sacrament of Jesus' Body and Blood.

And now Jesus invites you, too. Because Judas is not the only sinner in need of the Messiah's work, in need of a Savior. You too, have earned the title "traitor" and "false friend" when it comes to your relationship with Jesus, and we don't need to look far beyond our tables to see it. How many arguments have you had at your table, how many hurtful words have you spoken? How many times have you worked to exclude people from eating with you? How much of your conversation at meals has been spent in gossip? How many times have you complained about the food set before you, the food we confess in the Lord's Prayer is the daily bread given by God? How many times have you taken for granted, or even neglected the spiritual bread of life that God has

provided for you in His Word and Sacraments because there were other things you felt were more spiritually fulfilling, spiritually refreshing? We may call ourselves friends of Jesus, but every sin of ours is a betrayal, made worse when we contrive to justify and defend our sinful actions.

And Jesus treats you the same way He treated the betrayer Judas. He calls you to eat with Him, to share a meal with Him. And not just any meal, but one whose very nature suggests intimacy, family, friendship, and most importantly, redemption. He calls you to His supper where He will act as both host and feast. To call you to repentance and then to eat His body and drink His blood to forgive you of every sin of pride, every sin of inhospitality and animosity, every sin of ingratitude, every sin of betrayal of both Him and your neighbors, and to tell you personally that He no longer regards you as a traitor or a false friend. Rather He regards you as one of His closest friends, even a brother, a sister, for whom He is saving a seat not only at this supper, but at His heavenly banquet to come.

Gloria Patri...

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