

Guide for the Preparation for Worship on 16 March 2025

AM Worship

Call to Worship: Psalm 100:1-5

Opening Hymn: 196 At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing

Confession of Sin

Most merciful God, Who are of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and hast promised forgiveness to all those who confess and forsake their sins; We come before You with a humble sense of our own unworthiness, acknowledging our manifold transgressions of Your righteous laws. But, O gracious Father, Who desires not the death of a sinner, look upon us, we beseech You, in mercy, and forgive us all our transgressions. Make us deeply sensible of the great evil of them; And work in us a hearty contrition; That we may obtain forgiveness at Your hands, Who are ever ready to receive humble and penitent sinners; for the sake of Your Son Jesus Christ, our only Savior and Redeemer. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon: John 3:6-17

Hymn of Preparation: 202 Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face

Old Covenant Reading: Exodus 12:1-28

New Covenant Reading: Matthew 26:26-29

Sermon Title: *The Lord's Supper*

Hymn of Response: 198 Let The Blood in Mercy Poured

Confession of Faith: Nicene Creed (p. 852)

Doxology (Hymn 568)

Diaconal Offering

Closing Hymn: 200 Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness

PM Worship

486 Rejoice, Believer, in the Lord

467 Cast Down, O God, the Idols

460 Thy Works, Not Mine, O Christ

Old Covenant Reading: Nehemiah 9:1-15

New Covenant Reading: Hebrews 6:4-8

Sermon Title: *A Most Sober Warning*

Fellowship Lunch – No Sunday School Today

Suggested Preparations

Monday (3/10) Read and discuss Matthew 26:26–29

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

Christians or others who are familiar with Matthew's Gospel can run the risk of overlooking just how dramatically Jesus must have departed from the familiar ritual [of the Passover meal]. No matter when in the ritual He might have done this, for the head of the family to break bread and say, "Take. Eat. This is My body" was jarring to say the least. The brief saying about the bread, however one understands it, offers precious little interpretation of its role in the Passover ritual. Why did Jesus say this after taking the bread? Why did He not use the meat of the Passover lamb? Was there something about the bread and its role in the ritual that communicated what Jesus wanted to communicate? Sometimes interpreters point to the breaking of the bread as a symbol for Jesus' death, but this is not without its challenges. Nolland has suggested that if the bread had already been interpreted as "the bread of affliction," as it is called in the Law of Moses (Deut. 16:3), then perhaps Jesus is transferring the notion of "affliction" from the exodus generation and from His contemporary worshipers as they identify with their fathers to Himself and to His own body. In other words, because Jesus is about to be killed, His is the affliction that is now to be centrally in focus. The bread is His body. This means that *He*, His body, will be afflicted.

Even more alarming are the words Jesus spoke about a cup of wine. Whether it was one of the cups that was a traditional part of the first-century ritual or not, what He said must have bordered on the profane in the ears of His disciples. The "blood of the covenant" referred back to Ex 24:5-8 and how Moses ratified the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and His people Israel with the blood of sacrificed animals; then Moses and the elders ate and drank in God's presence. Jesus, however, says that the cup "is My blood of the covenant" and that all of the disciples are to drink it. He adds that His covenantal blood was being poured out to forgive sins. Perhaps the disciples would not have embraced this truth; earlier Peter (speaking for them all) had objected to Jesus' passion prediction (16:22). Moreover, God had prohibited the Israelites from consuming blood in any form; blood even had to be sufficiently drained from any carcass before the meat could be consumed. Now Jesus is giving them a cup and telling them that it is full of His blood – and that they are to drink His blood.

What is also remarkable is that Matthew gives us not a word about how the disciples reacted to these stunning departures. We know of their reactions immediately before and immediately after this unit. And perhaps there is a message in that arrangement. Matthew 26:26-29 should not be read for any information about Jesus' disciples one way or the other – and especially not for any positive information about any of them. The words given here should be read for two kinds of insight. First, we should ask what 26:26-29 tells us about Jesus and the meaning of His passion and death. In the second place, we can inquire what Jesus' words teach us about this radically altered

meal that Jesus implies will characterize His disciples' life together until He Himself returns to drink with them again in the fullness of His Father's reign.

