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Luke 22:1-13

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# PREPARING THE PASSOVER LAMB

SERIES: THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Once again the new year brings a new season of *Downton Abbey*: season 5 begins tonight on KQED. In *Downton Abbey*, the large country house of the Crawley family, the most important rooms are the dining room upstairs and the kitchen downstairs. Even a “normal” dinner with no guests is a formal affair, far more formal than the fanciest dinner most of us will ever attend. And then there are the formal dinners! These require much preparation, which is becoming increasingly difficult in the economic constraints of the 1920s. The silverware is polished, the table is set, and the spacing between settings carefully measured. Downstairs, the kitchen goes into overdrive. Upstairs, the women fuss at their dressing tables. After all has been prepared, Carson announces, “Dinner is served, my lord.” The family and guests take their places, and Lord Grantham presides as host. I’m sure we will see more dinners in this new series.

We return to Luke’s gospel, after our break for Advent and Christmas, to find preparations underway for a meal. It is not surprising to find a meal in Luke, for this gospel is full of meals. But this meal is special for several reasons: it is included in all four gospels; Jesus is the host rather than a guest; this meal is the most important meal of the Jewish calendar; and this meal has a liturgy attached to it. Due to the liturgical innovations Jesus introduces during the meal, it becomes the most important meal of the Christian calendar. We will spend the next four weeks on this meal: its preparation (vv. 1-13), the meal itself (14-23), and the after-dinner speeches (24-38).

## I. The Approaching Feast (22:1-2)

Now the Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near, which is called the Passover. And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. (Luke 22:1-2 ESV)

Passover was one of the three annual feasts or festivals which God appointed for Israel, the others being Shavuot (Weeks) and Sukkot (Tabernacles). These were pilgrimage feasts, when Jews who were able went up to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast by eating the festal meal in the Lord’s presence, in proximity to the temple.

Over the last few weeks PBS has aired a documentary series called *Sacred Journeys*, hosted by Bruce Feiler. One of the six episodes was devoted to pilgrimage to Jerusalem, both by Jews and by Christians. The Jewish portion of the episode focused on Sukkot, the Feast of Tabernacles, which occurs in September or October. Bruce Feiler followed an American woman who had gone to Jerusalem to celebrate the feast; we saw her preparations for the meal, and then the meal itself. Along the way there was much discussion about pilgrimage, specifically about whether her temporary pilgrimage to Jerusalem would become a permanent one, whether she would make *aliyah*.

Jesus has made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover. Though this journey to Jerusalem is included in all three synoptic gospels, it is especially prominent in Luke’s gospel, where the journey takes ten chapters (9:51–19:45). Jesus’ journey to Jerusalem ended when he

entered the temple (19:45). He arrived in Jerusalem a few days before Passover, and spent the intervening days teaching in the temple (19:47; 21:37), leaving the city each night to stay on the Mount of Olives. His teaching produced very different responses from the people and from the religious leaders. The people hung on every word, but the leaders were determined to kill him.

With Luke’s notice that Passover was approaching, Jesus’ public teaching in the temple is over, and attention shifts to the approaching meal. But the religious leaders have something else on their mind, “to get rid of Jesus” (NIV). Passover was a sacrificial meal: the main dish was a lamb that had been sacrificed. The religious leaders have another death in mind. They realized that in the future which Jesus had been announcing there wasn’t room for both Jesus and themselves. Someone had to go! So determined were they to keep their own position that they were prepared to sacrifice Jesus. But the leaders are frustrated; their intent to kill is clear, but they don’t see a way. We can sense this frustration in Luke’s three reports about their intentions, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of Jesus’ teaching in the temple:

The chief priests and the scribes and the principal men of the people were seeking to destroy him, but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were hanging on his words. (19:47-48)

The scribes and the chief priests sought to lay hands on him at that very hour, for they perceived that he had told this parable against them, but they feared the people. So they watched him and sent spies, who pretended to be sincere, that they might catch him in something he said, so as to deliver him up to the authority and jurisdiction of the governor...And they were not able in the presence of the people to catch him in what he said, but marveling at his answer they became silent. (20:19-20, 26)

And the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to put him to death, for they feared the people. (22:2)

For days they have been trying to get their hands on him, but the crowd is always there. Infiltrating spies into the crowd to provoke Jesus into a rash statement didn’t work; Jesus easily outwitted them. What else can they do? Time is running out: Passover is approaching; soon it will be over. Then Jesus will go back to Galilee with his disciples, and they will have lost their opportunity. But then they have a stroke of good luck: an insider is willing to betray Jesus.

