

I. Set Up

A. Welcome, Introduction, First Time Guests

B. Every month we celebrate the sacrament of Holy Communion. Today we are doing something special and unique. Mike is going to walk us through the events of the Last Supper, showing how -- and explaining why -- Jesus changed the Jewish Passover Feast into The Lord's Supper.

C. The Passover itself is reported in the Book of Exodus. It happened about 4,000 years ago when Moses led the Jews out of Egyptian slavery.

1. God had used a series of Ten Plaques to get the Pharaoh's attention. The last was the death of every first-born son – except for those families where an innocent lamb had been killed and the blood was used to mark the home. In those homes the Angel of Death had “passed over” them.

D. After the Jews fled Egypt God instructed them to repeat the Passover celebration every year to remember what He had done. They did. For 1,400 years, they had done just that. Jesus and his disciples had come to Jerusalem at the time of the Passover for this meal and because Jesus is going to claim that the Passover ceremony was set up to point people to him.

E. Today we are going to see all of this in context. And then we are going to partake of The Lord's Supper together. Right now...

II. Introduction

A. It is a tradition at our house to give the special plate to someone if they've had a big day; we have a special meal on Christmas Eve and spend the day after Christmas with my family; we have certain traditional sayings in certain settings. You have your own traditions. As a church we have “traditions.” Cities do. Sports teams do. They are all over, and that is all well and good. They have value, however the danger with them is that they can lose their meaning.

B. Today we are going to look at the sacrament (the sacred act) of communion - or the Lord's Supper or the Holy Eucharist or whatever you be most comfortable calling it. We are doing this in the context of our study of Luke, where we are in chapter 22 and have come to the Last Supper.

C. The goal is to help you understand a bit more about what is going on at this table, and help us appreciate the meaning behind the words that are said at this meal, which are among the most repeated in all of history.

III. Here is the setting:

A. The disciples – and every other Jew who can get there - are in Jerusalem for the Passover – the annual festival God has instructed them to recreate every year to remind them of the great moment when He had freed them from slavery in Egypt.¹

B. It is Thursday night. They had arrived in town the Sunday before in order to prepare for the event. (Jesus's arrival that year had been to great fanfare. We call it Palm Sunday and it's recorded in Luke 19). During the week, Jesus has managed to make just about everyone mad.

1. The Romans are fearful he is going to launch a riot.

2. The Jewish religious authorities are furious that he is undermining their authority and that of the Temple.
 3. And the people are frustrated that he hasn't led a revolt against Rome.
- C. It's now Thursday night (or, if you are a Jew, where the day begins at Sundown, it's Friday morning). By this time tomorrow He will be crucified, dead and buried.
1. Judas has already cut a deal with the Jewish leaders to betray Jesus.
 2. In a short few hours the disciples will let Jesus down by sleeping when he asks them to pray. Then, when he is arrested they will flee.
 3. Peter will deny him three times. Pilate will wash his hands of the whole thing. It's all about to happen.
- D. But first we have this meal.
- IV. What I am going to share with you today is the different elements in the meal and why they were included.
- A. If you have been through a Passover Seder, you have done this. This is not a full Seder – they take 3 hours and my presentation will only take 2 and a half.²
- B. I share that to say, I am going to be moving quickly. A Passover Seder isn't normally show and tell – it is a three-hour event meal and religious event in which you are encouraged by God to use your imagination and touch and taste to remind yourself of what happened and to walk down the path that Jews have walked down for nearly 4,000 years.
- C. The liturgy is very consistent. Rabbi Evan Moffic, a Rabbi at a Reformed Synagogue in Highland Park – with whom I had lunch last week – writes about the Passover in a book designed to help Christians understand it, noting that if you were a Jew visiting South Korea and did not speak Korean you would still know what was going on because everyone follows the same liturgy.³
- V. Let me read Luke 22:14-23.
- A. In 1-6 we read about Judas arranging to betray Jesus. In 7 – 13 we read about Jesus arranging for the meal to be set up. I am reading now starting in verse 14:
- B. ¹⁴When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."
- C. ¹⁷After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."
- D. ¹⁹And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."
- E. ²⁰In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you. ^[a] ²¹But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. ²²The Son of Man will go as it has been decreed. But woe to that man who betrays him!" ²³They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this.
- VI. By the way, put Leonardo Da Vinci's famous painting (PICTURE) aside.

