Mark Lesson 47 (2023)

**THE INSTITUTION OF THE LORD’S SUPPER**

*(Subtitle: A Feast of Redemption and Unity)*

Mark 14:12-26

Key Verse: 14:22

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.’”

Good morning! I want to begin today by sharing some joyful news. Our dear friend, Gloria, in Austin, Texas, recently welcomed a precious baby girl into the world, whom she named “Autumn.” (Pic# 1 &2) As we celebrate this new life, it reminds us that we are transitioning from the warmth of summer to the fruitful season of fall, a season of harvest and abundance.

Today, we turn our attention to a pivotal event in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ – the Last Supper. It was a simple meal shared between Jesus and his disciples the night before his death on the cross. Though seemingly ordinary, this event holds profound spiritual lessons that continue to nourish our faith even today. As we engage in this passage, let us uncover the deeper meanings within the Last Supper. I will show you a short video clip based on today’s passage. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=85woq8orYqE)

Look at verse 12. “On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, ‘Where do you want us to go and make preparation for you to eat the Passover?’” The festival of the Unleavened Bread held deep significance for the Jewish people as it commemorated their deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Families were required to bring a lamb to the temple in Jerusalem. The lamb had to be without blemish, slaughtered at the temple, and the lamb’s blood was sprinkled on the altar as a symbol of atonement. Following the sacrifice, the lamb was roasted and eaten as part of the Passover meal, along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

However, this particular Passover was unique because Jesus would institute a new covenant, liberating humanity from the bondage of sin through his sacrificial death as the Lamb of God. (Jn. 1:29). At this point, his disciples were unaware of the profound transformation that lay ahead, assuming it was just another Passover, so they asked Jesus how to prepare.

In verses 13-16, we see that Jesus carefully orchestrated the preparation. Look at verses 13-16. “So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, ‘Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, “The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?” He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.’ The disciples left, went into the city, and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.” The two disciples Jesus sent were Peter and John, as indicated in Luke 22:8.

They were to find a man carrying a water jar. Usually, women carried water jars in ancient times, so a man carrying a water jar would not have been hard to identify. Overall, it seems that Jesus had prearranged everything for the place of the Passover meal. So, all the two disciples had to do was follow Jesus’ instructions, trusting in his words. And they found things just as Jesus had told them. Yet, they were still responsible for the rest of the preparation, setting the tables, roasting the lamb meat, and acquiring the unleavened bread and drinks.

Look at verses 17-20. “When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me – one who is eating with me.’ They were saddened, and one by one, they said to him, ‘Surely you don’t mean me?’ ‘It is one of the Twelve,’ he replied, ‘one who dips bread into the bowl with me.’” The Passover meal was not supposed to be a gloomy occasion. It was a joyous occasion filled with thanksgiving and blessedness. Yet, Jesus dropped a bombshell: one of his disciples would betray him. The announcement of the betrayal ruined the festive mood. It also prompted each disciple to question their loyalty. Even though the other disciples didn’t know who would betray their master, Judas knew whom Jesus was talking about.

*But why did Jesus reveal Judas’ betrayal during the Passover?* Several reasons come to mind. Firstly, it allowed Judas to reconsider his actions and turn away from betrayal. Jesus had given Judas plenty of opportunities in the past, even though he had ignored them. Jesus warned him of the consequences but did not abandon him (21). By referring to “One of you” and “One of the Twelve,” without naming Judas, Jesus extended an opportunity for repentance, even at this late stage.

It reminds us of 1 John 1:6-7, which states, “If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” What a fantastic promise of God we have Christ Jesus! Jesus knew how messed up we humans are. Yet, he didn’t come to condemn us but to save us. However, without repentance and faith in Christ, no one can experience the kingdom of God. Repentance and faith in Christ Jesus are the pathway to heaven. The word *“repentance”* sounds offensive. But the original meaning of repentance is a change of one’s mind.

Most significantly, Jesus’ foreknowledge of the betrayal and his determination to continue with the Passover meal underscored his divine sovereignty. It revealed that Jesus was in control, undeterred even by betrayals. This highlights God’s unwavering will, undisrupted by human actions, as expressed in verse 21. “The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

Unfortunately, Judas didn’t change his mind. However, the exposure of Judas’ betrayal must have served as a teaching moment for Jesus’ disciples. Betrayal and opposition can indeed emerge from unexpected sources, even among those who profess to be close followers of Christ. It disheartens us, but it also urges us to be vigilant, discerning, and faithful in facing challenges.