Read or sing Hymn 196 At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing

Tuesday (3/11) Read and discuss Matthew 26:14–25

Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, "What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?" And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought an opportunity to betray him.

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. 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." Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so." (ESV)

Leon Morris writes:

With a company of thirteen there would be more than one dish, but Jesus probably does not mean that his hand would be in the dish at the same time as that of His betrayer, but simply that the betrayer was one of the same dinner party. The point of Jesus' words seems to be that to eat together was an outward sign of friendship. The Psalmist was dreadfully unhappy when the man "who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (Ps. 41:9). It was a shocking thing that the enemy, the one who would hand Him over to His enemies, came from Jesus' twelve closest associates.

Jesus proceeds to make two things clear: one is that His death has its place in the will of God and thus nothing has been done to him outside of the divine purpose, the other that this does not palliate the guilt that rests on the person who is to be His betrayer. For the former point Jesus refers to Scripture. He uses the term "the Son of man," His favorite way of referring to Himself in the discharge of His divine calling, and says that He "goes just as it stands written about Him." His verb may be used of various kinds of departures, but here it clearly refers to His death. That death will come about "just as it stands written about Him." Jesus does not cite any particular passage but indicates that His death will be in accordance with prophecies

made centuries before. He is making it clear that His death would not take place because He had strong enemies who were weaving a plot from which He could not escape. His death would take place because it was in the will of God, and it would take place in the way that lay before Him because that, too, was in the will of God. Jesus is sure that the divine purpose was to be worked out in His death just as it had been throughout the days of His life.

Read or sing Hymn 202 Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face

Wednesday (3/12) Read and discuss Exodus 12:1–28

The LORD said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, “This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you. Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers’ houses, a lamb for a household. And if the household is too small for a lamb, then he and his nearest neighbor shall take according to the number of persons; according to what each can eat you shall make your count for the lamb. Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male a year old. You may take it from the sheep or from the goats, and you shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month, when the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill their lambs at twilight.

“Then they shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted on the fire; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it. Do not eat any of it raw or boiled in water, but roasted, its head with its legs and its inner parts. And you shall let none of it remain until the morning; anything that remains until the morning you shall burn. In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the LORD’s Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the LORD. The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

“This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven out of your houses, for if anyone eats what is leavened, from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel. On the first day you shall hold a holy assembly, and on the seventh day a holy assembly. No work shall be done on those days. But what everyone needs to eat, that alone may be prepared by you. And you shall observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt. Therefore you shall observe this day, throughout your generations, as a statute forever. In the first month, from the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. For seven days no leaven is to be found in your houses. If anyone eats what is leavened, that person will be cut off from the

congregation of Israel, whether he is a sojourner or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.”

Then Moses called all the elders of Israel and said to them, “Go and select lambs for yourselves according to your clans, and kill the Passover lamb. Take a bunch of hyssop and dip it in the blood that is in the basin, and touch the lintel and the two doorposts with the blood that is in the basin. None of you shall go out of the door of his house until the morning. For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you. You shall observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever. And when you come to the land that the LORD will give you, as he has promised, you shall keep this service. And when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ you shall say, ‘It is the sacrifice of the LORD’s Passover, for he passed over the houses of the people of Israel in Egypt, when he struck the Egyptians but spared our houses.’” And the people bowed their heads and worshiped.

