

“This Isn't What it Looks Like: The Last Supper”

Meditation Preached by The Rev. Jennifer Cameron

April 9, 2020 (Maundy Thursday) – St. Columba Presbyterian Church, Belleville

Hymns for Worship Video

“Twas on That Night” Vs. 1 #537 in the Book of Praise

'Twas on that night when doomed to know the eager rage of every foe

That night in which he was betrayed, the Saviour of the world took bread

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“Let all Mortal Flesh Keep Silence” Vs. 2 #542 in the Book of Praise

King of kings yet born of Mary, as of old on earth he stood

Lord of all in human vesture, in the body and the blood

Christ will give to all the faithful his own self for heav'nly food

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“An Upper Room did our Lord Prepare” Vs. 2 #224 in the Book of Praise

A lasting gift Jesus gave His own, to share his bread, his loving cup

Whatever burdens may bow us down, he by his cross shall lift us up

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Scripture Texts

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

John 13:21-25

²¹ After he had said this, Jesus was troubled in spirit and testified, "Very truly I tell you, one of you is going to betray me."

²² His disciples stared at one another, at a loss to know which of them he meant.

²³ One of them, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was reclining next to him. ²⁴ Simon Peter motioned to this disciple and said, "Ask him which one he means."

²⁵ Leaning back against Jesus, he asked him, "Lord, who is it?"

²⁶ Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I will give this piece of bread when I have dipped it in the dish." Then, dipping the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. ²⁷ As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him.

So Jesus told him, "What you are about to do, do quickly." ²⁸ But no one at the meal understood why Jesus said this to him. ²⁹ Since Judas had charge of the money, some thought Jesus was telling him to buy what was needed for the festival, or to give something to the poor. ³⁰ As soon as Judas had taken the bread, he went out. And it was night.

³¹ When he was gone, Jesus said, "Now the Son of Man is glorified and God is glorified in him. ³² If God is glorified in him, God will glorify the Son in himself, and will glorify him at once.

³³ "My children, I will be with you only a little longer. You will look for me, and just as I told the Jews, so I tell you now: Where I am going, you cannot come.

³⁴ "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

Meditation

This isn't what it looks like.

Just as Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem was not what it looked like in many ways, so too this evening's story elicits an emotional response in us because we know what it is, what is going on as Jesus shared this special meal with his disciples. More to the point, we know what is about to happen, and why. And we don't like it.

For the disciples, this was a gathering of the inner circle, a group of people so close to Jesus they barely left his side. They were privileged to share the Passover with their Teacher, their Master. This was a deeply meaningful moment for them.

But it wasn't what it looked like.

For Jesus, this was more than a gathering of friends. This was more than an annual celebration. This was a meal that would feed his people far beyond that time and place. It was a meal in which he would give his people something by which to remember him and all that he was about to do. It was his gift, and his example to those who would become his body in the world – those who would become his church. And it was an evening in which the events that lay before him would be triggered into action.

He would be betrayed.

He would be arrested.

He would be abandoned by his friends.

He would begin to take his final steps toward the cross.

This looks like a gathering of friends for a community meal, on the surface.

But this isn't what it looks like.

It isn't just a meal.

It is so much more than food and drink.

Did you notice what Jesus said as the apostle quoted him in the reading from 1 Corinthians? He said, "This is my body, which is for you." *For you*. Jesus didn't put the focus on himself as he said those words, he put it on those for whom he would die.

It was for the disciples.

It was for those who would follow them.

It was for the church.

It was for us.

As sad as it is to think about what Jesus might have been feeling on this night – sorrow, dread – there is another heartbreaking character in this drama.

Every disciple reclining around that upper room was filled with shocked anticipation when Jesus said one of them, one of those who had been closest to him, would betray him. Who would it be? Each one was wondering which of them it could be...

They had all sat at his feet.

They had been so devoted to him.

They loved him! How could one of them betray him?

But one would. And it would be Judas.

I've often wondered why Judas took the bread, apparently so easily, when Jesus had just uttered those words. The one who takes the bread from me is the one who will betray me. Why would anyone want to be the one?!? Why did Judas reach out and accept that piece of bread?

The answer is in the Scriptures. The prophecy had to be fulfilled. It had to happen. In Psalm 41:9 we read: *Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me.* Zechariah and Jeremiah speak of the Messiah's life being traded for silver. Someone had to do it. It was a part of Jesus' story from the beginning. Jesus' purpose was being fulfilled, and Judas was a part of it, an important part. It isn't a nice part of the story. It's rather disheartening. If one so close to Jesus could do that to him, anyone could.

Any of the disciples.

Any of us.

And so yet again, this isn't what it looks like. Yes, it is a terrible betrayal that would kick off the events that lead to the cross. Yes, it is a moment even the disciples didn't understand – they thought Judas was leaving to run an errand. Yes,

it was the door being opened to the evil one entering into the story, entering into the one who would become the betrayer.

But that's not all it is.

Judas was compelled to do it. He had to do it. It had to happen. And so it is more than a betrayal. It is a step taken as the story unfolds. It is a crucial moment that had to play out. It is a part of the build up to a climax that would shake the world.

This isn't what it looks like. It isn't that simple. It is more than what we see. It is Jesus' story.

It is our story.

It is terrible.

And it is necessary.

This isn't what it looks like – or maybe it is.

Because the story isn't finished yet.