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Luke 22:14-20

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LAST SUPPER AND LORD'S SUPPER

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

"Come to the feast, come to the table."¹ We all love a good feast. Our bodies need nourishment, but dining is about so much more than just giving our bodies enough food and drink. Astronauts get enough nourishment in space, but they all look forward to a proper meal when they return to earth. Feasts are about celebration and community. We celebrate birthdays and weddings, special days such as Christmas and Easter, Mother's Day and Father's Day. We celebrate when family and friends come to visit. We celebrate by sitting down together at the table to enjoy a slow, leisurely, sumptuous meal. We converse and tell stories: we have a symposium (Gk. "drink together") or a convivium (Lat. "live together"). Sadly the delight of eating together has been robbed by TV dinners, fast food and junk food. The slow food movement seeks to reverse these losses. I am very fortunate to have a wife who loves to cook for the table.

We have seen that meals are an important component of Luke's gospel. Jesus enjoyed sitting down to a good meal. He ate with the right people: the Pharisees who were very particular about whom they ate with (7:36-50; 11:37-52; 14:1-24). But he also ate with the wrong people: tax collectors and sinners. He accepted the hospitality of Levi and dined with his many tax collector friends (5:29). He invited himself to stay with Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector (19:5-10). He told parables about feasts: the master who comes home in the middle of the night and serves dinner to his watchful servants (12:37), the wedding feast (14:7-11) and the great banquet (14:16-24); the Prodigal son (15:11-32).

Who is welcome at the Lord's table? As our song said, "the great and the least, the rich and the poor." In the first episode of the new series of *Downton Abbey* last Sunday there was indeed another dinner. But there was a crisis: a wrong person was at the table. "Who invited her?" demanded Lord Grantham. The Crawley family is very hospitable, but their hospitality goes only so far.

Today we come to the most important meal in Luke's gospel: Passover. Jesus will transform the liturgy of this meal, his Last Supper, so that it becomes the Lord's Supper, celebrated by the followers of Jesus ever since. The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of a yet greater feast, the Lamb's Supper.

I. The Last Supper

And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And likewise the cup after

they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (Luke 22:14-20 ESV)

Night has fallen, ending Passover, the day on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. The seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread has begun, and the hour has come for the Passover meal. Jesus took his place at the table with his disciples around him. Leonardo da Vinci got it wrong: they were not sitting on upright chairs at a long table. They reclined on cushions around the perimeter of a U-shaped table, the *triclinium*. Jesus said, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." This is the meal he was particularly looking forward to. This is the meal that lay at the end of his ministry. This would be his last meal, his Last Supper. It was therefore a farewell meal with his friends. Immediately after the meal his suffering would begin. What we call the Passion (Lat. *passio*, "suffering"), will commence immediately after the meal with the Agony in the Garden.

Passover was the biggest celebration of the year. Jews everywhere gathered on this night to eat a festive meal with its own elaborate liturgy. Jews today still do so, following the *seder* ("order") as detailed in the *Haggadah* ("the telling"), the booklet containing the liturgy. At the heart of the meal lies "the telling": telling the story of the first Passover and its significance. At the first Passover, Israel was commanded to observe Passover as an annual feast. Their children would ask, "What do you mean by this service?" (Exod 12:26). "You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt'" (Exod 13:8). In the *seder* the youngest child asks The Four Questions (Heb. *ma-nishtanah*, "what has changed?") Why is this night different? This allows the host to tell the story. This telling is all about memory and participation. Everyone around the table remembers and participates in the story as if they had been there: "it was *us* that the Lord brought out of Egypt."

The Passover table is set with many symbolic foods. The first Passover featured three: roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs (Exod 12:8). Several more had been added by the first century, as we saw last week. The gospel accounts focus on only two of these items: the bread and the wine.

Four glasses of wine are drunk during the *seder*. No, Jesus didn't have a bottle of Welch's grape juice on the table! These glasses are drunk at four major points: after the initial blessing, after the telling, after the lengthy thanksgiving which follows the meal, and at the end after the final psalms of praise. The four glasses also represent four verbs used to describe God's rescue of his people:

I am the LORD,
and I will *bring* you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians,
and I will *deliver* you from slavery to them,
and I will *redeem* you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment.

I will *take* you to be my people, and I will be your God. (Exod 6:6-7)

A platter of three *matzot*, three pieces of unleavened bread (*matzah*) graces the table. These are broken and eaten at several points in the *seder*. Twice a blessing is said over the bread.

