

We often had significant family events at the home I grew up in. We had a big table where 12 to 13 people could be around. My mom taught me the importance of setting a table and creating a beautiful space for people to come and enjoy a good meal and company. During special occasions, I remember polishing the silver, cleaning the "good" wine glasses, carefully putting out the china, ironing the humongous tablecloth, and getting creative with our table decor. (All before the days of Pinterest!)

The table is an essential place in a home. You might not think much about it. You might have three or four tables in your home. Tables are connected to some of our lives most important and meaningful times. We celebrate around a table; people have their first date around a table; we drink coffee with dear friends around a table; arguments break out around a table; business is conducted around a table; this sermon was written at a table, unlike my usual place, a desk!

Stories are shared around a table! I remember my grandmother telling us stories about her growing-up years. She was the daughter of a pastor. Pastors were paid with chickens, eggs, and milk; only the rich paid a pastor in cash. She grew up relatively poor but never knew she was poor because of the beautiful table her mother set daily with crystal and china, usually filled with food. She would tell us it wasn't until later in life she realized how poor they were.

Truth is also shared around the table. We are about to start all our midweek ministries, which all take place around what? A table. Bibles open, hearts open, authenticity flowing from open hearts, prayers prayed, tears shed, hearts transformed, around a table.

Today, we will look at the ultimate table, where Jesus spent some of his last moments with his disciples. And like many of our meals with family and friends, conversations will be had, and truths will be told. Jesus will give his disciples three truths around the table as we look at Mark 14:12-31.

Prepare

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?" 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." The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. Mark 14:12-16.

Jesus had done recon work ahead of the disciples as they prepared for the Passover. If you think about it, we see a similar story in Mark 11 before Jesus enters Jerusalem. Jesus sends a couple of disciples on errands, meeting mysterious people and finding things just as Jesus had said. Jesus knows what is about to transpire and is preparing the way. He has already arranged where they will celebrate Passover, and the two disciples will finish making preparations.

According to Deuteronomy 16:5-8, Passover was to be observed within the walls of Jerusalem. Can you imagine the number of people coming to town to celebrate? We think US Route 101 and SR 92 are terrible when back-to-school happens! Historians say the population of Jerusalem during Passover would swell to 2.5 million pilgrims, and over 255,000 lambs would be slaughtered in the temple. Jewish residents were expected to make spare rooms available in their homes for Passover pilgrims.

So the two disciples enter Jerusalem looking for a "man who would be carrying a jar of water." He would show them their room. A man carrying a water jug in public would be noticeable even among crowds. If you remember, carrying water jugs was done by women or slaves.

You might wonder about the secrecy of this preparation. Don't forget in John 11:57, right after Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead, the chief priests and the Pharisees hatched the plan to kill Jesus. *"But the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that anyone who found out where Jesus was should report it so that they might arrest him"* (John 11:57).

In last week's passage, Judas went to the chief priest to betray Jesus and wait for an opportunity to hand him over. The city is crawling with enemies of Jesus, even one of his own, waiting to hand him over during one of the most important celebrations in his culture. I wonder if Jesus was praying David's Psalm, *"You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows"* (Psalm 23:5).

I've learned living on the Peninsula, we like to prepare and know things far in advance. Our busy schedules require preparation.

As we learned in our Sabbath series, taking a sabbath and resting involves preparation. Preparation falls into our ministries as well. As we prepare for our ministries to kick off, preparations are being made for you around the table of ministry. Many ministries have been preparing since February for what will kick off in September. This service has been planned in various ways long before it takes place. We meet every Tuesday to plan our services; our teaching calendar is often in place a year in advance. Yet, much like this passage, Jesus is working behind the scenes to put together things we couldn't even imagine.

I love what Scott Grant at PBC says about this passage,

All sorts of foes and forces may be aligned against you, but Jesus takes great pains, as he took great pains to prepare for the Passover, to make sure that you partake of him. He implements his specific, elaborate, and unique plans to get you to the table of his love. He badly wants to share himself with you. Scott Grant

It makes a difference when people prepare for us—when the host greets you, when the home is ready, and when the table is set. Jesus prepares everything for us to come to the table.

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." 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." Mark 14:17-21

Table Truth 1: A Betrayer

Last week, we talked about Mark, the gospel writer, telling a story through a sandwich, not a literal sandwich but a literary one. In this passage, we see Mark tell this story through a literary sandwich.

A. Betrayal of disciples (vv.17-21)

B. Last Supper (vv. 22-26)

A.2 Disciples scatter (vv.27-31)

The "B" part of the sandwich, we could say the "meat and cheese," provides an understanding of the whole story. The "B" part of this story is Jesus' self-sacrifice, which contrasts with the dramatic duplicity of the disciples. As Jesus will show us, he lays down his life not for the worthy but for the unworthy, even the fearful, unfaithful followers.

