

**First Presbyterian Church**  
**Matthew 26:14-30, “Betrayal”**  
**by Pastor Matt Johnson, 4/9/2017**

Today’s text from Matthew’s gospel reveals  
where our tradition of the Lord’s Supper comes from.  
This is the last gathering of Jesus and his disciples  
around a table before Jesus would be crucified.

And this meal, given to the disciples by Christ himself,  
is still central to our lives.

The church for 2000 years has called this meal various things—  
primarily the Eucharist, Communion, the Lord’s Supper.  
By any name it is a meal that is at the center of our faith,  
and it is a meal which expands the meaning  
and importance of each day that we live.

But sometimes we forget that it is a meal that was also mixed with betrayal.  
That the meal which represents the body and blood of Jesus,  
was also the meal which set of the series of actions that led  
to his death.

Betrayal. It requires a specific set of circumstances:  
Duty. Obligation. Vulnerability. Trust.  
These are the things that set the stage for betrayal.

One does not simply fall into betrayal as a matter of course  
– it’s the result of a well-considered series of choices.

Greg Hoadly suggests a variety of betrayals we frequently encounter:

- a man or woman leaving their spouse and children, either for someone else or just to “find themselves”;
- an employer retracting a promise to an employee a promised promotion and/or raise;
- a “friend” exposing a close confidant’s deepest secrets;

- an employee stealing a co-worker’s idea or otherwise takes credit for their hard work, and then reaping the benefits due to the victim of their crime;
- someone knowingly slandering a friend for their own personal gain.

Let’s explore the events surrounding this meal further.

We begin with verses 14-16 which describe the preparations that are made for betrayal.

Judas Iscariot—who was the money keeper for the disciples—approaches the chief priests and asks them the price for delivering Jesus over.

In Mark’s gospel the chief priests give Judas 30 pieces of silver up front. Matthew’s account intensifies the betrayal with the question, **“What do you want to give me if I hand him over to you?”** 30 silver pieces was not a large sum of money, certainly not enough to make Judas rich. If anything, it highlights how low Judas has sunk. From that point on, he’s a double agent in the band of disciples.

Meanwhile, on the first day of the Passover festival, his disciples ask him, **“Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”**

So Jesus sends two of his disciples to look for a man...a certain man.

In the midst of the massive crowds that swarmed Jerusalem during the Passover, they were to find, “a certain man,” with no telephones or GPS navigation systems, and no internet.

Presumably Jesus provided them some identifying information.

And in fact, they find him in v. 19.

They tell this man,

**“The teacher says, ‘My appointed time is near.  
I am going to celebrate the Passover  
with my disciples at your house.’”**

From the beginning, Matthew shows us that even as Judas  
has established a plot to gain control over Jesus’ life,  
this meal is initiated by Jesus.

Jesus is setting the stage here, and he is in control.

The preparations are made for this feast,

which would include cooking a lamb,

and bringing together wine and bread,

and then in verse 20 we learn that Jesus

and the 12 recline at the table *when evening comes*.

Now envision this group of 12 disciples,

in this large room that has been furnished

and prepared for the Passover feast.

This is the safe house.

This is the meal that Jesus has organized.

Nobody would expect Jesus to be betrayed by someone in this group.

There he was, reclined at table with the twelve.

And as they were eating, he said,

**“Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.”**

The word betray literally means, “hand over.”

Everyone in the room became saddened.

One by one they said, “Surely not I.”

By saying, “one of you,” Jesus is inviting each disciple in the room

to examine themselves, to consider whether they may be the one

that Jesus is referring to.

As soon as each person said, “Surely not I,”

they must have begun evaluating who it surely could be.

Who could it be?

He says in verse 23 it won't just be someone in the room,  
but one of the people he's sharing the bowl of hummus with—  
one of the Twelve.

This isn't betrayal by a cheap spy from Jerusalem,  
Jesus is announcing in front of everyone that this betrayal  
will be the result of an inside job.

Jesus then makes a comment on this betrayal in verse 24.

**“The Son of Man goes as it is written of him,  
but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed!  
It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”**

Listen to how Eugene Peterson puts it  
in his translation called The Message:

**“In one sense, the Son of Man  
is entering into a way of treachery well-marked  
by the Scriptures—no surprises here.  
In another sense, the man who turns him in,  
turns traitor to the Son of Man—  
better never to have been born than do this!”**

With this comment, we as readers seem to have our expectations fulfilled.  
Everything has built up to this big question—  
who is going to betray Jesus?  
Yet Matthew already let us in on who the traitor is.

Matthew has set his readers up by giving us the answer—“it's Judas!”—  
so that we naively join the disciples in the room in saying,  
“Surely not I.”

We've been set-up for that devastating revelation  
that eventually came to each person in the room:  
I did betray Jesus.

Yes Judas got the bag of money, but I also betrayed Jesus.

Each one of us would look Jesus squarely in the eyes and say,  
“Surely not I.”

But the true answer is “Yes—even I would fall away.”

We would all fall away.

The reason is that the cross is too shameful a reality  
for us to endure—it brings us face to face  
with our complicity in evil.

In the cross, salvation comes to us in the most terrible way,  
and we share in its terror.

In the final account of things,  
we all dip bread into this bowl of our common need.

(PAUSE)

The Kingdom of God operates on different principles than the world,  
so Jesus has to overturn the expectations of his disciples  
who are well trained in the ways of the world.

Anyone here meet that criteria?

This is a meal that operates on the principles of the Kingdom of God,  
This is a meal that offers us a refuge from the world.  
This is a meal in which the Savior eats with his betrayer.

Jesus knows that even though he's told them in advance,  
even though he's told them that they must  
take up their cross and follow him,  
*he knows* that in the end...he will be alone.

But not only that!

Jesus knows that these disciples of his  
will *need* this life-giving meal at the center of their lives  
if they are going to truly take up their crosses  
and follow him.

This was not just the last supper between Jesus and his disciples,  
it was also a Passover meal.

Why does this matter?

Passover was a meal first given to Israel  
when God delivered them from 400 years of slavery in Egypt.  
It was a meal that prepared Israel for the rigors of life  
to come, and which marked them as the people  
who followed Yahweh, the God of Israel,  
rather than the gods of Egypt.

James Edwards writes that in Jewish observance,  
as the eldest male in the household interpreted the feast,  
he would emphasize  
*remembering* their past deliverance from Egypt  
and *anticipating* the future redemption  
of the Messiah.

Did you hear that? The Passover is the meal of salvation!  
Not only a meal remembering being saved in the past,  
but also a meal of hope that God will save again in the future.

So Jesus, knowing the great need inside the hearts of each one of us  
better than we know it ourselves,  
knowing the betrayal that was to come,  
used this Passover meal,  
to provide new symbols of salvation.

He did this because the road of following Christ to the cross is difficult;  
because he knows that we would all fall away.

I want to close by again considering what this meal  
has to say to our lives today. The words that Jesus  
uses in verses 26-29 reveal why this meal  
that was introduced 2000 years ago  
is still vital for us today.

Jesus gives thanks and breaks the bread and says,

**“Take and eat. This is my body.”**

He gives thanks again and everyone drinks the wine.

Then he says the wine is

**“my blood of the covenant,  
poured out for many.”**

The most important thing about these disciples

at the Last Supper wasn't that they would fail Jesus at some point.

It wasn't that they shared in Judas' betrayal.

The most important thing is that they came to Jesus,

even in their naivety about their own faithfulness,

and he joined himself to them in the eating of bread

and the drinking of wine.

This is why we must continually be reminded

that in the Lord's Supper, Jesus offers us...himself.

The point Jesus is trying to communicate is that  
this meal connects us

to the Son of Man who is at the center of life.

James Edwards writes that **“From earliest times the Last Supper**

**has been regarded by the church as the truest**

**representation of its fellowship with Christ.”**

Meals are central to life, but this meal represents

our connection to the life and mission of God

in the world in the deepest way.

This is a meal that connects us physically and spiritually

to the person Jesus Christ, whose blood was poured out for many.

This is a meal that is offered to those

whom Jesus knew would betray him,

and yet he demonstrated the grace of the Father

by inviting each one of them to share in it.

Lent is a journey to the cross, it is a journey of fasting and repentance,  
a journey of recognizing the betrayal in our own hearts.

It's also a journey of learning to forgive those who have  
betrayed us.

On this journey we are somehow sustained by Jesus through this meal.

And so on Friday of this week we will come once again to the cross,  
but we will also share in this meal,  
and remember the elements of the table that Jesus invites us to.