

Maundy Thursday B, 2009

Text: Mark 14:12-26

Title: Last Supper

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Tonight Jesus has His Last Supper.

In a matter of hours He will be arrested.

By this time tomorrow He will be dead.

These are Jesus' last moments with His disciples, and He spends them at Supper.

If you had one last meal, one final supper to share with your friends and family, if you knew that tomorrow you would die, and this will be your final meal, what would it be? What would you eat for your Last Supper?

Steak? Lobster? Pizza? Would it be something rare and exotic, or an old favorite? Or would you skip dinner and go straight to dessert?

What would your Last Supper be?

For Jesus and His disciples, it is the Passover meal. It was the same meal they had eaten every year on this day. It was the same meal being eaten by Jews throughout Jerusalem, Judea, Galilee, and across the Mediterranean. On this night everyone ate the same meal. The meal brought them together and united them as God's people.

The meal goes back to the days of Moses.

It begins with unleavened bread. Matza. Thin and tasteless. Something we would probably call a cracker rather than a loaf.

It is bread without yeast, because it was eaten in haste. No time for the bread to rise, for tomorrow we leave for the promised land. This is bread for the journey.

Then comes the bitter herbs. The bitterness of slavery was not to be forgotten.

The main course is the lamb. The lambs were to be slaughtered at sundown. The blood marked the doors of the people, and death passed them by. The lamb was then roasted and shared by all. No leftovers.

There was wine, of course. Moses doesn't mention it, but what is a celebration without wine?

The Passover was more than just food.

There were stories, too. The stories of old, of long ago. The story of Moses and Pharaoh. The burning bush. The ten plagues. The journey from slavery to freedom, from death to life, through the Sea, through the desert, and to the Promised Land.

All of that packed into one meal.

In that meal the people remembered and relived their salvation, and they looked forward to their final deliverance from all their enemies.

This is Jesus' Last Supper. He knows that this will be His final meal with His disciples. He speaks of the betrayal that will soon come to pass.

And so, before He goes, He gives them a gift. He gives them a meal to celebrate. "Do this in remembrance of me," says Jesus.

Jesus gives His disciples a new meal, a meal that flows from the Passover, but is new, and unique, and different.

Jesus takes the bread, that unleavened bread, the bread of haste, the bread for the journey, and after giving thanks and breaking it, He gives it to the disciples with these words, "This is my body."

Jesus gives His body to His disciples to strengthen them for the journey, for the years in the wilderness that lie ahead. In the wilderness we are tempted to murmur and complain, to rebel just as the Israelites did. Jesus' body has borne all of that rebellion and sin. Jesus gives it to us to forgive our sins and to join us to Himself.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for forty days. He strove with Satan and He was victorious. He now gives you Himself, that same body to join you to Himself and to make you one with Him.

You have victory over temptation, over sin, over death, and over Satan himself, because you are one with Christ in the Lord's Supper.

The body of Christ is tremendous gift. But the gospel is always more. The Lord always has more to give.

And so after Supper, Jesus took the cup, filled with wine for celebration and rejoicing and says, "This is my blood."

At the Passover the blood of the lamb marked the door, and death passed over.

In the Lord's Supper, the blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God marks the door of your lips, and death passes you by.

You still have to pass through the little death when your heart stops beating, and body is laid to rest. But the big death will pass you by.

Jesus was forsaken by God for you. Jesus endured the Hell of the cross in your place, for you. His innocent blood now courses through your veins, cleansing you and keeping death at bay.

This is the Last Supper for Jesus with His disciples. It starts as just another Passover meal, but Jesus makes it new. God's people are set free, not only from Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but from slavery to sin and to Satan. This meal brings them safely to the Promised Land of heaven.

From that Thursday to this, Jesus has faithfully given out His gifts in the Lord's Supper.

The Passover was a yearly celebration.

For the disciples, once a year was not often enough to receive the gifts of the Lord's Supper. So they gathered every Lord's Day, the first day of the week, or better, the eighth day, the day of new creation to be recreated, refreshed by the Lord's Body and Blood.

Following their example, the Lord's Supper was offered every time the church was gathered through the time of the Reformation. We would do well to follow their example, and receive the Lord's Supper every week.

For us the Supper comes first. It's the first meal of the week. It's more of a breakfast than a supper, and every week begins with the Lord.

The Lord's Supper is not some sort of re-enactment of the Last Supper to be done once a year or whenever we need a reminder of the past. This is the Lord's Supper, it is not the Last Supper. It's something new.

Each week you are different than the last. Each week you come with new sins to be forgiven, new fears to be calmed, new struggles to gain strength for. And the body and blood of Christ is there for all these.

In the Small Catechism, Luther poses the question, "But what should you do if you have no hunger and thirst for the Sacrament?" Luther gives a three part response:

First, touch your body to see if you are still flesh and blood. As long as you are still breathing, you will be struggling with sin and the desires of the flesh.

Second, look around and see if you are still in the world. As long as you are in this world there is no lack of temptation and trouble.

Third, the devil is near, whether you see him or not. He is a liar and will not leave you at peace.

We face these three enemies every day- our flesh, the world, and the devil.

Jesus faced them, too, and was victorious over them on the cross. The fruit of the cross, the body and blood of Jesus are given to us in the Lord's Supper, so that we, too, share in Jesus' victory.

As it turns out, the meal Jesus ate with His disciples that Thursday night was not His Last Supper with them. Jesus promises His disciples that He will eat and drink again with them in the Kingdom of God.

That promise goes for us, too. We know that this meal will not be our Last. Jesus has invited us to the heavenly banquet, and this is a foretaste of that feast, the gathering of all God's people for the wedding banquet of the Lamb and His bride, the church. In this supper, we catch a glimpse of what that great supper will be like.