## 2. Judas Offers to Betray Jesus (22:3-6)

Then Satan entered into Judas called Iscariot, who was of the number of the twelve. He went away and conferred with the chief priests and officers how he might betray him to them. And they were glad, and agreed to give him money. So he consented and sought an opportunity to betray him to them in the absence of a crowd. (22:3-6)

Luke reminds us that Judas was one of the Twelve, one of the close circle of disciples who had followed Jesus, their rabbi, throughout Galilee and from there to Jerusalem. He is an insider; he can get close to Jesus without arousing suspicion. In the movies it is usually the spymaster who takes the initiative to enlist the spy. Not so here. Judas wasn't simply willing to betray Jesus; he actively wanted to do so. The chief priests didn't approach him and offer him money. They didn't blackmail him with embarrassing photos or information. They didn't have to. It was Judas who approached them.

Judas "went away": amidst the hubbub of Jerusalem he slipped away from Jesus and the other disciples. Did anyone notice? Even if one or more of the disciples had seen Judas going away, they would not have been suspicious. Later, Judas would leave the table before the after-dinner conversation; the disciples saw nothing unusual in this since he had the moneybag and they supposed he was going to take care of business (John 13:29).

Judas was going to take care of business, but he had different business in mind. He wasn't buying supplies for the meal or for the poor. Instead he went away to meet with the rich and powerful. He conferred with the religious leaders. The officers of the temple guard were present for the discussion presumably because both the chief priests and Judas assumed that violence would be involved, that neither Jesus nor his disciples would go down without a fight. Judas may understand impetuous Peter well: there will indeed be swords, and Peter will use one. But how little do Judas and the chief priests understand Jesus. When they arrest Jesus, he will rebuke them, "Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs?" (22:52). The word translated "robber" refers to a bandit or rebel, one who uses violence to achieve his goals. But Jesus will offer no violence; instead he will reverse Peter's violent act with the sword. Jesus will allow himself to be handed over; indeed, he will hand himself over. How little do Judas and the chief priests understand the motivations of Jesus.

Judas conferred with the chief priests how he might betray Jesus, how he might hand him over to them. Subsequently Judas will be called the Betrayer, though no English version actually translates it that starkly: Judas the Betrayer. A few years ago a group of us visited the Rabin memorial in Tel Aviv, marking the place where the Israeli prime minister was assassinated in 1995. Small bronze medallions mark the spots where the key people were standing. A bronze plaque on the wall identifies the names. But the shooter's name is not given. Instead he is identified as *ha-rotseach*, "The Murderer"; his name is blotted out. Judas retains his name, but is given an equally ignominious title: The Betrayer.

Why did Judas decide to betray Jesus? Both Matthew and Mark place a little story between verses 2 and 3 of Luke 22. While Jesus was dining in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany, a woman with an alabaster flask of expensive ointment anointed his head with it. The disciples were indignant at such waste; the ointment could have been sold for a year's wages and given to the poor (Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9). John is more specific: it was Judas Iscariot who was indignant. John adds, "He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it" (John 12:6). Perhaps it was greed that motivated Judas. Or perhaps a recognition that Jesus' agenda was far different than his own agenda.

But Luke sees a more sinister reason: he attributes Judas's motivation to Satan, who had entered into Judas. The disagreement is not

simply between a rabbi and a disgruntled disciple. There is a cosmic battle behind the scene. Back just before the beginning of Jesus' ministry, the devil had tempted Jesus in the wilderness. Having failed three times to entrap Jesus, the devil "departed from him until an opportune time" (4:13). Now he is back. If this were a movie you would now begin to hear the low bass notes indicating that something ominous is coming.

Judas conferred with the chief priests, they agreed to give him money, and he consented. This language suggests that there was some haggling. Judas talked the matter through with the chief priests; they then put their heads together and worked up a proposal which they put to Judas; he then accepted it. It is the language we would use for buying a house; it is cold, business-like and impersonal. But this is a human life they are haggling over. Not just any human life; this is a disciple selling out his master. How much is the rabbi worth? Evidently Judas and the chief priests reached an amount that was mutually agreeable to both parties. Matthew tells us it was thirty pieces of silver, the same price at which the prophet Zechariah had been valued (Matt 26:15; 27:9; Zech 11:13).