- A. It didn't look like that. And there are all kinds of things wrong with this picture.⁴
1. In DaVinci's painting there is no Lamb on the table, there is eel.
 2. There is the wrong kind of bread.
 3. And best we can tell, best we can tell, the table or mat would have been laid out in a U shape.
 4. Of course, the classic joke here is that, according to DaVinci, just before Jesus broke the bread he said, "Everyone on this side of the table for the picture."
- VII. The first thing to note is the Passover plate (**PICTURE**).
- A. Today, many families will have this plate on display around their home and it is only used once a year for Passover.
 - B. On the plate (**PICTURES**) we have 3 pieces of Matzah – which were part of the meal at the time of Christ but become more important later because they replace the lamb. (After the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD, it was impossible to get the lamb sacrificed, so they use bread as a substitute). There is also a shank bone (to remind us of the Lamb), a vegetable, we are using parsley (known as *Karpas*), *Charoset* (which is a mixture of fruit, nuts and spices, *Maror*, we have horseradish (which is a bitter herb), and Beitzah (which is an egg, which will not be eaten but which represents new life).
 - C. Also on the table are four glasses of wine, salt water for dipping and water for washing our hands.
- VIII. The Seder Meal starts with two blessings and the first glass of wine.
- A. "Blessed are you, Eternal God, Sovereign of the Universe, Creator of the Fruit of the Vine. Blessed are you, Eternal God, Sovereign of the Universe, who has given us life, sustained us and enabled us to reach this momentous occasion." AFTER EACH PRAYER I WOULD TAKE A DRINK. I AM NOT GOING TO. We have 9 services every weekend. Five are by video, but if tried to have four glasses of wine at the four services I am speaking at...
 - B. The opening prayer is to prepare our souls for what we are about to embark on.
- IX. The first act of the meal includes taking the parsley, dipping it in salt water twice and eating it.
- A. TAKE THE PARSLEY, DIP IT TWICE AND EAT IT
 - B. Parsley is an herb found early in the spring before vegetables have had time to grow. Other herbs can be used.⁵
 - C. As a rule, you do not want to eat parsley dipped in salt water. But part of what happens in this meal is that we are reminded that life is mixture of joy and sorrow, of bitter endings and sweet new beginnings. The meal does not eliminate the negative experiences and pretend that life is all sweetness and happiness.
 - D. That would be dishonest. Instead, the goal is to rejoice in the fact that God works in all the circumstances, just as he heard the cries of slaves and brought deliverance.
- X. Next we move on to the Matzah. REMOVE AND BREAK THE MIDDLE MATZAH

- A. There are traditionally three Matzah on the Seder plate. There are many explanations for why we use three. One is that it represents Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, another is that it represented the three loaves of bread the widow made when Elijah asked her for food. Who knows.
- B. I am breaking the middle piece, which is called the bread of affliction - the *lechem oni*. It is to be eaten now. The other half is called the *afikomen*, the dessert. It is hidden for later.
- C. WRAP THE SECOND PIECE IN A CLOTH AND PLACE IT OUT OF SIGHT
- D. At the beginning of the Seder, before the Exodus story is read, it is called the bread of affliction. It reminds us of the harshness the Israelites faced before God redeemed them. By the end of the meal – as the storyline proceeds and you rehearse the people’s deliverance – the Matzah becomes the bread of freedom. The renaming of the matzah highlights the journey from slavery to freedom.
- XI. Next comes 4 questions.
- A. These are often asked by a child, which is one of the ways to keep the kids engaged in the meal.
- B. HAVE CHILD ASK EACH QUESTION, THEN RESPOND WITH ANSWER
- C. Question #1: On all other nights, we eat bread or matzah. On this night why do we eat only matzah? Answer: In haste our forefathers had to leave Egypt and its bondage!
- D. Question #2: On all other nights, we eat all kinds of vegetables. On this night why do we eat only bitter herbs? Answer: In haste our spiritual forefathers had to leave Egypt and so had only to eat what they could find. They are bitter to remind us of their harsh slavery.
- E. Question #3: On all other nights, we do not dip our vegetables even once. On this night why do we dip them twice? Answer: Now that God has bought us from bondage we can take time in enjoying ourselves.
- F. Question #4: On all other nights, we eat our meals sitting or reclining. On this night why do we eat only reclining. Answer: As free men we imitate the Israelites in relaxing at our meal. Tonight is different from all other nights because tonight we will remember what God has done for his people.
- XII. At this point in the Seder Meal the Passover story is read.
- A. Let’s not miss the obvious, this whole experience is about remembering that God secured their release from slavery in Egypt.
- B. The hope is that every year we would experience what the Israelites experienced. We would have this profound sense of liberation. For us it’s not freedom from Egyptian slavery, but freedom from sin.
- C. As an aside, you can see why this was such a politically volatile time during Christ’s life. Pilate came into town because the Jews are remembering how God gave them their freedom. At that moment, they are being oppressed by the Romans. During the Passover, Jerusalem is a powder keg just waiting for a match.
- XIII. After the reading of the Passover story. The second glass of wine is taken.

