

A Meal to Remember

Luke 22:14-20

Preached March 1, 2009 by Dr. Dwight Kilbourne

The following events happened around 6 p.m., 24 hours before Jesus' burial.

Luke 22:14-20

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 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 until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of 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 he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

The Passover Passed Down.

Eating meals with family and friends is a common experience in all cultures. Most of us gathered here share meals with others on a frequent basis. While nourishing our bodies is an important part of that process, the social experience is often more important to our well-being. As a church, we place high value on gathering for meals. In reality, it is difficult to have an official UM gathering without some food.

You may have heard of the three boys who were asked to bring symbols of their religious faith to class. The first boy brought a "star of David" and announced, "I am Jewish." The second brought a rosary and said, "I am Roman Catholic." The third brought a casserole dish and proclaimed, "I am United Methodist."

For more than three millennia, one annual meal has been imprinted on the hearts of nearly every Jew - the Passover or Seder. When Jesus gathered with his disciples for this meal, they were sharing the Seder. I would imagine that everyone gathered around that table had annually participated in the Passover meal since their birth. They knew what it was, what would happen and why it was celebrated.

Interview Joe Wilson -

Let's take a brief look at this meal and its history. The origin of the Passover is traced back to the time when the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt. After God had sent a series of plagues against the Egyptians, God commanded the Jews to share a meal. They were to gather in family groups large enough to consume a year-old lamb that was to be roasted over a fire and served with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. Each family was to paint some of the lamb's blood on the doorpost. When God's angel came, it would pass over the houses with the blood and spare the first-borns. The meal would give them strength for their journey.

God commanded the Jews to celebrate this festival each year as a way of remembering what God had done to deliver them and of teaching their children the story. It became a time of celebration and keeping alive their rich heritage. Even today, both religious and not so religious Jews celebrate the Seder.

The Seder meal developed into a well-order feast for Jewish families. (Seder means "order.") The foods, how they were prepared and served, and when and how they were eaten became didactic exercises that reminded and taught the participants the significance of God's actions in their history. During the meal, a child or children would typically ask the question, "Why is this night different from all other nights." From that point, the lessons would be taught through the meal. (By the way, the Seder meal in some homes might last 3-4 hours. That gives us little room to complain about communion taking a little extra time.) Because they were repeated year after year, people knew what to expect.

A few years ago, I was visiting a church member who was in a nursing home because she had dementia. On that day, her conversation was oftentimes quite strange with little connection to the present. I explained to her that we were going to share communion. As I began to read through the service, an amazing thing happened. She began to say the

words of the service as I said them. There was a real connection with her concerning what was happening.

Remembering what is ahead.

The power of memory is significant. Not long after the Hebrews left Egypt, Moses was inspired by the Lord to express the importance of what had happened. During his address he said, "*Remember this day on which you came out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, because the Lord brought you out from there by strength of hand*" (Exodus 13:3). Then the Jewish leader went on to initiate an annual celebration of the Passover meal. What they were to do would serve as a sign and reminder of what God had done (9).

For the Jews, the Passover meal became a means of remembering. Through what they did and do each year, they remember what God did for them. By the strength of his hand, God set their forbearers free from slavery, set them on the road to freedom and began forming a strong nation.

Eating the meal also reminded the Jewish community of who they were. They were a people loved by the Creator and not forgotten. God had chosen them to be a people to serve as his priests to the world. They were set apart to serve the living God.

When Jesus sat at the Passover table with his disciples, they too were reminded of what God had done for the Jewish community. But what Jesus said at the table, transformed their remembering to a foreshadowing of what was ahead.

When Jesus took the bread into his hands and broke it, the disciples probably were rehearsing in their minds the words that would follow: ***This is the bread of affliction that our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Whoever is hungry, let him come and eat*** (www.chabad.org). When Jesus said, "*This is my body which is given for you,*" their ears would have perked up. Immediately they would have realized, this is not your "father's Passover." When Jesus shared the third cup of wine and said the cup was poured out was the new

covenant in his blood, they knew things had changed drastically.

It is clear in Luke's telling of the event, that Jesus was foreshadowing in the meal and in his words what was ahead. He told the disciples clearly that he was about to suffer. The words over the bread, "his body broken," indicated he was going to face physical suffering. The words over the third cup alluding to his blood being poured out spoke of his pending death.

How he defined these was intended to give them meaning for his disciples. In a few hours, Jesus would be arrested and sentenced to die. He would be beaten and then nailed to a cross. For those who knew and loved Jesus, these actions would seem like a senseless and cruel act of the Jewish high council and Roman government. But Jesus' words in this meal gave these acts of suffering meaning – his body was broken for his followers. His blood was shed to seal a new covenant of forgiveness.

As I think about these things, I am reminded of Isaiah's words when he spoke of the suffering servant. He wrote: *Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed* (53:4-5).

Jesus took the disciples and those who would follow beyond foreshadowing. He said, "Do this in remembrance of me." Like the Passover, this meal of broken bread and a cup of wine shared with the Jesus community was a means to remember – What Jesus had done and who we are.

When we gather at this table we remember what Jesus has done. He suffered and his body was broken so that we can share in life, death and resurrection. We share this together as a common community of his followers. His blood was poured out for us on the cross so that we could enter a new covenant with God where we know the Creator personally and the Creator knows us. In this new relationship, our sins are forgiven.

When my three sons were at home, we would have morning prayers before they left for school. I would say before their departure, "Remember who and whose you are." As the Christ community gathers at this table, we are reminded of who we are. We are followers of Jesus Christ, a community of the forgiven and transformed, a community to serve the world.

This act of remembering though is more than a recollection of what has happened. It is a recalling in such a way as to have a bearing on the present. The past event impacts the present moment.

For those who gather around the Lord's Table, the past is present in the now. Jesus is present in the bread and in the cup. Because of this, his grace is communicated to those who in faith receive it. Each time we gather here, we encounter Jesus Christ. This is part of the mystery and meaning of this table.

Eagerness to share this meal.

Jesus expressed that he was *eager to eat this Passover with his disciples*. His eagerness may have been stimulated by several factors. Being a Jew, there was a sense of expectation in sharing the Seder meal. This meal in many ways defined who the Jews were. For Jesus and the disciples, it gave them an opportunity to get away and to be together. Jesus knew that this meal would be the last one he would share with the disciples before his suffering would begin.

I wonder if Luke is cluing the Christ community in to an important attitude when we come to gather at this table – an attitude of eagerness. As you know, different Christian communities celebrate this meal with varying frequency. Some have this meal weekly while others seldom celebrate it. The majority of UM churches celebrate it monthly. Through the years, the people in the pews where I have served have had varying attitudes about Communion Sunday. Some have been eager to participate and others sometimes stay home. I pray that God would give each of us a sense of "eagerness" to share this meal.

As we gather at this table, remember what Christ has done for humanity and for you. Remember who you are and can be

in him. Allow his presence at this table to dwell in you and by faith receive the grace he offers you to be forgiven and to become who God created you to be.