

Maundy Thursday
April 18, 2019

Pastor Lew Upchurch
Luke 22:7-20

“The Family Meal”

If you have children at home, you know that when it comes to family dinners, it would be much easier to just forget about them. Jobs, after-school activities, sporting events, practice, and the countless other things that demand our time all contribute to families being constantly on the go. So when dinner time rolls around, it's a lot easier to either grab something on the run, or if we're home, grab something from the kitchen, and then a seat on the couch. I know how it is... my family's has been there. Actually I take that back, because we're still there! A late tennis match for one, piano lessons for another. Throw in a long day at work, homework, laundry, and other household chores, and sometimes just finding the time to get **anything** to eat, much less sitting down and eating it together, is all we can manage.

But you know what? We still make the effort to eat dinner as a family. It might not happen every night, but we try. And I'm not saying this to be boastful, or to suggest that if your family isn't doing this, you're wrong. It's just that family meals are something that we've always done. It's funny when I think about it. In our current house we used to eat at the table. Now we either gather around the island sitting on stools, or outside on the screen porch. But **where** we sit doesn't matter as much as **why** we do it. Sharing a meal strengthens the family bond. We all lead kind of disconnected lives at work and school, but this time, if only for a few minutes, allows us to **all** be together in the same place and to reconnect. Yes, we still deal with picky eaters, stories that seem to go on forever, and petty fights over who's going to clean up. But right there in the middle of the family meal, regardless of what we're eating or where we're eating it, is always a time of respite from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

And don't we all need a little respite—a little period of relief— from this life that never seems to slow down? From this life, that for **most** of us, can at times be unpleasant and even difficult? From this life, that for **all** of us, is a daily battle with sin? I think we all know the answers to these questions. And so does our Lord Jesus Christ.

That's why we are gathered here tonight. Because Jesus knew exactly what all of us would need from him. We know the setting. On this night, Jesus would move from the upper room out into the darkness of the garden of Gethsemane. He knew the terror that was coming in form of a cross. He knew Judas would betray him, and that Peter would abandon him. But before Jesus heads out to the garden to meet those who would take him into custody—before he enters into the grueling prayer to his Father— he shares with his disciples a meal.

The meal, of course, was the Passover. But Jesus took the Passover feast and he made it way more than a link to the past event of God's gracious deliverance of the Israelites. With his "family" gathered around the table, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples. And the words he spoke next changed everything:

*"This is my body, which is given **for you**. Do this in remembrance of me...This cup that is poured out **for you** is the new covenant in my blood."*

He didn't tell them a parable. He didn't use a metaphor. *"I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer,"* he boldly proclaimed before saying these words. Because he knew that this would be the final time they would gather in this way. So when he took the bread and said, "This is my body," he literally meant exactly what he said. And by these words, he transformed the Passover into a meal of the new covenant—one in which he gives his true body and blood, together with the bread and wine, for the forgiveness of sins. He did

this for his disciples that night, including Judas, Peter, and all of the others who would abandon him. And he continues to do the same for his Church, which includes disciples like you and me, who have a lot more in common with Judas and Peter than we might want to admit.

And so tonight, as we remember and celebrate the meal that Jesus instituted on the night he was betrayed, we stand in awe of the mystery. I mean think about this. During Holy Communion, the body and blood of Jesus given in this meal are the same body and blood who suffered and died; the same body who was buried in the tomb; and the same body who was raised on the third day. Most importantly, that very same body and blood is for you! Hear that again. Jesus' body is given **for you**. His blood is poured out **for you**. As I often say, "This is such a big deal!" The Lord's Supper is not something we do for Jesus. Nor is it some lifeless symbol that we use as a remembrance of all that he did. It's his supper, which means it's something **he does for us**. I mean, wow, talk about a family meal!

But usually, that's not the connection we make, is it? Yes, the Lord's Supper is definitely a personal thing. When you come up to this rail in a few minutes, the sins you are confessing to Christ, repenting of, **and with his help**, trying to stop doing, are between you and him. Know that he hears you. And know that he comes to you with his forgiveness just as he promised in the upper room.

It's personal, but the Lord's Supper is never private. Because we approach the altar together, as a spiritual family of brothers and sisters, united through faith in Christ. Have you ever thought about it like that? Paul really helps us here when he writes, "*For as often as **you** eat this bread and drink the cup, **you** proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*" The **you** here is plural, which is the unity created by Christ in establishing this meal that we all share. But so often we come to the altar only as individuals, kind of tuning the rest of the body out. Kind of like those times

when parents and kids sneak into the kitchen, grab something only for themselves, and plop down on the couch... all without saying a word.

Now, I'm certainly not suggesting that you and your pew family whoop it up before coming to the rail. But **acting like they exist** would be a good start. If you don't know someone's name, ask them. Smile. Be nice. Show some respect. You don't have to. But why not? This is a family meal hosted by Jesus himself. And isn't this meal what all of us need? Of course it is. Because we all lead disconnected lives. We're busy. We're focused on things we need to get done and problems we need to solve. On the outside we might look like everything is Ok. But it's not! Because behind whatever face we choose to reveal is a sinner with nothing holy to claim for ourselves.

This is a commonality that we all share. But as members of the body of Christ, there's another thing we have in common. And it's the true family meal that we will soon share together at this altar. And this one makes all the difference in the world. Because together, it is where each of us will receive relief—where each of us will receive respite—where each of us will receive peace. You need it. I need it. So, together by his grace, we will come and receive all the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. His body and blood **for us!** His forgiveness, not only proclaimed, but placed into our mouths. It's mysterious. It's countercultural. It can't be explained **but** neither can it be ignored. Because this is Christ's work. He lived. He died. He rose. And until he comes again, **it is he** who actually comes to us, his family, in his holy supper to forgive our sins, and give us his life. All I can say is, wow, thanks be to God! May the same be true for you.

Please pray with me. Eternal Savior, preserve in your Church this blessed Sacrament, given on this sacred day. Help us to fully recognize the significance of this blessed meal, and unite us as a family in love and fellowship, as we join you at your table. **Amen.**