- A. It is used to remember the 10 plagues. Each plague is recited, and with each one we take our little finger, stick it in the wine and allow a drop to fall on the plate.
- B. WHILE READING TEN PLAGUES, USE YOUR LITTLE FINGER FOR 10 DROPS OF WINE ONTO THE PLATE
- C. Blood. Frogs. Lice. Swarms. Cattle. Disease. Boils. Hail. Locusts. Darkness. Death of the First Born.
- D. Finally, there is an 11th drop of wine to remember all the evil that is still happening in the World.
- E. READ THE FOLLOWING WITH THE 11th DROP
 - 1. “As innocent people suffered and died long ago because of the oppression of tyrants, so people today still suffer from evil in the world. Our newspapers are filled with accounts of ethnic cleansing and bombings. We cannot celebrate God’s deliverance for ourselves without longing that all God’s children experience freedom from their bondage. So, we will spill another drop from our cups to recall the cost of evil in our world today.”

XIV. At this point things start to pick up with the Seder Plate.

- A. Shank Bone: We start with the shank bone. It reminds us of the lamb whose blood marked the doors of the Israelites. We read in Exodus that the lamb was to be without defect, brought into the household and cared for. No bone was to be broken.⁶
 - 1. Numbers 9:12 reads: It was then at twilight, the fourteenth day of the month, that the Israelites were to slaughter the lamb and put the blood on the sides and tops of the doorframes. God gave His people instructions that only through obedience would they be spared from the angel of death.
- B. We then come back to our Matzah. There is another hand washing, some more blessings. And eventually we eat the top piece of Matzah.
- C. Next comes the Maror (take scoop of horseradish on lettuce). This is the bitter herb, another opportunity to remember the bitterness of slavery. The tradition is to be sure to use enough horseradish that it brings tears to your eyes.
- D. Then we take the 3rd piece of matzah, break it in two, spread horseradish on one side and charoset on the other and make a sandwich. The idea is that we are making a sandwich that combines the bitterness of slavery with the sweetness of freedom.
 - 1. We are reminding ourselves that hope in God sweetened the misery of their slavery. And we are also reminding ourselves that life is a mixture of the bitter and the sweet, of sadness and joy.
 - 2. We all have bitter experiences in our lives. The message God is communicating to us is His desire for us to press through the bitterness (the horseradish) to experience the sweetness (the Charoset).

XV. At this point a variety of things happen in today’s traditions with the Seder meal.

- A. There is always an empty place set at the table. It is for Elijah – whose return would set in motion the arrival of the Messiah. So, the youngest child goes to the door and opens it to see if Elijah has come.
- B. Then the children go and look for the hidden piece of Matzah.

C. Many scholars believe it is at this point where Jesus picks up in Luke 22:14 and breaks from the Jewish tradition of the last piece of Matzah and the 3rd glass of wine.

XVI. HOLDING THE 3RD GLASS OF WINE AND THE BROKEN PIECE OF MATZAH

A. This bread, and this cup is where Jesus gives us a new command, a new tradition. What I am holding in my hand becomes communion.

B. The third glass of wine was normally taken as the meal ended and it was accompanied by a prayer. The normal Passover liturgy would have him saying, “Blessed art thou, O Lord God, King of the Universe, who gives us the fruit of the vine.” He would then pass it around for everyone to take a sip. But this time he breaks tradition – tradition that has been in place for 1,400 years, and says, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”⁷

C. We’ve heard these words a lot, but imagine hearing them for the first time. Jesus is repeating a well-worn script. They know what comes next. He is saying things that had been said for 1,400 years. And then he suddenly takes a sharp left turn.

1. The reference to the “blood of the covenant” goes back to Exodus 24. It reaches back to the covenant God made with his people right after they left Egypt

2. The statement, “poured out” comes from Isaiah 53 – that remarkable Messianic chapter that so clearly predicts that Jesus would die on a cross, even though at the time it was written, crucifixion had not been invented.

