

“New Practices” Mark 14: 12-25 – the Last Supper, remember Jesus – never forget the price

I remember the year that Christmas changed for us. I was in grade three, and we were staying on Metz’s farm. It was an unusually snowy winter, and it seemed we were constantly shoveling the long driveway so my father could get the car out and drive into the city for work. I remember the path to the burning barrel out back had snow so deep I had to lift the shovel over my head to throw the snow out of the way.

But I was only in grade three. Maybe it was because we were isolated on the farm that winter, or maybe because we were new to the area and knew so few people, but that Christmas a new tradition was started. On Christmas Eve mom set up a beautiful table with candles and a feast of sausages and crackers and a host of other treats. The focus was on remembering the birth of Jesus before enjoying an amazing evening together as a family.

The tradition stuck, and to this day Lise and I serve a similar supper Christmas Eve, though it is not the same since the children left home!

Our passage today is about the day Jesus changed the Passover Celebration forever.

Read with me from Mark 14:12-25.

Mark starts this passage by giving us a time reference. The first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread had come. This was a week long festival that marked the beginning of the barley harvest, and it was a time to celebrate and thank God for the new crops.

Also at this time, the Jewish nation celebrated the feast of Passover. Passover celebrated the deliverance of the Jewish nation from the Egyptians. After generations of slavery to the Pharaoh, God sent Moses to lead the people out of Egypt. Before Pharaoh would let the people go God had to inflict ten plagues on the nation, the last of which was the death of all the first born in the land. However, God gave a way to be spared, and it was by sacrificing a lamb and spreading its blood on the doorway of your house. When the angel of death moved through the land, it would pass over all the homes with the sign of the blood.

Every year the Jewish people would remember this event by partaking of a meal together with their family, reciting the story of God’s deliverance. The meal consisted of various food that would remind the people of the days of slavery in Egypt:

- the lamb, of course, whose blood was put on the doorway
- salt water to remind the people of the tears the people shed
- a fruit paste to remember the mortar used to build with bricks
- bitter herbs to remember how bitter life was in Egypt

- unleavened bread, to remind them they left in haste (no time for the bread to rise) and as a reminder that they were called to be a holy people – the yeast represented sin so none was to be found in the house during this festival.

- and four cups with wine to be passed among the guests, each cup representing a promise from God taken from Exodus 6:6,7:

- I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians

- I will rid you of your bondage

- I will redeem you with an outstretched arm

- I will take you to me for a people, and I will be your God.

Singing was also an important part of the celebration, singing the Psalms of Praise to God in Psalms 113-118.

This was a special time for Jewish families, and Jesus desired to eat this meal with his disciples. Mark makes it clear that Jesus had made arrangements in advance so that he could eat the Passover meal with his disciples. In verse 12, as the lambs were being killed for the Passover meal, the disciples ask Jesus if he wanted them to make preparations for them to eat together. It was then Jesus revealed that plans were made – look for a man carrying a water jug and he will show you where we are meeting. You might think there would be hundreds of men carrying water jugs in a city filled with pilgrims at that time. But since carrying water was women's work, it would be very rare to see a man carrying a water jug.

Verses 14 and 15 make it clear that Jesus has arranged the place where they would meet in advance but it was a secret to everyone – even the disciples – until the last moment. Why? First, so the crowds would not follow Jesus there. He wanted to be alone with the disciples. Second, he knew Judas had betrayed him and was looking for a time to hand him over to the religious leaders. It would not be during that supper. Judas would not know the place until the last minute. And the spies of the religious leaders would not know where Jesus was at that night. This gave Jesus time to spend with his followers uninterrupted by those who opposed him.

At six o'clock the sun would set, and for the Jews it meant Friday had started. Days started in the evening and ran to the next evening. Thursday was preparation day, and when the sun went down, Passover began.

In verses 18 -21 Jesus makes it clear that he knows one of his own disciples will betray him. Even in this scripture was being fulfilled, for Psalm 41:9 says, "Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me."

The meal would have progressed normally until near the end Jesus changed the script. It may have been the bread reserved for Elijah, the one who was to come and usher in the age of the

Messiah, that Jesus took and shared with his disciples, saying, “This bread is my body broken for you.”

