

Sermon – April 14 , 2022 - Maundy Thursday

“This Is the New Covenant”

Luke 22:7–20

“Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover” (v 1). So begins St. Luke’s account of the Passion of our Lord.

As the Passover was drawing near, the chief priests and scribes were preparing to kill Jesus, the Twelve were preparing to kill the Paschal lamb, Satan was preparing Judas, and Judas was preparing to betray Jesus. And they all succeeded. The chief priests and scribes, Satan, and Judas succeeded in killing Jesus, killing God. Then when the day came, the twelve disciples succeeded in a celebration of the Passover that surpassed anything they could have imagined.

This Passover began like any other Passover that the apostles had observed year after year since their childhood and the Jews had observed for hundreds of years. But what began as just another Passover meal would become the Lord’s Supper, the fulfillment of the Passover, a new covenant in his blood for the forgiveness of sins. The new Covenant Jeremiah said God was going to do with his people.

But for that covenant to take place something ought to happen. The Son of God would soon go to his death as the uncomplaining Passover Lamb, shedding his divine blood for the sins of the world. This fulfillment before the disciples’ eyes. The Lamb on the table has become the Lamb reclining at the table, hosting the meal and soon to be the sacrificial Lamb on the cross.

Judas was at the “last Passover” and the first Lord’s Supper. Precisely when he left and whether he actually received the body and blood is unclear, Luke doesn’t mention it, though intriguing to contemplate. What is clear is that Jesus ate with sinners throughout his ministry; he ate with sinners on the night in which he was betrayed; the same way he hosts sinners at his table today with the same invitation: “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” (Mt 26:27–28).

It is also clear from Scripture that after the meal Judas went out and hanged himself. What is so tragic is that it didn’t have to happen. Yes, he did the wrong thing in betraying Jesus; it is possibly the worst thing anyone has ever done since the fall of

Adam and Eve. Yet it ended up being the “right thing,” in the sense that, as a result, Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Therefore, it didn’t have to end that way for Judas. Matthew tells us: “Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he [was seized with remorse] and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, ‘I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.’ They said, ‘What is that to us? See to it yourself.’ And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and went and hanged himself” (Mt 27:3–5).

Judas went to the temple and confessed his sin. The temple was precisely the right place to go. It was where you go for the forgiveness of sins. But the priests refused to hear his confession and absolve his sins. Imagine that you come to one of the pastors here at Faith, with deep remorse and confesses a heinous sin, and rather than absolving you, you hear the pastor say, “What is that to me? See to it yourself,” and sends you away without absolution, imagine that, sending you to despair and hopelessness.

Now, many of us, all of you, have heard the Passion Narratives, the long readings that are read in church during the parts of the Holy Week Services, they are part of our liturgies, they are liturgies. They are not merely heart-moving and heart braking stories or examples that inspire personal kindness and good works. All those readings and retelling of the passion story are in fact God’s word that tells us the why’s of his work, the why’s of his suffering, the meaning behind all, but most importantly what good it does to each of us. What Jesus does for each one of us. Reading, reciting, and hearing the passion stories over and over, reassures us of God’s desire, even his heart for each one those who hear them. On that Thursday evening in the Upper Room Jesus spoke words of Liturgy, words that were God’s promise from long but that now have become real in Jesus. And more, on the evening of his resurrection he gave us the ministry of Confession and Holy Absolution, elements of a new and contemporary worship. New, because it contains a new covenant in the Blood and Body of Jesus, and contemporary because it is good and alive in each era of history, it was the same one thousand year ago as it is today, for it is for you here and now. He is present with us now, bestowing upon us the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, therefore all true liturgy is contemporary.

The Passion Readings are not a script or the story of a hero, or some tragic drama. O yes, people put on passion plays, and you know the one some of us have attended, the one in Drumheller. There are movies too, and even some pastors and worship leaders dress up in costumes like Jesus and the apostles and re-enact the Last Supper to make it “more meaningful.” It must be an experience to do so! But it is not liturgy, it is not worship, it is not God speaking to you directly.

A few years ago, here at Faith, with some, we entertained the idea of doing the Jewish Seder around this day, or in lieu of the Lord Supper. That would have been an experience indeed, however, looking back, replacing it with the Lord’s supper? What were we thinking? Why would we replace Lord Supper with the Jewish Seder?

Each will have its place, and for us Christians who know the word of God, can say we do have the real deal! We do have Jesus body and his blood, given and shed for us, given for us to receive and enjoy.

And we know this because the Word says it so. We are given God’s word. We do have God’s word. We read it, we hear it, at home and here in church, in Bible studies, in the lessons appointed for each Sunday, and most certainly here tonight, and will have it this weekend too, and we do have it primarily in our liturgy. It doesn’t stand alone. It shapes the liturgy with the living Word and presence of God. The appointed readings do far more than simply establish the theme for the day. They bring the living Lord Jesus and the viva vox Christi-the living voice of Christ, into the service. They tell us what Jesus has to say to us today by letting him say it, and then through the liturgy we enter into the text, or rather, the text enters into us and takes us into the presence of the living God. And at the heart of it give us forgiveness and life.

So, even when tonight we hear the story of the passion once again, it is not just repetition, it is not just teaching, it is not just even a re-enactment of the Passover while celebrating the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper is the fulfillment of the Paschal Meal. Neither the Passover nor the Lord’s Supper are intended to be re-enacted. Prayer and liturgy are not acting. The art of acting is a sophisticated craft involving convincing pretense before an audience that comes to see a play. In worship, one comes into the very presence of the Lord God. As the writer of Hebrews told us this evening:

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of

Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.” Heb. 10:19-22

As you see, this is not merely acting, or remembering something Jesus said. It grants access to the Father, therefore religious plays are best conducted somewhere else, not within the context of the Liturgy.

And so, we may have a lengthy Passion Narrative read by several readers, as we have done here often. But they aren't actors. We do sing beautiful music, and sometimes as the case merits somber but full of insight, but what we do here is not a musical. It is something very different from a musical performance. It is liturgical song, a sung prayer and confession of the text, that is, a contemporary participating with the living Word and living Lord God.

Today and tomorrow, through the Worship Services, we come as the repentant Peter, as the Gentile soldiers, as the crowds in Jerusalem who realized their sin, as religious leaders, and as Judas who in repentance came to the temple and said, “I have sinned.” You will say, “I, a poor miserable sinner, confess unto you all my sins and iniquities with which I have ever offended you and justly deserve your temporal and eternal punishment.” But unlike Judas, who was repentant, but didn't seek forgiveness, you come to the right place, looking for the right source of forgiveness, and I promise you, the pastor will not say, “What is this to me? See to it yourself.” Rather, the Lord's pastors have been given the command and authority to say—in fact, we are under divine orders to say—“I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” And that too, is not acting. And even we too are sinful human beings, we do have the command of Jesus, for they are the words of Jesus, receive them for he has spoken them!

Therefore today, “let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.”

In the name of Jesus. Amen.