Then the people of Israel went and did so; as the LORD had commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did. (ESV)

R. Reed Lessing writes:

The Passover – connected to the last plague – is one of the most important features in the Book of Exodus. Moses indicates that in several ways. The Passover plague is different than the first nine, as it alone is linked to a detailed ritual (Exodus 12). To further imply the Passover’s significance, God changes Israel’s calendar, making the month of Abib the first month of the year, which, later Old Testament books is called Nisan. Abib/Nisan falls in the springtime, later March to early April. The Passover marks a new beginning. Not only for Israel but also for us. Adios to bricks and bondage!

The Israelites, however, don’t leave through the back door, carrying only the clothes on their backs. They march out in full view of their captors, with Egyptian wealth bulging from their bags. The last became first and the first became last. ...

The word *every* appears in Exodus 1 and 12 – thus linking the Passover to Egypt’s earlier crimes against Israel. “Pharaoh commanded all his people saying, ‘*Every* son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile’” (Exodus 1:22 ESV). Moses announces in chapter 12 that the Egyptians made their bed and now they must sleep in it. “At midnight Yahweh struck *every* firstborn in the land of Egypt ... and *every* firstborn of livestock. And Pharaoh arose in the night – he and every one of his servants and everyone in Egypt, and there was a great outcry in Egypt, for there was not a house where there was not someone dead” (Exodus 12:29-30). What do we call that? A boomerang with a vengeance. Egypt’s punishment fits the crime.

And it isn't as though the Egyptians weren't warned. "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, "Let My son go that he may serve Me." If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son'" (Exodus 4:22-23 ESV). When Yahweh passed through Egypt, striking down the firstborn of both man and beast, in grace He passed over and spared Israelite firstborn sons because of the lambs' blood upon their doorposts (Exodus 12:23-29).

Read or sing Hymn 198 Let The Blood in Mercy Poured

Thursday (3/13) Read and discuss Nehemiah 9:1–38

Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the LORD their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the LORD their God. On the stairs of the Levites stood Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani; and they cried with a loud voice to the LORD their God. Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah, and Pethahiah, said, "Stand up and bless the LORD your God from everlasting to everlasting. Blessed be your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise.

"You are the LORD, you alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and all that is on it, the seas and all that is in them; and you preserve all of them; and the host of heaven worships you. You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous.

"And you saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt and heard their cry at the Red Sea, and performed signs and wonders against Pharaoh and all his servants and all the people of his land, for you knew that they acted arrogantly against our fathers. And you made a name for yourself, as it is to this day. And you divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on dry land, and you cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into mighty waters. By a pillar of cloud you led them in the day, and by a pillar of fire in the night to light for them the way in which they should go. You came down on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven and gave them right rules and true laws, good statutes and commandments, and you made known to them your holy Sabbath and commanded them commandments and statutes and a law by Moses your servant. You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.

"But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you

performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, ‘This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt,’ and had committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell.

“And you gave them kingdoms and peoples and allotted to them every corner. So they took possession of the land of Sihon king of Heshbon and the land of Og king of Bashan. You multiplied their children as the stars of heaven, and you brought them into the land that you had told their fathers to enter and possess. So the descendants went in and possessed the land, and you subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hand, with their kings and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they would. And they captured fortified cities and a rich land, and took possession of houses full of all good things, cisterns already hewn, vineyards, olive orchards and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate and were filled and became fat and delighted themselves in your great goodness.

“Nevertheless, they were disobedient and rebelled against you and cast your law behind their back and killed your prophets, who had warned them in order to turn them back to you, and they committed great blasphemies. Therefore you gave them into the hand of their enemies, who made them suffer. And in the time of their suffering they cried out to you and you heard them from heaven, and according to your great mercies you gave them saviors who saved them from the hand of their enemies. But after they had rest they did evil again before you, and you abandoned them to the hand of their enemies, so that they had dominion over them. Yet when they turned and cried to you, you heard from heaven, and many times you delivered them according to your mercies. And you warned them in order to turn them back to your law. Yet they acted presumptuously and did not obey your commandments, but sinned against your rules, which if a person does them, he shall live by them, and they turned a stubborn shoulder and stiffened their neck and would not obey. Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

“Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set

before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress.

“Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed document are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests. (ESV)

Derek Thomas writes:

In accordance with the law, the Jews separated from all foreigners in their midst. A three-hour worship service in which Scripture was read and presumably explained was followed by another three hours of worship and confession. Solemn confession of sin was made, the contents of which are summarized by Ezra in the form of the prayer that takes up the rest of the chapter. ...

The prayer itself consists of seven distinct sections:

1. Praise to God as Creator, perhaps reflecting the fact that in recent weeks the people have been listening to the reading of the first five books of the Old Testament, beginning with the story of creation in Genesis 1.
2. A record of God's power and grace right up to that day against a backdrop of the Israelite's repeated failure during their forty-year period of wandering in the wilderness. They recall especially that, despite the provision of food and water and protection, they refused to listen to God and tried to return to Egypt.
3. A testimony to God's forgiveness, graciousness and compassion in memorable words: “You are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them.” Throughout this period, they “lacked nothing;” God met their every need.
4. An open confession of sin. The prayer records the period of the judges and the monarchy with characteristic summaries of sin on their part and grace on God's part: “They were disobedient ... You are a gracious and merciful God.”
5. A resting in God's covenant faithfulness: “the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love.”
6. A complaint that the people are in distress; they are “slaves” or “servants” (both translations are possible) under Persian rule – and if the former, a daring acknowledgement given that Ezra and Nehemiah were both civil servants of this regime.

7. A solemn, climatic oath and recommitment by way of covenant reaffirmation: “Because of all this we make a firm covenant in writing; on the sealed documents are the names of our princes, our Levites, and our priests.”

Employing these seven observations in our own praying would have an immediate, reforming effect on the content of our prayers.

Friday (3/14) Read and discuss Hebrews 6:4–8

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned. (ESV)

Amy Peeler writes:

Maturity is necessary for engaging such a passage as this, yet it is frequently the young in faith who encounter it and react in fear, worried that through some sin they have fallen away and, therefore, can never return to God. If someone is heartbroken that they may have fallen away from the faith, that concern over one’s relationship with God is evidence that they have not fallen away. Alternatively, another form of immaturity could be manifest in the tendency to ignore or dismiss this text. Because this is part of divine revelation to the church, it is necessary neither to ignore nor to soften the full impact of this difficult sentence in the letter. ...

The sin under discussion here is “falling away.” Absent in the other texts of the New Testament, the term for “falling away” is most prominent in the book of Ezekiel. ... This word does not describe an accident but a choice, a connotation supported by this section and others in the letter, where the concern is over a grave sin such as “turning away” (Heb 3:12) or “shrinking back” (10:38-39). This grave sin is to turn away from what God has provided in Christ. It is to cease to trust. This does not mean that doubt constitutes this grave sin. Presenting honest spiritual questions and struggle before God who already knows all (4:12-13), as the man did who asked Jesus for help with his unbelief (Mark 9:24), can be a vital part of spiritual life. The type of distrust discussed here includes an active cessation, after an adoption of gospel truth, of both mental and lived faith in God among God’s people. It is the sin of apostasy.

Read or sing Hymn 200 Soul, Adorn Yourself with Gladness

Saturday (3/15) Read and discuss Matthew 26:26–29

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (ESV)

Jeffrey Gibbs writes:

Jesus’ final words in this unit bring clarity and focus on this historical moment. He is going as it is written of Him, but His blood has not yet been poured out in death. He is eating this Passover meal with His disciples, and while they are eating, He is creating a new reality and gift for them – a banquet that will sustain them for the time when He no longer eats with them at table as He had done during His earthly ministry. When the fullness of the Father’s reign comes, however, then a new and greater table fellowship will be restored, and many will come and join the patriarchs there.

Prayer: Please lift up tomorrow’s morning and evening worship services.