Jesus and the disciples arrive and recline at the table eating. Please note they did not sit at the table like DaVinci painted! It was customary to recline and eat. This was a customary way of eating feasts and formal meals. This is the second time we see

Jesus reclining at the table in this chapter. In last week's message, we find Jesus at the home of Simon the Leper, and a woman interrupts the meal and anoints Jesus with expensive perfume. This was a shocking moment in that story.

So, as they continue to celebrate Passover, it is here that Jesus tells his first truth around the table, a shocking truth, "One of you will betray me—one who is eating with me." Now that is a truth bombshell! Can you imagine, for just a moment, following Jesus everywhere for the last three years—this group is a family—and someone is a betrayer? Remember, in this culture, you would forever be considered family if invited into a meal. This is the worst kind of betrayal.

I love the disciple's initial response; you get the sense there is soul searching. "Is it me?" Jesus' truth invokes grief and protests. The Greek word for grief is *lýpē*, used twice in Mark. Once in 10:22 with the rich young ruler, "*At this the man's face fell. He went away sad because he had great wealth,*" and then again in Mark 14:19, "*they were saddened, and one by one they said to him, "Surely you don't mean me?"*" There is joy in following Jesus and great grief in failing him, as Peter will soon learn. Even Judas maintains his innocence, even though he conspires with the Chief Priests.

As they go around the table declaring their innocence, Jesus is specific in saying it's one of the 12. "One who dips bread into the bowl with me." This excludes others also at the Passover Celebration and highlights that those closest to Jesus would betray him.

Jesus knows that one of the disciples will betray him, not only because he knows the scriptures; David wrote, "*Even my close friend, someone I trusted, one who shared my bread, has turned against me*" (Psalm 41:9). But Jesus knows his future. "*The son of man will go just as it is written about him....*"

Let's stop right there. I don't know about you, but I've always wondered why Jesus didn't call out Judas. Even when Jesus calls Judas to "come and follow," Jesus knows what Judas will do from the beginning. But as I've studied this passage further, I've realized the significance of Jesus' warning to the betrayer, "It would be better for him if he had not been born." This warning, I believe, is an opportunity for all of the disciples to probe their hearts and give an opportunity to repent. This warning makes the disciples more self-aware. In the end, many of us know that all the disciples will scatter and leave Jesus.

Just as Jesus prepares a table for us, he also tells the hard truth to probe our hearts, to give us the room to talk with him about what he is doing or not doing in our lives, our sphere of influence, and the world. He invites us to come to the table in truth.

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." 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. "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." Mark 14:22-24.

Table Truth #2: The New Covenant

As the disciples take in the news of a betrayer, Jesus tells another truth around the table. As Jesus takes the unleavened bread and breaks it, traditionally, he would have given the traditional Hebrew blessing,

"Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the Universe, who causes bread to come forth from the earth." After he blessed it, Jesus would have retold the story of the Exodus, but not at this Passover meal. Jesus retells the story, giving it a new meaning. The bread would symbolize his body, broken for them, broken for us so that they could have new life. Then Jesus took the cup, and he introduced the new covenant! "*This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many.*" With just a few words, Jesus announced what the prophets of old preached about. Ezekiel and Jeremiah said that a day was coming when God would permanently forgive Israel's sin and establish a new covenant by writing the laws on her (Israel's) heart. The prophet Isaiah in chapter 53 would prophecy that a servant of the Lord would justify and "*bear the sin of many*" (Isaiah 53:11-12). This new Passover meal would celebrate Jesus' death and the new covenant.

Scott Grant wrote, "The Passover, which celebrated the exodus, now celebrates the new exodus—liberation not from Egypt but from Satan, sin, and death. Jesus builds a new temple made of his people and leads a new exodus." Ray Stedman describes the new covenant this way, "the new agreement that God makes with men and women by faith, and not by works; by believing, and not by performance." No more trying to follow the 613 laws of the Torah. There was no need to sacrifice a lamb; Jesus was the final sacrificial lamb. His blood poured out for many.

This is a powerful moment. Imagine, for a moment, being in that room, knowing the end of the story. Don't forget the disciples live this in real-time without foreknowledge. The hands and arms of Jesus are handing you the bread. Arms that would be stretched out across the beam of a cross, hands that tenderly serve the bread, will soon be nailed to a cross. The blood that would run down Jesus' head, arms, hands, and feet spilled not only for those in that room but also for you and me. Little did the disciples know they would need this moment more than they knew.