3. The final part of this, “for the forgiveness of sins,” goes to Jeremiah 31, where the prophet was talking about the new covenant that God would set up with his people.

D. Are you seeing the imagery? Every time we come to the Lord’s Table, we are entering the Passover tradition. Everything I just explained is all a precursor to what we experience when we take the bread and the cup together. Jesus is connecting the Israelites freedom from being slaves in Egypt to our freedom from being slaves to sin.

E. Jesus is saying to his disciples:

1. Forget what this bread and cup used to mean. They no longer symbolize freedom from Israel. They no longer symbolize a broken and bloodied lamb.

2. I am the lamb of God. I am the New Exodus. I am the Messiah you have been waiting for and I am doing something much bigger than you ever dreamed. It starts as I die for you, which is about to happen.

3. It has always been about me. This meal has looked ahead to this time. Take this bread, it is my body and my blood, broken and given for you.

F. The religious leaders were stuck to their traditions. They were stuck looking back, they missed what was right in front of them. They missed the Messiah they were waiting for.

1. This is both the wonder and danger of traditions. The Passover was always meant to look forward to the coming Messiah, not just to look back to Egypt. But the meaning was lost in tradition.

G. Let’s not lose the meaning of the Lord’s Supper. We are looking back on Jesus broken body and shed blood and remembering the freedom he offers.

1. God has given us a way out of slavery to sin.

2. We look back, but we also look forward. Jesus would tell his disciples that this would be the last Passover meal, and that a time would come where once again we would all sit around a table with Jesus, all who receive and believe in Jesus as Messiah. Don't miss the meaning of this bread, and this cup. You are a slave to sin, Jesus is your Messiah.

XVII. We are now going to take communion together. I hope you will let your experience of it be shaped by what you have seen.

A. Jesus died on the cross. His body broken, his blood shed, so that you might be free.

B. LEAD THE TAKING OF COMMUNION

XVIII. Conclusion

A. There is a 4th glass of wine that is used to conclude the Seder Meal and it is accompanied with a toast that says "Next Year in Jerusalem."

B. We don't say that though. As followers of Christ we are no longer looking forward to next year in Jerusalem, we are looking forward to next year in the New Jerusalem – Heaven. We want the return of Christ and the New Heaven and the New Earth that we will enjoy forever.

¹ This is in response to a direct command from God in Exodus 12:17. "Celebrate the Festival of Unleavened Bread, because it was on this very day that I brought your divisions out of Egypt. Celebrate this day as a lasting ordinance for the generations to come."

² When Passover is celebrated it is determined by the Jewish calendar, which is determined by the moon. The Jewish calendar year begins in late September or early October with the celebration of Rosh Hashanah. It uses twelve lunar months of 28 days in length. The new moon marks the beginning of each month with the full moon occurring halfway through the month. Passover happens on the 14th day of the 7th month.

³ The Passover meal is filled with ritual. The ritual is so precise that someone in Nashville, Tennessee, could go to a Passover meal in South Korea and feel comfortable knowing what is happening and what will come next... The order gives us a framework. It separates our sacred meal from daily life. It gives us a space to sing, teach, laugh, shed tears, and experience God in the ancient traditions of the Jewish people. As we prepare to experience each step of the seder, try to imagine the millions of people who have participated in a Passover seder for thousands of years. You are connected to them, following in their footsteps and adding your voice. As you move through this event, you will understand each act and, I hope, encounter the holy in a new way."

⁴ "Leonardo da Vinci's masterpiece, the Last Supper, is culturally wrong in every detail and yet has influenced the Christian imagination of Jesus' fateful last evening more than any other. Lacking are the essential elements of the Passover celebration, including the lamb and the unleavened bread. In their place is a strictly forbidden puffy loaf of bread and a shockingly unkosher plate of grilled eels. By not including the elements of Passover, a feast that celebrated God's redemption and brimmed over with messianic expectations, we miss the fact that Jesus was powerfully proclaiming Himself as the fulfillment of God's ancient promises. Jesus uses the symbols of Passover to point toward His coming atonement to redeem those who believe in Him and to inaugurate a new covenant for the forgiveness of sin." (Lois Tverberg, *Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus*).

⁵ Since the date of Passover is based on a yearly agriculture calendar, basic seasonal herbs are typically used at the meal.

⁶ Numbers 9:12

⁷ Mt. 26:28