The chief priests were untroubled during this business transaction. Far from it: they were glad, they rejoiced. This is a discordant word to read in Luke's gospel. Joy is a major theme of Luke. John fittingly entitled his recent message on Luke's nativity account, "Repeat the Sounding Joy." How dissonant is this: the leaders rejoice not over the birth of Jesus, nor over the good news that he has been proclaiming, but over the prospect of his death after betrayal by an insider.

In 1962 Don and Carol Richardson went to Irian Jaya as missionaries to the Sawi tribe. After learning the language Don told them the gospel story. To his great surprise the Sawi applauded Judas as the hero. He learnt that Sawi culture honored treachery and betrayal. Praiseworthy was the man who was able to befriend a man from another tribe, lull him into confidence, then turn on him, kill him and eat him. Not only was Don surprised, he was also perplexed: how could you share the gospel story of Jesus with a people who responded to Judas not Jesus? And he was afraid: the Sawi were still cannibals. He lived to tell the tale in his book *Peace Child*, which has also been made into a movie.

After accepting the chief priests' offer, Judas departed to seek an opportunity to betray Jesus to them. Satan's opportune time is close. The music grows a little louder.

Both the religious leaders and Judas have made their preparations for the Passover sacrifice. It will not be a young lamb; it will be Jesus. Though Judas will sit down at table with Jesus, his mind will not be focused on the meal. He will be looking for an opportunity to keep his side of the bargain. The ball is now in his court, but he has the same concern as the chief priests had: how to avoid the crowd. He knows he has to do his misdeed in the absence of a crowd. But how will this be possible in a city packed full of pilgrims?

Now the big day arrives, and it is time to prepare for the meal.

### 3. Preparing the Passover (22:7-13)

**Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it." They said to him, "Where will you have us prepare it?" He said to them, "Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you,**

**Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.” And they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover. (22:7-13)**

Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are separate events, but so closely related that Luke equates them. Passover is on the 14th day of the month of Abib, later called Nisan. Near the end of the day, “at twilight” (Exod 12:6), the Passover lamb was sacrificed. Sunset marked the beginning of a new day, the 15th day of the month, and the start of the seven-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. The meal itself wasn’t seven days long; it was the Festival that was. The lamb was sacrificed at the end of Passover, and eaten at the very beginning of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. From altar to table was just a few hours, but two separate days.

Religious festival, meal, and lamb are closely connected: Luke uses the word “Passover” for all three. He adds a note of urgency: the Passover lamb *had* to be sacrificed on Passover.

At previous meals in Luke Jesus had been the guest, at dinners hosted by Pharisees (7:36-50; 11:37-52; 14:1-24), or by Zacchaeus the chief tax collector (19:5-10). At this Passover dinner Jesus will be the host. But where will he host the dinner? Jerusalem was full of pilgrims who had left their homes to come to the city, and were looking for places to hold their meals. Jesus has the matter under control. He sends Peter and John into the city to prepare; the verb “prepare” is used four times in these verses. Rather than telling them the actual address, Jesus gives them a sign: a man carrying a water jar will meet them. This would be so unusual as to be unmistakable: normally it was women who carried the jars to fetch water. They were to follow this man right into the house; Peter and John had to trust Jesus as they walked in through the front door of a house they didn’t know. Inside they were to convey a message from Jesus to the householder: “The Teacher says to you, ‘Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’”

At Jesus’ birth the guest room was full (2:7). On the eve of his death, there is a guest room ready, where he may share his farewell meal with his disciples. Peter and John would be shown a large upper room. It was not uncommon for a guest room to be built on the flat roof of a house, reached by an external staircase, such as that built by the Shunammite woman for the prophet Elisha (2 Kgs 4:10). Tradition identifies this house as that of Mark’s parents on what is today called Mount Zion. Here Peter and John were to prepare the Passover.

A few days earlier, as he approached Jerusalem, Jesus had sent two disciples to fetch a colt. They “went away and found it just as he had told them” (19:32). So, too, here, Peter and John “went and found it just as he had told them.” Luke shows that Jesus is in full command of circumstances. Luke is more interested in showing the master’s command of the situation than in describing the actual preparations: simply, “they prepared the Passover.”

Luke gives no details, but the preparations would have been extensive. The room was already furnished, meaning it was outfitted for a meal, but not with the fancy long table and upright chairs of Downton Abbey. The table would have been a *triclinium*, a low U-shaped table, rising a foot above the ground. It would have been large enough to accommodate thirteen guests. Around the external perimeter of the table would have been cushions on which the dinner guests reclined. These furnishings were already present. Peter and John needed to prepare the meal itself. Anyone who has attended

a Passover meal, or even more so hosted one, knows that a lot of preparation is required.

