**Pastor Tim’s Message Notes from 4-1-21 (Maundy Thursday)
The Most Important of Meals**

I remember when I went off to college at nearby Messiah College, which is now called Messiah University. It was August of the year 2000. The school had what was called “Welcome Weekend.” And they did their best to try to make the transition into college a smooth one for students and their family.

And one of the culminations of this time was that they had a special time of worship for freshmen and their families. As the service was nearing its conclusion, everyone was singing Amazing Grace with lights dimmed and lit candles raised.

And as you can probably imagine, it was a rather emotional evening for many people. We all knew that life was going to be different for everyone gathered there. A new stage of our journeys would be beginning. Everyone’s life that was gathered there that evening would be impacted and changed as a new season would begin.

\*Think about your journey for a moment. Perhaps you recall significant moments in your life as well. A graduation, a marriage, a new school, moving, leaving for military service, beginning a new job or other significant life transitions as well. You knew that things would never be quite the same. Something was ending and something new was beginning. And the various emotions that comes with that.

Similarly, on this day, which we call Maundy Thursday, Jesus and His followers knew that they were at a turning point. Something would be ending and something new would be beginning. Only Jesus fully understood everything that was happening at this time and He was fully in control throughout this special gathering. Jesus had arranged the details for where and how they would be celebrating the Passover meal. But this Passover meal was the most important meal in the history of the world. We call it the Last Supper or the Lord’s Supper.

Now you may recall from the first Passover, which we read about earlier tonight, was a sacred meal that was to be eaten by households as they gathered together.

And here we find Jesus as the Head of His household of disciples.

Let us now turn to this most important of meals, found in Luke 22:7-30.

**7Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.”**

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

**10He replied, “As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, 11and say to the owner of the house, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 12He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there.”**

**13They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.**

**14When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. 15And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. 16For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.”**

**17After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among you. 18For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”**

**19And 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.”**

**20In 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.[**[**a**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+22%3A7-30&version=NIV#fen-NIV-25885a)**] 21But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. 22The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!” 23They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.**

**24A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest. 25Jesus said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who exercise authority over them call themselves Benefactors. 26But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. 27For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. 28You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 29And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**

There are many remarkable things to discuss from this final meal that Jesus shares with His disciples before His sufferings.

**First, again we see that Jesus is in control throughout the entire event.**

Jesus instructs Peter and John on what to do to prepare for the Passover meal and they find things just as He says.

Then, Jesus leads in the Passover celebration, particularly in the sharing of the bread and wine that was a part of the event.

And this reminds us that Jesus desires His followers to let Him lead them, even when things seem confusing and uncertain.

The last year has been a year in which much has seemed confusing and uncertain. But Jesus is as much Lord now as He was then. Amen.

Christ is Lord and He is worthy of our trust at all times. He is ultimately in control and in charge. No matter how things look around us.

**Second, Jesus enhances the meaning of Passover.**

Passover had long been the celebration that Jewish people participated in to remind them of God’s judgment passing over them as they were being set free from slavery. But now, in Jesus, the meaning of Passover would be enhanced.

Think of all the symbolism of Passover.

In the Passover, there is a lamb without defect that would be slaughtered. Jesus knew that he would soon be slaughtered as this sacrificial lamb. Paul the apostle writes later to the Church in Corinth, **“Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.”**

In the Passover, there is the smearing of blood on wooden posts. And Jesus knew that it would be his blood that would be smeared on the cross.

In the Passover, it is a nighttime occurrence. And as Jesus hung on the cross, darkness would come upon the land for 3 long hours.

And finally, the Passover would signal an immediate exodus of God’s people. And Jesus knew that his sacrificial death, God was cutting a new covenant, would unite people to him in his victory over sin, death, and the devil.

Passover would now also speak of God’s judgment passing over every follower of Jesus. Followers of Christ would soon be set free from the power and enslavement of sin through what Jesus was about to do. Jesus would soon offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice to God on humanity’s behalf.