The disciples would not know what Jesus meant by that until the next day when Jesus would be beaten, whipped and nailed to a cross. Then they would see the bread of life that came down from heaven broken. But that suffering had a purpose, for as Isaiah foretold, **“By his stripes we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:6)**

In this context, as Jesus shared the Passover meal with the disciples, the idea of his body being broken takes us back to the sacrifice of the lamb. Every home that trusted God, and believed His word through Moses that if the blood was put on the mantle of the door, the family inside would be spared grief. The lamb was taking the place of the first born in the home, so the child could be spared.

Jesus was saying, he would take our place, and die so that we could live. **The wages of sin is death.** Jesus would take that on himself so all who trusted in him, believed that he died in their place, could be saved.

And when did Jesus die for us? “While we were yet sinner, Christ died for us.” Romans 5:8. The first part of that verse tells us why: because he loves us.

Then Jesus took the cup, likely the fourth cup of wine, where Jesus would say, “I take you to be my people. I will be your God,” and now he says, “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many.”

Blood was the symbol of life. Jesus gave his life so that we could live. Just as the angel of death passed over all the homes covered by the blood of the lamb that first Passover, so now the wrath of God passes over those who are covered by the blood of Christ today. We do not physically take his blood and apply it to our lives or doors, but by faith we trust that we are saved from condemnation – judgement – when our lives are in Jesus hands. On judgement day God the judge will see the blood of His son covering our lives and we will be declared “Not guilty.” The debt has been paid.

Jesus says this is the blood of the covenant – and some manuscripts had the new covenant. Certainly this was something new. The old covenant was ratified by blood, but it was a covenant of law. To stay in the covenant God’s people had to keep all the rules of the law. Unfortunately, that proved impossible for the people. The story of God’s people is the story of constant failure and disobedience.

The new covenant Jesus was bringing through his blood is a covenant of love. God was showing the extent of his love through the sacrifice of his own son. This sacrifice would open the door to an eternal relationship with God – we call it eternal life.

The old covenant was built on what we did for God. The new covenant is based on what God did for us. It truly is a covenant, or agreement, built on love.

Verse 25 hints that Jesus not only would have his body broken and his blood spilled, but that he would rise again. He talks about drinking the wine again when he is **new** and in the kingdom of God. This speaks of the resurrection of Jesus, when he would rise to new life on the third day. He would still be Jesus but he would no longer be bound by the body that was beaten and broken. He would have a new body, a resurrection body!

Today we celebrate that fact – He is risen! He is risen indeed!

So at that Passover supper so long ago Jesus gave to his disciples a new way to remember him, to remember his love, to celebrate the salvation he provided through his death and resurrection. Jesus said to break the bread, and drink the cup of wine in remembrance of him. God's people do not need to celebrate the old exodus from Egypt. It is time to celebrate the new exodus from sin. We are God's people, and he is the one who has rescued us, but this time the lamb was his own Son. As John the Baptist correctly said when he saw Jesus at the Jordan River, **"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."**

Christians around the world from that day forward have cherished the special moments gathered at the Table of the Lord. It has been called Communion, as it draws us into fellowship with Jesus. It has been called Eucharist, coming from the Greek word "to give thanks." It has been called the Lord's Supper as it takes us back to that night Jesus fed the disciples and then told them of the new significance of the bread and the wine.

No matter what name is given, Communion is a special time when we come into the presence of Jesus. Just as he invited the disciples to that Passover supper so long ago, he invites us to this table of grace today. And as we take of the bread and wine, in obedience, yes, but also as a token of our faith in his sacrifice for us for salvation, we are blessed.

As we say in our ritual this morning, we not only remember Christ's death but we also partake of his life as we take the elements. This is holy ground.

Common bread and juice suddenly take on a whole new meaning when they represent the body and blood of Jesus. This is a new practice for his followers, and those outside the faith may not understand it. They certainly cannot appreciate what it means. But for us today, and each time we take the bread and wine, we celebrate the love of God shown to us through Christ's death on our behalf.

How important is this to Christians? Where persecuted, Christians will still find a way to remember Christ through bread and wine. When imprisoned, they still find a way. Rita Chretien of our Penticton Nazarene Church, recounts how she survived for 7 weeks in a van in the wilderness after being led astray by the GPS. She tells how she remembered her church would be partaking of communion on a certain day, and when that day arrived, she scoured through the van until she found a crumb of cracker and a sip of water so she could partake of Communion as well.

This is a God given gift to remember Jesus' sacrifice for us. Let us partake – and be thankful.