Passover is a richly symbolic meal with an elaborate liturgy. Our Scripture reading (Exod 12:1-14) described the first Passover, held on the night of the Hebrew people’s departure from Egypt. That text mentions three foods: roasted lamb, unleavened bread, and bitter herbs (12:8). Each of these is symbolic; each has meaning beyond the physical substance. The lamb had been sacrificed and its blood put on the lintel and doorposts of the Hebrews’ houses so that the Lord would pass over those houses when he brought judgment upon Egypt. The lamb was vicarious and substitutionary; it died instead of the firstborn son in that house; the lamb died that they might live. The bread was unleavened because the people made such a hasty departure that there was no time for yeast to work. The bitter herbs represented the bitter affliction under the harsh hand of Pharaoh.

The liturgy for Passover meals today is based upon the Mishnah, the second-century codification of the oral law that the rabbis received from the Pharisees. It certainly incorporates much that was already practiced in the first century; precisely how much we don’t know. Several more food items are prepared for the table in addition to the three mentioned in Exodus 12. A special Passover plate is used to hold six symbolic foods. With the destruction of the temple in AD 70 sacrifices ceased. Two items on the plate represent these former sacrifices: a lamb shank bone stands in for the Passover lamb, and a hard-boiled egg for the offerings presented throughout the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Two servings of bitter herbs, usually horseradish root and romaine lettuce, remind of the bitterness of harsh slavery. *Haroset*, a paste made of chopped walnuts, apple and sweet red wine, resembles the mortar used to build Pharaoh’s buildings. The plate is completed by a sprig of parsley which will be dipped in salt water to remember the tears shed in Egypt.

In addition to the Passover plate and the bowl of salt water, a separate plate holds three *matzot*, three pieces of unleavened bread (*matzah*). Candles on the table are lit early in the meal. At each place setting is a wine glass that will be filled four times, and a Haggadah, the booklet containing the liturgy for the *seder* (Heb., “order”). This makes for a full table! A couple of years ago Tuvya Zaretsky of Jews for Jesus came on Palm Sunday and talked us through a Passover *seder*; he had a table set for Passover here at the front. If you have not seen such a presentation it is well worth seeking out. Even better is to participate in a Passover *seder*.

Whether Peter and John had to prepare as much as for a modern *seder* is unknown. They certainly had work to do. They would have gone to the temple to purchase a one-year-old male lamb, that was certified to be without blemish, then handed it to one of the priests on duty to be sacrificed on the altar of burnt offering. With the Passover lamb thus prepared they would have returned to the upper room to finalize preparations. This included setting out unleavened bread—not the dry *matzah* cracker used today, but more likely flat bread; and procuring enough wine for everyone to have several glasses. All this is covered in Luke’s simple words, “they prepared the Passover.”

What is the point of Passover then and now? The Lord anticipated this question. When Moses told the Israelites to celebrate Passover when they entered the land, he said that their children would ask, “What do you mean by this service?” (Exod 12:26). What is it all about? Passover is all about memory and participation. The liturgy book is called the Haggadah, “the telling.” Each year the participants

tell the story of what happened over three millennia ago, of how the Lord liberated his people from bondage and brought them out into freedom. The participants participate in this story as if they had been there. They remember and they relive the events.

All was now prepared for Jesus to come to the table with his disciples, there to immerse themselves in Israel's founding narrative. The Passover lamb has been prepared. Next week we will look at how Jesus celebrates the meal and introduces his liturgical innovations.

But now we come to the table, not the Passover table but the Lord's table. We ask, like the children of old, "What is this meal about? What is the meaning of this service?" Like Passover, this meal is also about memory and participation. We remember; it is a memorial feast. We remember our Lord's death, that his body was given and his blood shed for us. But it is more than a memorial to help us remember; it is a participation. We participate in what we remember. Our body wasn't given and our blood wasn't shed. Instead, we participate in the one whose body was given and whose blood was shed. Therefore, as Paul wrote,

**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)**

Christ was sacrificed once as our Passover lamb. We do not participate in that sacrifice once made. We participate in the one who was sacrificed and is now risen. As Paul is fond of saying throughout the epistles, we are now "in Christ." We enter into this participation symbolically through our baptism, which announces that we have died to our old self and risen to our new self in Christ. We are nourished in this participation by regularly coming to the table, here to commune with God in Christ.

**Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival. (1 Cor 5:7-8)**

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