**Third, in this most important of meals, Jesus establishes the new covenant.**

In the scriptures we learn that God is a God of covenant. Covenants are different from contracts. Contracts are about putting responsibility on the other party or person. Covenants are meant to be about putting responsibility on ourselves. Marriage is not meant to be a contract, for example. It is meant to be a covenant. It is meant to be about giving of oneself rather than what we can get from others.

In Scripture we find that certain events were expected when covenants were made. There would be an exchanging of vows. There would be a meal. Just weeks ago, we spoke about the wedding at Cana. The wedding was followed by a meal. In eating together, the two families were to become one.

In the Bible, we see meals being shared between people when covenants are established. We even read in the covenant at Sinai that the elders of Israel ate and drank with God. That sacred meal confirmed or ratified the covenant that Israel had just made with the Lord. **In Exodus 24:11 we read**:

**“But God did not raise His hand against these leaders of the Israelites; they saw God, and they ate and drank.”**

Jesus is doing something very similar here in Luke 22. The Last Supper was a covenant meal between God and people. Whenever we share in Holy Communion, we are celebrating Jesus Christ being our Passover Lamb.

When covenants were made, there was also a mingling of blood that would take place. A representative of both parties that were cutting covenant together would lightly cut themselves in their wrist area and then as they would shake hands with one another, their blood would contact one another. And it was one way of saying “If I fail to uphold my end of this covenant, you have permission to come after me.” This is where the concept of blood brothers comes from.

And so as Jesus raises a cup of wine, He declares “This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.” Within a day, Jesus’ wrists would be bleeding from the nails that would be driven into them.

The Lord promises to be with us. It is a mystery how exactly He is with us in the break of the bread of Communion and in the drinking of the wine or juice, but He promised to be present and He is faithful. And he promises to nourish people as they gather in Christ’s Name and share in these elements together. The bread and the juice now point to Christ’s body and blood given for us.

A covenant is a special agreement in which both parties are to pledge their allegiance to the other. We read of various covenants that are made throughout the Scriptures and this is what Jesus is doing with his followers. He is establishing the new covenant.

And Jesus offers all people an opportunity to participate in this new covenant as well as through placing their faith in Him. It is for anyone and everyone who comes to Him in faith.

Interestingly, when covenants were cut or made, there were several things that took place. There would be a pledging of allegiance from one person or group to another person or group. There would often be mixing of blood, as both parties have a representative that would lightly cut themselves in their wrest area and then they would shake hands. The blood would intermingle and the meaning behind this was that we are now family. I will defend you and you will defend me.

And finally, there was a meal was shared between the two parties.

When we receive Holy Communion, as we will shortly, we are participating in this new covenant meal.

In the UMC we believe that through the Spirit of God, we are spiritually nourished and strengthened as one of God’s means of grace, as we receive the meal we call Holy Communion.

**And fourth and finally, and perhaps the most surprising significant aspect** **of this scene – which is that Jesus entrusts leadership in His Kingdom to his disciples**.

Jesus knew that when the sun would rise the next day, the disciples would largely be running and hiding for their lives and Peter would have denied knowing him 3 times.

*And yet Jesus still confers his kingdom to them.*

Even though the disciples were still a work in progress, Jesus’ evaluation of them was still largely positive. He tells them, **“You are those who have stood by me in my trials.”**

I believe that we can and should be encouraged by what Jesus did towards his disciples in conferring to them his kingdom.

It means that his disciples do not have to be perfect or to understand him completely.

If you are like me, you do not completely understand everything about our Triune God and if you are like me, you are less than perfect followers of Jesus. Yet Jesus calls us the light of the world and the salt of the earth.

We are to follow our leader. We are to carry the kingdom message of the good news of Jesus with us everywhere we go.

When I went to college, a new chapter had begun in my life and in the life of my family.

Today, this Maundy Thursday, a new chapter was turned in sacred history. The new covenant had begun and the world would never be the same.

God’s invitation is for everyone. Christ gave His life for us all. May we respond in faith and in daily surrender to Him.

Let’s pray…