

One of my fondest memories from high school was eating lunch. You can probably guess why, it's not because our high school was serving up 5-star meals but because we had a really fun group of guys that eat together each day. Everyone knows that meals are more than food. Meals are important social events. That's why families try to eat together. Meals together are social events - but not all are equal. If you're reconnecting with an old friend, you might go out for lunch. If you have a date you might suggest dinner. But then there's once-a-year meals. Birthdays, anniversaries, Christmas, Easter. These are the really special meals. For a lot of people these are family only events. Maybe if you had a friend in town who had nowhere to go you would invite them, but otherwise, Christmas dinner is a special time for family.

We've almost come to the end of our Reality Road but in our reading today, Jesus is celebrating one of those special once-a-year celebrations: the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread. This was the paramount feast in the Jewish calendar. In terms of importance, it's like Christmas and Easter. At Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread the Jews celebrated God saving them from the Angel of Death as it passed over their homes, and delivering them out of slavery in Egypt. This was the definitive event of God saving his people and creating the nation of Israel. The American parallel would be like if God struck Britain with 10 plagues, drove them out of America back to Europe, and then made a covenant with George Washington promising that America was his chosen, favored, nation. If this were the case, suddenly, Independence Day would have not only a national but theological significance. That's the sort of festival that Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread was.

In short, Passover is a big deal. This is a family-only type meal and celebration. And this is what makes verse 14 so striking. Jesus is giving instructions to his disciples and he says, "Say

to the master of the house, 'The teacher says, 'Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples'''. Where Jesus can eat the Passover with who? His disciples? That must be a mistake, this is a family event. Not only is it a cultural expectation for this to be a family meal, but in Exodus 12 God actually instructs each household to eat the meal together. But Jesus says he will eat it with his disciples. What's Jesus' deal? Does he not care about his family? Does he just enjoy being around his friends more?

No. This isn't personal preference, Jesus has a radically different understanding of who his family is. We first see this in Mark 3. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus' family thinks he's crazy and tries to bring him home. Someone tells Jesus that they are looking for him and Jesus replies, "Who is my mother and my brother?... Whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother." So, we see that in eating with his disciples, Jesus is eating with his family after all. By eating with his disciples, Jesus is doing something new and strange. And it only gets stranger from here.

The two disciples find the room, Jesus and the 12 arrive, and they begin the meal as usual. The Passover meal isn't a free-for-all, there is an order to the meal and certain prayers are said and hymns are sung as they remember God's saving his people out of Egypt. Jesus and his disciples have celebrated this meal dozens of times throughout their lives, everything is going along as usual but then Jesus takes a sudden left turn. In the middle of celebrating a meal that's over 1,000 years old, Jesus does something new. He takes the bread, blesses it, and gives it to them saying, "Take; this is my body." And he takes the cup, gives thanks, and gives it to them saying, "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

Imagine yourself sitting at the table when he does this. If Johnny down the street tried to pull this, you'd throw him out, you don't mess with tradition especially when God commanded it. But this is Jesus, the Son of God. There's electricity in the air, your hair stands on end, Jesus is doing something radically new. I can't imagine that the disciples fully understood what's going on but from this side of the resurrection we understand a bit more.

This is a revolutionary moment in the history of Judaism, in the history of the world. Jesus is gathered with the new family of God and institutes the new feast of remembrance. No longer would the people of God look back to Egypt as God's definitive saving act, but now they would look to Jesus. While God made a covenant on Mt. Sinai with Israel after he saved them, Jesus proclaims that a covenant has been made in his blood. From this day forward God's people would look back to the cross and see God's salvation, not just for the Jews but for all people. They would trust in a covenant not made to their Father's, but a covenant, a promise, made to them in the body and blood of Christ found in the bread and the wine. This is a revolutionary day in the history of God's people. On this day Jesus made clear who was included in his family, he taught them where to look for God's salvation, and he taught them how they would celebrate the salvation won on the cross.

The Lord's Supper is a family meal for the people of God. For the brothers and sisters of Christ. And who are Jesus' brothers and sisters? Those who do the will of God. And what is God's will? Faith, trust, belief in God's Son whom he sent.

We've entered this new family through baptism. In baptism, you're born again, born into the family of faith. And this is a glorious family to be a part of. The body of Christ, the fellowship of believers, the ones chosen by God through his Word. As members of this family, we are at

peace with God, we are saints here and now, and we look forward to the return of our brother Jesus and entrance into the kingdom of our Father where there will be joy upon joy.

These things are true but if we let our imaginations run too far, we might get the wrong impression. We might start imagining a family where everyone goes right, where it's all harmony all the time. But then we actually go to church. We meet up with our family of faith. And we find that some of us sing out of tune, some sing well and seem to know it. Some of us say the wrong thing, some of us say the right thing the wrong way. Some of us have to have our hands on everything, some of us refuse to engage with anyone. Some of us vote one way, some of us vote the other. Some of us drink too much or refuse to drink at all.

And suddenly, our family really starts to act like one. We fight, we bicker, we gossip. We harbor anger, jealousy, frustration. Maybe you can think of a time when you were the offender, didn't quite act like a Christian ought to. Or maybe you've seen every flaw, every misstep, every sin committed in church. It shouldn't be this way, there's no excuse, but when sinners gather this will always be the case.

We know how we are supposed to act in this family but continually fall short. After a while, this reality can make it can be easy to think, "Maybe I don't belong here". Or, worse, we might think, "Maybe *they* don't belong here."

But every week that fear or that judgement is dispelled. Every week we gather for a family meal and are reminded how we got here in the first place. It's all by grace through the blood of Christ. Just as the Israelites ate the Passover and remembered God's salvation from Egypt, we too eat and remember God's salvation in Christ. But we do more than a remember. When we gather, we receive the very body and blood that was crucified on the cross. God gives

us his Son's body and blood as a sign to us. It's a sign and a promise that you're part of his family. Your sins are forgiven, you are accepted under the covenant of Christ. It's a sign, that when Jesus drinks of the vine for the first time in the new creation, he will smile and pass the cup to you.

This is not merely a symbol of something that took place long ago, but tonight, God is communicating with you, giving you assurance that you are one of his own. Trust, believe, have faith in this sign.

Here we are, celebrating Maundy Thursday in Wake Forest, NC, a small pocket of God's great family. Each of us saint and sinner alike, each us with our own warts and smells, but each of us saved and sustained by God's grace. As we partake in this family meal remember that it's a meal for our family. As you come up and receive the Lord's Supper, rejoice! God is assuring you of your salvation, but also watch and rejoice as your brothers and sisters receive that same assurance. Praise be to Christ for this salvation won on the cross. Thanks be to God for his repeated promise of acceptance.