Matthew and Mark mention the bread and the cup. Luke mentions two cups, either side of the bread. The first cup is probably the first cup of the *seder*, drunk immediately after the opening blessing over the meal. Jesus took this first cup and gave thanks: "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine." He took the bread and gave thanks: "Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth." He broke the bread and gave it to his disciples. After the meal he took another cup; this would be the third cup, the cup of redemption, the cup that celebrates the third verb, "I will redeem you."

The bread and the wine commemorate the Exodus story. Jesus gives them new meaning. He retells the story, Israel's story, around himself, with the bread and the wine pointing to himself: "This is my body, which is given for you." "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

"This is my body, which is given for you." Jesus is the sacrificial victim, the Passover lamb. He is giving himself on behalf of, in the place of, his people. Just as the Passover lamb died so that the Israelites might live, so Jesus will die so that his followers might live. The one is being given for the many. The one will die in the place of the many.

"This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." The old covenant was sealed with the blood of sacrificial animals. Moses threw half the blood against the altar. After proclaiming the Book of the Covenant to the people he sprinkled on them the remaining blood, saying, "Behold, the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exod 24:8). But the old covenant was unable to secure the people's obedience. Through the prophet Jeremiah the Lord promised a new covenant, whereby he would write his law on his people's hearts, and forgive their sins; "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:31-34). This new covenant is about to be enacted with the blood of Jesus, the sacrificial Lamb.

Jesus knows that his death is imminent. He will not again eat this Passover or drink the cup until the kingdom of God comes. This will be the last Passover. Jesus will eat and drink again but at a different feast, a feast which will be the fulfillment of what Passover pointed towards, a feast that will celebrate the completion of redemption, the full presence of the kingdom of God.

The Passover *seder* looks back to the first Passover, but it also has a forward horizon. After the third cup is drunk, a cup is filled for Elijah, the door is opened in the hope that Elijah might be there, and the people sing a song about him: "May he soon come and bring the Messiah." The *seder* ends with the cry, "Next year in Jerusalem!" The Last Supper proclaims that Messiah is here and is giving himself as the paschal lamb, slain for his people.

2. The Lord's Supper

Jesus told his disciples, "Do this in remembrance of me." The church began to do just that, from its very birth on the Day of Pentecost:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:42, 46-47)

We might expect the early church to have celebrated the new feast once each year, at Passover. But these early Christians met together every day, and each time they met they broke bread and gave thanks. The breaking of bread and giving of thanks was a characteristic action of Jesus. When feeding the 5,000 and the 4,000 he gave thanks and broke the loaves. After the journey to Emmaus, it was when Jesus "took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them" that the eyes of Cleopas and his companion "were opened and they recognized him" (Luke 24:30-31). What had been a characteristic action of Jesus now became a characteristic action of his people.

The church has continued to eat the meal under a variety of names: eucharist, Mass, communion, Lord's Supper, Lord's Table, breaking of bread; and with a variety of verbs: celebrate, observe, take, receive, have or do. No issue has been as divisive in the church. How often should it be observed: frequently or infrequently? Who should be admitted? Is it a sacrament, an ordinance, a memorial, or a means of grace? What do we eat and drink? A piece of bread torn from a common leavened loaf, a tiny square of bread cut up beforehand, a chiclet, a tasteless wafer, or a piece of *matzah* bread? Do we drink real wine from a common chalice, or grape juice from a little plastic cup, or dip the bread in a common cup?

No issue has more divided the church than the nature of Christ's presence in the bread and the wine. Do they become the physical body and blood of Jesus? If not, is Jesus present in some other mystical way? Or is he present only in the lives of the believers gathered around the table? What happens when we have communion?

The church soon described the eucharist as a sacrament, which Augustine defined as "a visible sign of a sacred thing" or "a visible form of an invisible grace." Two things are present: something visible and something invisible which the visible represents. In communion, the visible signs are bread and wine, physical nourishment. These point to the invisible reality which is Christ. But what is the correspondence? The debate hinges on the little word "is." Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "This is my body." What does this mean? What is the relationship between the bread and his body. There are four major positions. Some of you have grown up in churches that hold different positions.

It didn't take long for the early church to conclude that Jesus was physically present in the bread, that the bread really was his body. The Catholic Church adopted this as dogma at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, using Greek philosophy to explain it. The inner nature of the bread (its substance) becomes Christ's body, while its external appearance (its accidents) remain bread; likewise for the cup. Hence this position is called transubstantiation; the substance changes. The change happens at the moment of consecration when the priest says, "This is my body" (Lat. *hoc est corpus meum*). This belief that the bread becomes the body has had several consequences which I consider unfortunate. Those who have grown up Catholic will be acquainted with at least some of these beliefs and practices.

Since the bread is now Christ's body, the meal becomes a sacrifice. The bread becomes the host (Lat. *hostia*, "sacrificial victim"). It is of-

ferred on an altar not spread on a table. It is handled by a priest not served by a minister.