When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered. Mark 14:25-26

Table Truth #3: Two Declarations

Jesus announces this will be his last meal and the last time he will drink from the vine. It shifts the focus of the celebration from the old covenant in Exodus 24 to the fulfillment of the new covenant and the "new kingdom of God." Then they sang a hymn. Some of us were laughing about this verse last week. We were laughing because none of us thought of Jesus singing! Was he a baritone, a tenor? Was he tone-deaf? Needless to say, just like we sing songs of praise, so did Jesus and the disciples. They most likely sang one of the Hallel hymns, Psalms 115- 118 (Ps. 113 and 114 probably preceded the meal). Imagine the impact these verses had on our Lord as he sang,

The LORD is my strength and my song, And He has become my salvation. Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: The LORD'S right hand has done mighty things! The LORD'S right hand is lifted high; The LORD'S right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live. Psalm 118:14-17

Think about these words: Jesus takes his disciples to one more place, declares, and gives vision as to what is to come. "The Lord's right hand has done many things. I will not die but live." The Psalms sung for many years and written about Jesus; we see him singing right here as he walks to the Mount of Olives.

"You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee." Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not." "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times." But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same. Mark 14:27-31

Jesus gives his second declaration to the disciples, although this one isn't around a table! Mark closes the sandwich in this last part of the story. In the first part of the sandwich, Jesus tells the disciples that one of them will betray him; in the middle part of the sandwich, we learn of Jesus' self-sacrifice. Now, Jesus tells them a second declaration, "You will all fall away." How is this different from betrayal? The Greek word for "fall away" *skandalizo* carries a passive sense, meaning that the external factors they face will cause them to do so. *Skandalizo* is the failure to do what Jesus commanded them to do in Mark 13. Watch!

Next week, we will see how Jesus wrestles internally when pressed by external factors. But how does Jesus know the disciples will fall away? He knows scripture! He quotes Zechariah 13:7. *For it is written: "I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."* Throughout this last week of Jesus' life, he continues to tell them what will happen, yet despite his best efforts, the disciples are not grasping it. Jesus tells them after he has risen, he will go ahead of them into Galilee, a full circle moment, from Galilee to Jerusalem and then from Jerusalem to Galilee. Jesus

called these disciples in Galilee, and in Galilee, he will reestablish them in their call. Having the disciples reestablished in their call will give them the confidence to understand the new covenant, as well as fulfill the great commission that Jesus will later give them.

Many of you know that I was on a three-month sabbatical. Yes, I did a lot of fun things, but the things that can't be seen on Instagram and Facebook are the time spent with Jesus. When I go on sabbatical, it's an opportunity to wrestle with Jesus on my calling. Am I still called to CPC? Am I still called to the role I am in? It's a time for Jesus to reestablish his calling on my life!

Often, when Jesus talks about his death, the disciples respond with arrogance rather than humility, which we see in Peter's response. Peter always gets a bad rap for putting his foot in his mouth, but he is the guy many people relate to, including myself! Peter thinks of himself as the exception, the hero; when others fall, he won't. Jesus, once again, probing Peter's heart, tells him the truth, "Peter, tonight before the rooster crows twice, you will disown me three times." Even Jesus' truth doesn't penetrate Peter's heart or the rest of the disciples, as they all clamor with their bravado that they would never disown Jesus. Jesus doesn't say another word; he knows they must experience the painful consequences.

This morning, we come around the table knowing the great joy in following Jesus and the great grief in failing him. We will fail in our faith. We may scatter. We may not take opportunities to serve Jesus. But this passage makes all things new as Jesus' body and blood declare a new covenant, a new kingdom! Despite the impending agony of the cross and the fear and cowardice of the disciples, the Last Supper is the expectation of the coming kingdom of God.

1. The Table is a reminder. It's a reminder of what Jesus did for us on the cross. We can't forget the suffering and the agony of Jesus.

2. The Table is a Place to Celebrate. Why do we celebrate? We are truly free! Jesus died on the cross for you and me to free us from sin. We don't have to be bound to this world. We don't have to be bound to sin.

3. The Table is a Place for Authenticity. Jesus prepares a table for you, giving fully of himself, his life poured out as a drink offering. It's a safe place for you to give yourself fully to and authentically to him. It's an invitation to intimacy because Jesus desires to be close to you. We don't have to clean ourselves up; we come as we are.

4. The Table is Communal. We come to the table together, people we call brothers and sisters, people we call family. It's a time when we can open our hearts to the people around us who care about us most. It's a time to linger, not to scatter, where we can be encouraged by one another and go out with joy and walk in obedience.

As we come to the table, we, too, are no different than the disciples. We are the sheep that go astray, the sheep that scatter, and our great shepherd, Jesus, goes before us; he leads us, he knows us, he refines us, and he knows our failures aren't final. He uses those failures to shape us and show us that his loving kindness is more profound than we can imagine. Will you join him at the table? He has arranged everything. You are his honored guest.

Father, we are humbled by your grace for us that you would allow your body to be broken and your blood to be poured out on behalf of all the people you created. That you would seek a relationship with us, even though we have not been faithful to you. Your sacrifice did more than just forgive; it conquered death and granted us freedom from sin. It has made us alive in Christ. We can now walk out each day in freedom from that which used to bind us. Help us to take a seat at your Table as often as we can, knowing that you are waiting for us, wanting to spend time with us in the safety of your loving kindness. You are worthy of all praise.
Amen

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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