

## Family Night Supper – It Is Finished

Matthew 26:17-30

John 19:30

April 6, 2023

Maundy Thursday

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In the church where I grew up what we here call Wednesday Night Live was called Family Night Supper. In those days it was a weekly pot luck, always heavy on fried chicken and baked beans. Family Night Supper, just like here, was the gathering of the family. Sort of the close family, the inner circle of the folks who were most active in the life of the congregation.

Tonight, Maundy Thursday is our supreme Family Night Supper. Jesus is gathered on Passover night with his inner circle of the twelve. You are not the crowd who will be here Sunday. You are the family who are most engaged here have come out and not even on Wednesday but Thursday for this most special supper, this supreme night of love. The Passover made new.

The word Maundy comes from the Latin for “New Commandment,” - “Mandatum Novum”, as this night Jesus takes the Ancient Passover Supper and makes it New, grounded in his Body and his Blood.

Breaking the loaf of bread, Jesus says, “Take, eat, this is my body.”  
Pouring a cup of wine, Jesus says, “Drink from it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Rising from supper Jesus takes off his outer robe, girds himself with a towel and lovingly washes his disciples’ feet. Then he tells them, “I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. This night Jesus says and shows the depth of his love which he will fully enact from the Cross tomorrow.

With this focus on Jesus’ Last Supper we also look ahead to tomorrow and Jesus Seven Last Words from the Cross, as we have been moving through them on Wednesdays in Lent. Tonight, the next to last word, “It is finished.” To piece the Seven Last Words together in some sort of chronology requires drawing from all four Gospels, where “It is finished” is traditionally the next to last word. However, strictly in John’s account, it is Jesus’ last word, after which, “he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

The words and actions of this family night supper foretell what will indeed be finished on Friday. Death on the cross for our sins and for the sins of the whole world is where all this is headed.

What exactly is finished? Jesus’ physical life on Earth, yes, is finished. But more, Jesus’ work on the cross for our salvation is finished. Done, Complete. As the Book of Hebrews says,

“When Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption... For this reason, he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.”<sup>i</sup>

I think of Dr. Ivan Rusyn of the Ukrainian Evangelical Seminary in Kiev who was with us not long ago, and his telling us of celebrating the Lord’s Supper, Holy Communion, with young Ukrainian soldiers, some mere boys, in a dense forest, soldiers who the next day would go into battle to defend their native land against Russian invaders. Dr. Rusyn said, “I knew for some of them this was their first communion ever, and I knew also, for some of them, it would be their last.”

All the disciples know about this night is that Jesus desired to share this Passover with them. And they know everything has been arranged ahead of time. He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, my time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” They do as he says, and the man takes them to the room, and there they prepare the meal.

At the table - Then comes Jesus confrontation with his betrayer, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me. And they became greatly distressed and began to say to him one after another, ‘Surely not I, Lord?’” It is Judas, the misguided treasurer who dips his hand into the bowl as Jesus says his betrayer would, Judas who having already begun the betrayal process and taken the blood money feigns innocence, “Surely not I, Rabbi? Jesus says simply “You have said so.” It is Judas who with a kiss will betray Jesus.

Poor Judas, never grasping quite who Jesus was or what he was doing. Was Judas just greedy for money, or was Judas expecting Jesus to lead a political revolution as the Messiah they expected would beginning on Palm Sunday? And when that did not happen Judas began to concoct a way to be rid of Jesus? We do not know his full underlying motives. Betrayal must come. It cannot be denied. Indeed, it is part of God’s will for this to happen. It is written into the script. But so also is this, “Woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born.”

We shudder at what Judas did. He is forever since known as the Betrayer. I do not know any parents who named their child Judas. Yet there is some Judas in us all. We all betray, we all deny, we all abandon Jesus in large and little ways again and again. As the hymn we sing tonight asks,

“Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon You?  
(and we answer)  
It is my treason, Lord, that has undone You.  
‘Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied You; I crucified You.”<sup>ii</sup>

While they are eating the Passover meal, Jesus takes the loaf of unleavened bread. Bread for the Passover was always unleavened, reminding Israel how they had to hurriedly depart from Egyptian slavery. Now Jesus gives it new meaning.

His every action is significant; he takes it, he blesses it, he breaks it, he gives it to the disciples and says, "Take, eat; This is my body." Eating he invites us to enter this new covenant with him. Our deepest nourishment comes not in the physical bread but the spiritual bread. "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."<sup>iii</sup>

Then Jesus takes the Passover Cup. Again, he gives thanks and gives it to them, saying "Drink from it all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom,"

Here in bread broken is Jesus' Body, in wine poured, is Jesus' blood, Jesus gives these twelve and all of us who would be his disciples **this remembrance** of his once for all time sacrifice, this **experience** of his real presence with us at this table every time we share this meal, and **this hope** for the day of days when we enter into the final bridal feast of the Lamb at the completion of all things. As the angel in Revelation says, "The marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready; ... Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb."

"Tomorrow," Jesus will cry out tomorrow, "it is finished." Finished, complete, the saving work for all time and eternity. God dies and goes to hell tomorrow. As we will sing on Sunday, opening our resurrection service, "But the pains which He endured, Our Salvation have procured." Death, suffering, hell, "He descended into hell." All this he did for us and for our salvation.

There is a shocking painting in the Birmingham Art Museum I have pondered over many times. I went by to see it again recently as I was thinking about this family night supper with you. It is called "The Barricade." It was painted by George Wesley Bellows, an artist in New York City in 1918, after he became so profoundly disturbed by heinous war crimes committed in World War I. He portrays an atrocity in that war where German soldiers used defenseless Belgian townsfolk as human shields for the soldiers to hide behind – "The Barricade."

He paints them as helpless, defenseless nudes, their hands uplifted, and crouching behind this human wall of flesh, helmeted German soldiers, their rifles and bayonets protruding.

This is what the Romans under Pilate, and the Jews under Herod, and the priests of the temple did to Jesus. On Friday, Jesus Christ the firstborn of all Creation, He who is before all things, He who holds all things together, hangs naked on a tree, a human shield, a human sacrifice through whom we are given God's forgiveness for our sins. On the cross, through his death, Jesus puts us and all things to rights.

Tonight, Jesus tells his family, taste and see in broken, in his shed blood. Tonight, the darkness will descend the disciples will betray, deny and abandon their Lord. Tomorrow darkness will come on Friday at noon for three hours. He is finished. Jesus offers us these gifts. Won't you reach out and receive them.

Tonight, we're having Family Night Supper, and you are invited.

Eat- the body of Christ,  
Drink – the blood of Christ,  
Our true food for life.

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<sup>i</sup> Hebrews 9:11-12, 15

<sup>ii</sup> "Ah, Holy Jesus, The Presbyterian Hymnal, p.93

<sup>iii</sup> John 6:51