

Sunday, February 5, 2017

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DO THIS!

Luke 22:7-23

INTRODUCTION:

Today's Gospel reading is Luke's account of the last supper that Jesus ate with his disciples. The early followers of Jesus were mostly Jewish. Hebrew culture and Jewish influence was the primary lens and central context in which these followers understood Jesus. This last supper was actually a very important ritualistic meal that is still practiced today among Jews at Passover. At every Passover Seder, Jews are meant to experience and feel what the ancient Israelites experienced and felt when God freed them from Egypt. It's a reenactment ceremony specifically designed to evoke spiritual connection to God's liberation from bondage and Yahweh's deliverance of the Jewish people.

As you listen to this story, I want to invite you to do the same. Imagine you are in this little room with Jesus and his followers. It's a quiet night. We see candlelight dancing on the walls. The aroma of freshly baked unleavened bread mixes with the pungent red wine. Everyone is silent, anticipating Jesus words that will begin the sacred Seder. Notice how Jesus takes the tradition and reinterprets it. He extends the liberation message in a new way that invites everyone to participate.

From the Gospel of Luke chapter 22...

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 meal for us that we may eat it." They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?" "Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, 'The teacher asks you, "Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there." So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him.

He said to them, "I have eagerly 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.” Then he took a cup, and after giving 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.” Then he took a loaf of 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 he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!”

Then they began to ask one another, which one of them it could be who would do this.



How’s your imagination this morning? Were you able to place yourself in that room with Jesus? Maybe you want to try this at home to really get into the scene. As a former dramatic television director and writer I can actually see it in my head. It plays like a finished movie in my mind. Placing yourself in the narrative can be really helpful to pull out a variety of meaning from scripture. Ask yourself, “Who did I relate to the most? What’s that characters emotion in the beginning of the scene? Does it change as the story progresses? How do you think the character feels in the end?” There’s no right or wrong here it’s simply choosing a tone. Then you might read the same scripture again choosing a different emotional chord or maybe from a different characters point of view. Anyone can read the Bible this way and absorb meaning. You don’t need to be a scholar or theologian, you just have to imagine and wonder.

Let’s do that now...

Source Of All Creativity, Generosity, and Extravagant Mercy, Help us this morning to understand the deep meaning in the sacred gift of the Eucharist. Open us to fully receive the compassion Jesus offers in the communion meal so that we might share it freely as medicine that heals the world. AMEN

So here we have a rich and vivid account of a Seder gone sideways. Scholars tell us that the Gospel writer Luke was very well educated in Greek culture and had outstanding command of the Greek language. Luke knew how to use his extensive vocabulary, often modeling classical Greek writings. He was also a Doctor by profession so it can be surmised that he was quite specific in what he reported in his

story. Luke gives us a very particular and intentional account of the last supper. Let's break it down a bit.

First off, I imagine the overall mood coming into the room was far from a peaceful centering gathering of holy people. In fact I think the beginning of that horrible night was actually quite intensely stressful for all of them. The disciples certainly knew that Jesus coming to Jerusalem was going to incite trouble with the Temple authorities and in his first week there he caused a near riot staging a theatrical entrance with the colt and all those palms and screaming fans. Then, he went directly into the Temple and turned over the moneychanger tables. What was he thinking? Was he trying to get them all killed? Jesus too had to have been convinced of his impending execution by the Empire. This wasn't supernatural fortuneteller knowledge. This was plain cause and effect. His message threatened the social fabric of the day, a society whose social contract was built on oppression, exclusion, and military might. This was an entire culture that relied completely on the exploitation of the weak and poor to strengthen and protect the powerful and the wealthy. Jesus simply wouldn't play along and his growing popularity demanded a quick public discrediting, extreme humiliation, and a gruesome spectacle of blood and violence. It's how it works.

So, in this thick atmosphere of high anxiety and fear, the tension in this little room was as tight as a high E piano wire. Still, Jesus does what he's always done; he sits and eats with the wrong kind of people. No one there could get him out of this impending horror. In fact, he even calls Judas out on his betrayal and is certain that Peter will publicly deny knowing him, even as the others sitting around this Passover Seder are going to completely abandon him. Yet as always, he sits and shares with them what is perhaps the most sacred of all ceremonial meals in Judaism. To ratchet up the significance just a bit more it's interesting to note that the first Passover in Egypt took place on the night right before their liberation. Now this new Seder that Jesus is about to serve up will usher in yet another liberation, but this time for the healing of the whole world.

Throughout the Gospels Jesus talked about how following him means living a life of self-denial. He said you have to lose your life to gain it, take up a cross to truly become like him and willingly accept being last to get to first. These are odd directions indeed. But now, it all comes together at this table. In his final act before the arrest, Jesus shows them and us how to begin this glorious spiritual awakening. He offers a way to actually participate with him in his death and resurrection. This is what he means when he takes the bread and says, "This bread, this is my body that is broken for you. Take it eat it, become part of it. This cup is now my life-blood poured out for you. Take it drink it. Jesus is saying that we are all invited to take his

very being, *divine essence in human form*, into the center of **our** being, and in doing so we become living participants of a journey that goes directly through the darkness of a death that opens to new life. Jesus was telling us the new liberation story that leads us directly out of all bondage, through all suffering, pain and loss and revives the Divine connection within. When we participate in the act of communion, we are actually participating in the Divine Mystery. A circular dance of life, death and resurrection!

“Do this, to remember our connection.” He said. Do this, time and time again and let my way of being become your way of being. Give this as food for the broken body Give my blood to the anemic soul. Give it freely to all who would take it. Do this for anyone and with everyone and participate in my way of love, forgiveness and compassion for all life. Do this and remember me as you make this circle bigger and wider to include all people who hunger for release from bondage and thirst for the liberation of all humanity. Do this and follow the way of Jesus. Do this, Jesus says and you too will pass through the death of self only to rediscover the true self connected to the Divine Presence. And so we do.

At this communion table there is no fear of scarcity, no restrictions that limit the sacrament to only us. No vetting for worthiness. And amazingly enough we find that not one person is the least bit diminished, or lessened, or diluted. How drastically counter cultural is that! In fact at this open table we discover that it is the distinctiveness of the other that enhances our shared humanity and clarifies our common experience across differences. It is at this table, where we are united as one to participate with the life giving body and blood of the living Christ active and alive, in us and through us in our world today - right now.

And so we can all come with great Joy, knowing that we are not defined by our mistakes or cast aside because we have not been perfect. We come as forgiven and loved, liberated from all bondage.

At this table we are truly free. - AMEN

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