Probably, sometime between verse 21 and verse 22, Judas left the place to betray Jesus, breaking Jesus’ heart while leaving the other disciples oblivious. Yet, amid the sadness of the betrayal, Jesus established an everlasting covenant for all humanity and introduced a timeless ritual known as ***“The Lord’s Supper.”***

Look at verses 22-24. “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body.’ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ‘This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them.” Let’s explore these words for a while.

Jesus was taking the traditional parts of the Passover meal, the passing of the bread and the drinking of wine, and then he imbued them with new significance, representing his body and blood. He used the elements of bread and wine to explain the forthcoming crucifixion, where his body would be broken for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus invited his disciples into a profound relationship with him by sharing the bread.

When he said, “Take it; this is my body,” he was not saying that the bread literally becomes his body, but it symbolizes his body. He is establishing a profound symbol of his sacrifice on the cross, where his body would be broken for the forgiveness of sins. Then, Jesus also took a cup, likely filled with wine, and gave it to his disciples, and they all drank from it, symbolizing the sharing of his blood, shed for the forgiveness of sins.

Look at verse 24. “‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,’ he said to them.” This verse emphasizes the installation of the new covenant, replacing the old covenant. According to the old covenant, animal blood had to be sacrificed. But that was the temporary, not permanent, plan of God. Animal blood cannot clean our sins. However, the old covenant foreshadowed the day when Jesus, as the perfect Lamb of God, would be the ultimate sacrifice for sin. Jesus’ sinless blood became the perfect sacrifice that sealed the new covenant between God and humanity, offering forgiveness and reconciliation.

So, what does the new covenant mean to us? It means that through this new covenant, Jesus opened a new pathway to God through faith in Christ Jesus, accessible to all, regardless of ethnicity or social status. We don’t need to bring to animal sacrifice any longer. Through this last meal on the Passover, Jesus instituted the new covenant, urging his disciples to partake in what we call “*the Lord’s Supper” or “the Communion.”* It means that by sharing the bread and wine, we are encouraged to pursue reconciliation and forgiveness within the body of Christ, further strengthening the bonds of unity.

Sharing the same bread also highlights the equal status of every member of the body of Christ, promoting unity and equality among believers. It highlights that all are welcomed in God’s family, sharing the same grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

It’s disheartening that our world is characterized by polarization and division, but what’s even more distressing is that this issue of division exists within the Christian community. Partaking in Communion can also serve as a moment of self-reflection and reconciliation. The Lord’s Supper is a feast of redemption and unity, which we should observe with sincere and contrite hearts, acknowledging our sins before God humbly and forgiving one another as Jesus had forgiven us. Thus, we bring praise and glory to the Lord.

Verse 25 expresses Jesus’ anticipation and longing. Look at verse 25. “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” Jesus would face a cruel death on the cross in the next few hours. But despite the impending crucifixion, he looked forward to future events in heaven – the joyful communion between believers and himself (Rev. 19:9). In that coming kingdom, sorrow, sin, and death would be no more.

Look at verse 26. “When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.” After the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn as they made their way to the Mount of Olives. The Mount of Olives held significance in Jesus’ ministry, being a place of prayer and later his arrest (14:32- 52). Even though we cannot identify the specific hymn they sang, it likely expressed anticipation of God’s imminent kingdom. Perhaps it echoed the lyrics of *“We’re marching to Zion. Beautiful, beautiful Zion. We’re marching upward to Zion. The beautiful City of God.”*

 Let me close this sermon. The Last Supper recaps the heart of the Christian faith, serving as a reminder of our continual need for redemption, the danger of betrayal, and the beautiful communion we share with Christ. It’s a spiritual feast that brings spiritual nourishment, recovery, and the wholeness of God into our lives. (Jn. 6:54-55) However, we must remember that we are encouraged to participate in the Lord’s Supper as a body of Christ as often as we desire so that we may build the spirit of unity in Christ. Sharing one bread in the context of the Lord’s Supper is a powerful symbol and practice that promotes unity among Christians. It’s a tangible reminder of the call to unity within the Christian faith. May we be inspired to live lives worthy of the Ultimate sacrifice made by our Lord Jesus on our behalf. May we continue to examine our hearts, repent of our sins, and strive to walk in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus.