



Apollo 11 landed on the surface of the moon on Sunday, July 20, 1969. Most of us are familiar with astronaut Neil Armstrong's historic statement as he stepped onto the moon's surface: "That's one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind." Do you know the first meal that was eaten on the moon? No, it wasn't Tang and Space Food Sticks. Some of us remember those. Buzz Aldrin had brought aboard the spacecraft a tiny communion kit provided by his church. Aldrin sent a radio broadcast to earth asking listeners to contemplate the events of that day and give thanks. Then, in radio blackout for privacy ... [Aldrin] read, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, bears much fruit."

Silently, he gave thanks and partook. No ordinary place and no ordinary meal. Yet when we share in communion together we use ordinary things—a table, serving trays, juice and bread. But this is no ordinary thing we do. Communion, or the Lord's Supper, is not an ordinary meal. It won't fill, but it will certainly satisfy something deep within us. It can't last in our stomachs, but it will linger in our hearts. It doesn't fill every space on the food pyramid, but it does fill us with truth and love.

I read about a young professor who recalled the first time he was asked to teach a seminary class on communion. He went to an older colleague and said, "How shall I begin? What should I do?" The older colleague said, "The first thing you must do is to go to a kitchen and learn how to cook." The young professor asked, "Why should I learn to cook if all I want to do is teach the meaning of communion?"

"Ah" said his colleague, "you must know this. You will never be able to understand the meaning of communion until you know the love and labor of making the meal and the joy it brings to feed someone until they are satisfied."

That's what we do this morning. We celebrate a meal made with the love of God and it brings him joy because what takes place here satisfies. In Mark chapter 14 starting in verse 12 we read the account of why we can celebrate this communion meal together today. This is the account of the last supper shared with Jesus and his disciples. They are about to celebrate the Passover sacrifice that kicks off the eight-day Festival of Unleavened Bread, the central feast of the Jewish year.

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where

do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

For the ancient Jews and even Jews today Passover was an annual meal that commemorated a defining moment in the history of Israel. More than a thousand years before Jesus the Jews were enslaved in Egypt. They were trapped in miserable bondage. God then sent plagues upon Egypt to release Pharaoh's grip on the Israelites. One night God sent the plague of divine justice. Every home would suffer under the wrath of God's divine justice unless they put their faith in God's sacrificial provision. The only way for a family to escape judgment was to slay a lamb and put the blood on the doorposts as a sign of faith in God. In every home there would be either a dead child or a dead lamb.

When justice came down, either it fell on your family or you took shelter under the substitute, under the blood of the lamb. If you accepted the shelter, then death passed over you and you were saved; that's why it was called Passover. One thousand years before Jesus the basis of salvation through a substitutionary sacrifice was born.

So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there" (verses 13-15).

Luke tells us that the two disciples sent to take care of the place were Peter and John. Jesus instructed them to find a man, which was unusual because it was women who mostly carried water. There was a secretive feel to this meeting place and meal, and this was done to prevent Jesus from being betrayed before Jesus was ready. If Jesus would have announced the place early, Judas would have told the high priests and they would have arrested him before the meal. Jesus had his timetable and he was totally in control. Luke 22 tells us that Jesus said, "*I have earnestly desired to eat the Passover with you before I suffer.*"

The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover (v. 16).

So it was sometime after 6:00 pm on Thursday evening when they began to eat. The very first Passover in Egypt was eaten on

the run—fast food. But this one was more relaxed. Jesus and his disciples were reclined at the table as they were eating.

The Passover meal had to be prepared in a certain way and had a distinct form. I encourage every one of you—if you haven't at some time in your life—to participate in a Seder supper and learn the rich teaching and symbolism within the Passover Feast. This morning I want to highlight one part of the symbolism. Those who participate in the Passover Feast were served four cups of wine that represented the four promises of God that were recited during the meal as they drank their four cups. The four promises are found in Exodus chapter 6 verses 6-7.

"I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians...."

They would drink cup #1 and remember their sanctification...

I will free you from being slaves....

They would drink cup #2 and remember their deliverance...

I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment....

They would drink cup #3 to remember their redemption....

I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God....

And finally, after their meal was eaten, they would drink cup #4—wine—and praise God and remember their future with God forever.

So the meal began. They drank their first cup of wine and then washed their hands before the actual meal took place to symbolize the need for a moral and spiritual sanctification. Apparently pride in their hearts was not touched by the hand washing because, as Luke tells us, they began to argue about who was the greatest in the kingdom.

Then the food would arrive and someone would ask, "Why do we eat these foods on this night?" The host would recount the story of God's grace in Exodus. They would eat their meal and explain the symbolic meaning to each part of the meal. And glass of wine #2 would be served as they celebrated the promise of their deliverance. Then Jesus dropped a verbal bombshell.

When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me" (verses 17-21).

Jesus had mentioned his death would soon come many times, but this was the first time he mentioned betrayal. Eating a meal with someone was a mark of friendship, so that made his statement all that more disturbing. The disciples knew he had enemies, but one of them on the inside a betrayer.

They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"

"It is one of the Twelve," he replied, "one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born" (verses 19-21).

At this point Jesus revealed Judas' heart. He saw what no one else could see. Have you ever wondered why the betrayal of Judas was necessary in the plan of God? Jesus could have been arrested and crucified without a Benedict Arnold, had God wanted it that way. But it seems that God set into place that Jesus was to experience the full cup of human suffering as the judgment on him; the judgment that should have been on us. Psalm 41: says, *"Even my closest friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."*

So John tells us that Satan entered Judas. Jesus said, "What you do, do quickly," and Judas left the dinner. It was at this point, just before the meal was done, Mark tells us what Jesus did next.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body" (v. 22).

Jesus departed from the thousand-year script. For the host to say something like this was shocking. It was no ordinary meal and Jesus was no ordinary host. What was normal by a Passover host was, "This is the bread of our affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let everyone who hungers come and eat; let everyone who is needy come and eat the Passover meal." The host would then break off a piece of bread for each person present.

What Jesus is saying here in essence is this: This is the bread of my affliction, the bread of my suffering, because I am going to lead the ultimate exodus and bring you the ultimate deliverance from bondage.

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them (verses 23-24).

Then Jesus raises the 3rd cup of wine. Jesus' words mean that as a result of his substitutionary sacrifice, there is now a new covenant between God and us. And the basis of this relationship is Jesus' own blood, "My blood of the Covenant." How ironic that for a thousand years they were remembering that redemption came from God through acts of judgment. But tonight the judgment that would truly save them was judgment that would be poured out on the host himself.

Understand that even though Kathy or I will serve you communion today, we are not the host. I heard a story of a man who described his first experience with communion. He said it was like he was coming to the outside door of a house, the door was opened and the master of the house welcomed him in. But when he stepped across the threshold he felt he was in a place where

he didn't belong. He felt that his mask was stripped off. There was no crowd to hide behind. He realized for the first time who he was. He walked up to the table with Christ as the host and realized for the first time Christ's deep love for him.

Instead of being comforted he was frightened. What lover hasn't said to his lover, "I don't deserve you. I'm not good enough for you. How can you possibly love me? Why should I be loved so much? I'm not really worthy of this love."

This was a turning point for this man because no loved person is ever truly worthy of this deepest kind of love. And this deepest kind of love brings forth worth to those who receive it. So this morning love meets us at the door. Love welcomes into his house. Love brings us to the table. Yet we feel a little uneasy because we are truly unworthy of this kind of love.

In 1st Corinthians 11 Paul tells us to examine ourselves before coming to the table. The word means to test. What is it that the Lord is testing us on before we come to the table? Is it on whether or not we deserve his grace? Or is he testing us on our understanding of what his grace did for us?

It's the latter. When Paul tells us to examine ourselves he is telling us that we are to test ourselves to make sure we remember what was accomplished on the cross. The table says betrayers and frauds do not participate because to believers, Jesus is the bread of life, the solid rock of salvation; to betrayers and frauds Jesus is the stumbling block. The meal invites us to examine our hearts. Can we let our minds and hearts take in his goodness and our need? It was right that those disciples went from a conversation about which was the greatest to realizing that none of them are great.

The test isn't whether we deserve to participate. Some have that notion. Some even say it. Some people who feel their own weakness feel they are not worthy to participate in the Lord's Table. It's a crazy notion so let's settle the question: Who is worthy to come to the table? Nobody. Jesus died to shower the grace of God upon us that we might all come through Jesus who is worthy. Worthy is the Lamb. I come by putting my faith and trust in Jesus the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, including my own sins. I come and partake of the strength and nourishment given by the life of Jesus.

None of the gospels mentions the main course of the Passover. It was not a vegetarian meal. What kind of Passover would it be without a lamb? For that last supper Jesus was the lamb. Jesus was the main course. That's the reason that John the Baptist said, "*Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world*" (John 1:29).

In Isaiah 53 the prophet said, "*We all, like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to*

the slaughter.... he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors." In Mark when Jesus said, "This is my blood poured out" he means I'm the one that Isaiah and John spoke about. I am the lamb to which all other lambs pointed.

On the cross our host got what we all deserved. Our sin, our guilt, our brokenness fell on him. He loves us so much he took divine justice on himself so that we could be passed over forever. All real love, all life changing love is demonstrated with sacrifice.

This is no ordinary meal, this is no ordinary host, and this is no ordinary table. At communion we are called away from the place of isolation and into the place of gathering. We are called by our host into a place where he has set a table for each of us, with each of our names on it. Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you. I called you to my table. I make a place for you here."

Another thing about this table is that it expands. We can't all crowd around it literally, but there is no limit to its size. It cannot be confined or fenced. The table expands with the love of the host, and it grows with the grace of his invitation to us. Here comes the thief on the cross. Here comes the woman in adultery. Here comes the pompous, the puny, the guilty, the misunderstood, the foolish, the fickle, the hopeless, the hopeful. They're all welcome at the table. This is not an ordinary table; it expands with mercy. It is lengthened with love, and it pushes to the ends of the earth with the gospel.

We feel really ordinary sometimes. This is no ordinary meal, no ordinary host, and no ordinary table. The ordinary in us is unforgiving, jealous, resentful, bitter, angry, self-centered, accuses and fight back. Our pride in us is ordinary too. The ordinary in us finds identity in performance—I am what I do. I am what others see in me. I am what my title is, my paycheck, my degrees, my wisdom, my intelligence, my beauty. To our host this is all ordinary.

What is extraordinary about the table? It's that we can all come to this table together and listen to the words of grace from our host when he said, "You are my friends, all of you, each of you. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you." Then we realize that we are not ordinary people. At the table something happens to us. The ordinary is swallowed up in the extraordinary. The usual vanishes into the unusual. The worst of us is crucified with Christ. The best of him is placed in our lives.

Today we break bread together. Not because we are worthy, but because the Lamb is worthy. Jesus said, "take it." Receive it actively. Feed on him in your hearts. You don't get the benefit of the food unless you take it in and digest it. The meal is perfectly prepared, but we don't get the benefit unless we eat it.

To share a meal with someone in particular in Jesus' time was to have a relationship with someone. We can't have the benefits of Jesus' death unless he calls us into a personal relationship with him and we receive him as our Lord and Savior. The meal is for those who have a relationship with him.

Today we drink the juice together as a reminder of Christ's blood poured out on the cross for our sins—past, present and future—washed clean by the Lamb of God's one-time sacrifice on the cross once and for all. And the meal is a feast for the family with our flaws and all. We are in this together. In Jesus' Passover, he created a brand new family that includes us. When we take the Lord's Supper together we are doing it with brothers and sisters, family.

So the disciples waited for that fourth and final cup of wine. Jesus concludes the supper with one sentence.

“Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God” (v. 25).

Most scholars believe that when Jesus says this he is telling his disciples that he isn't going to drink that 4th cup of wine with them on earth. He is saying he will not eat or drink with them again until he meets them in the fully revealed kingdom of God established upon his death and resurrection.

This 4th cup of wine is the promise of a future fully revealed kingdom of God on earth and in heaven. The 4th cup points to the one day when we will have the ultimate feast in our future in heaven.

Doesn't it seem like everything is in a shadow now? It seems that way because everything **is** in a shadow right now. But one day that future kingdom will spring forth in a blaze of light that has never been seen before. On that day the ordinary will truly become extraordinary. So go to the table today with hearts tender toward God's love for you, his work for you, and then leave the table looking forward to the day when you will drink again with Jesus in his Father's Kingdom in heaven.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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