Since the transubstantiated host is Christ himself, it becomes an object of adoration. The priest elevates the host. Any of the host not used is reserved in a tabernacle and a light is lit to show the presence of the reserved host. The host is occasionally taken from this tabernacle and displayed in a monstrance, so the people can see and adore the host. In the 13th century the Feast of Corpus Christi (the body of Christ) was introduced, focusing on adoration of the Blessed Sacrament. Corpus Christi is still a public holiday in many Catholic countries. Our state capital Sacramento is named after the Blessed Sacrament, as is the city of Corpus Christi in Texas.

Since the consecrated bread, the host, is sacred, it must not be desecrated. Any leftovers cannot be thrown away. Spilling a drop of wine desecrates Christ's blood. The movie *Luther* (2003) opens with Martin Luther, played by Joseph Fiennes, celebrating his first mass. He is so overwhelmed by this occasion that his hands shake as he holds up the chalice. Then disaster: he spills the wine. He has spilled Christ's blood! So afraid was the Catholic church of such desecration that they withheld the cup from the laity, who couldn't be trusted not to spill. For centuries the laity received only the bread.

Since the partaker literally eats and drinks Christ, he is nourished whether or not he has faith. Grace is necessarily conveyed regardless of the spiritual state of the recipient.

Transubstantiation confuses the sign and the reality, the bread and Christ's body, the cup and Christ's blood.

The Reformation discarded the Catholic mass and transubstantiation. But Luther held on to a literal understanding of the word "is." Arguing that Christ's human body now has the property of omnipresence, he stated that the body and blood is present "in, with and under" the elements. The bread is both bread and the physical body of Jesus, a view known as consubstantiation (Lat. *con*, with). At the Marburg Colloquy held in Marburg Castle in 1529 the German and Swiss Reformations parted company over this issue.

Zwingli, the Swiss reformer who represented the other position at Marburg, argued that the body of the risen Christ is in only one place, at the right hand of the Father in heaven, where it remains. Christ is present only inasmuch as he is present wherever two or three are gathered in his name. Communion is simply a memorial and an ordinance; it is not a sacrament.

Calvin led a different branch of the Swiss Reformation. He agreed that Christ's body was only in heaven. Nevertheless, Christ is spiritually and mystically present with his people when they receive the bread and the wine. His people are nourished on him, provided they eat and drink in faith. This is a Real Presence, as opposed to which Zwingli's view is a Real Absence.

Our Scripture reading (John 6:48-58) was drawn from the Bread of Life passage, which comes after the feeding of the 5,000, when the crowd had its fill of physical bread. The next day the crowd finds Jesus and a discussion commences about bread. The Israelites ate manna in the wilderness but died. Jesus has come down as living bread, manna from heaven, so that anyone eating this bread would not die but live forever.

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him." (John 6:53-56)

Jesus said these words before the Last Supper. The Lord's Supper gives visible expression to these words. Christ gives himself to us and we are nourished. This assumes that we have faith. Without faith, the bread and the cup are meaningless; they are mere physical realities behind which the one without faith does not see or experience any spiritual realities. But the one who eats and drinks in faith is nourished on Christ himself. God has given us appetites. We have appetites for physical things, but ultimately God gives us an appetite for himself. He wants to nourish us; he nourishes us in Christ.

The Lord's Supper is about both memory and participation. We remember our Lord's death. But we also participate in our Lord's body and blood:

The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? (1 Cor 10:16)

As we sang in Charles Wesley's great hymn, we have an interest in our Savior's blood. We come to the table to eat and drink and so participate in Christ.

3. The Lamb's Supper

When we eat the bread and drink the cup we proclaim Christ's death until he comes (1 Cor 11:26). The Passover *seder*, with its bread and wine, tells of the Exodus, Israel's founding narrative. In communion we declare a different primary event, the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, our Passover Lamb slain for us. This is our founding narrative, our communal narrative. We declare an event in the past but we look forward to an event in the future: Christ's return. What will happen then? He will sit us down to a yet better dinner, the marriage supper of the Lamb.

In the famous verse from Revelation that is addressed to a church not to an unbeliever, Jesus says,

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me." (Rev 3:20)

What does Jesus promise to give? What is the reward he offers to the one who hears his voice? A place at his table.

Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. (Rev 19:9)

The Lord's Supper is the bridge between the Last Supper and the Lamb's Supper. Our collective memory of the past and our collective expectation of the future meet here, as often as we eat and drink.

1. Jeff Lawson, "Come to the Feast," *Songs for the Book of Luke* (The Gospel Coalition, 2012), based on the Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:16-24); sung as the offertory.