**Luke 22:7-20** April 18, 2019

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Maundy Thursday

*7Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. 8Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover…”*

*14When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table… 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 of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” 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.” 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.*

**The Last Passover—The First Lord’s Supper**

We didn’t realize the clock was ticking. On our wedding day (or maybe it started ticking the day of the birth of our first child) the countdown clock started ticking. We had about twenty years. There in the Martin home, in the living room, at the dinner table, around the fire place, we learned to mark days and events in special ways. Year after year, there were certain things we did at Christmas and New Year and Good Friday. There were mealtime prayers and devotion, Friday pizza night and fires out back. You know what I am talking about because every home has its traditions.

Had we known our time was counting down we might have tried harder. We imagined that the beloved family traditions we were creating would continue, I guess, forever. But now, they are ending. Children grow and have lives of their own. To try to stop the progress would be like filling a glass jar with water right up to the top, sealing it, and then putting it in the freezer. Stopping ourselves in a point of time will eventually destroy what we try to save. Yet as a somewhat nostalgic person, it makes me sad to think that our family might be celebrating some traditions for the last time. But, no! It must be so. The next generation must rise and make their world their own.

On this evening when Jesus told his disciples to prepare for a Passover, the Passover had become a sturdy and favorite Jewish tradition.

In case some are new to this, we should review the Passover. The ancestors of the Jews, then called Hebrews or the children of Israel, had been subjected to slavery in Egypt for generations. In slavery they suffered likes slaves throughout the centuries. But the Lord God had long before chosen the children of Israel to be his people, and so he planned to set this people free by a miracle. God would on night send an angel of death to the land of Egypt who would to slay the firstborn of every family in the land. And, on this same night, God commanded the Hebrews to slaughter a lamb and paint the doorframes of their houses with that blood. Doing so showed that they trusted God, that they took him—both his love and his justice—seriously. And so it happened: Egyptians dead, Israelites passed over, the Hebrew nation emancipated. From there God led them to Canaan where they established their nation. God told the Israelites to celebrate this night as Passover, because the angel of death had passed over their homes, because the blood of the sacrificed lambs had saved the Israelites.

Jesus knew the Passover of our reading would be its last true celebration. For centuries the Passover had served to celebrate God’s great works of the past, to draw God’s people to a living relationship with God in the present, and to direct their hope to a future Savior. After the day of our reading the Passover would fade away. God’s people would no longer live in one house. After Jesus Christ’s life and death to save us, God would call people of all nations to be his people. The “family tradition”, if we can call it that, of the Passover would have no significance to them.

Yet on the last day of his natural life, Jesus said, *“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”* Part of his desire, perhaps, was that he knew death to be near. And he, like a dying man, drew those dearest to him nearest to him. Part of his desire was something else.

But to the meal… On Thursday morning, Jesus sent two disciples, Peter and John, into the city of Jerusalem to make preparations. There they found much of their work already done. They found a fully furnished room. Probably table and places set. Maybe even the groceries for the meal bought. But even though the upper room was fully furnished, Peter and John had to do more than merely assign seating. They had to acquire a lamb (probably previously arranged), then take it to the temple in the late afternoon. There in the temple, among the crowds of thousands, Peter and John would have to slay their lamb with their own hands. Their Passover Lamb reminded them of the lambs which were slain one day long ago in Egypt as a sign of God’s grace and Israel’s faith.

Having slaughtered the Passover Lamb, Peter and John would have removed the parts that were to be offered on the Altar of Burnt Offering in the temple. Then they had to hurry back to the upper room for final meal preparations. This being done, ***“Jesus and his disciples reclined at the table.”***

Together with Jesus and his disciples, the entire Jewish nation in their many thousands of homes, in Jerusalem and hundreds of cities, towns and villages, ate the same meal. It was a tradition, but more than a tradition. They celebrated their independence and God’s gracious choice of their nation.

As we listen to Jesus celebrate this meal in the Gospel of Luke, we might get a little confused. If you were following closely, you heard the reading tell us that Jesus passed a cup of wine around twice, in verses 17 and 20. Maybe you asked yourself: What is that all about? Did Luke repeat himself?

Jesus was following tradition. The Passover tradition was not just saying, “Hey! We have some lamb here, some wine, let’s eat.” As with all good traditions, there was a right and wrong way to celebrate the Passover. There’s not a law, but still there is a right way. For example, in our lives, Is it wrong for a man to leave a hat on his head while the national anthem is played? Well, there is no *law* about it. It’s a free country. But we all realize that it is right and proper to remove a hat. Certain people who refuse to follow certain traditions tell us something about themselves.

Jesus and his disciples didn’t celebrate the Passover higgledy-piggledy. Over the centuries, the Jewish people had developed a tradition about the Passover that was meant to highlight God’s blessings. It was sort of like what our “liturgy” does for our worship. In the Passover, one of the basic things to know is that the master of the celebration passed the cup around the table four times throughout the meal.

The people who know, tell us that in verse 17, Jesus is beginning the Passover meal with the first cup. Luke 22 omits most of the details of the Passover because those were not important. Then later in the meal, probably at the third passing of the cup, Jesus took the tradition and he broke it.[[1]](#footnote-1) And all who think that tradition is boring and stodgy say, “Yay! Down with tradition!” But that’s not all that Jesus did.

As I mentioned, there is a certain sadness I feel sometimes when I realize that some of our Martin house family traditions will never again be celebrated. Yet there is something else at work. Some of those traditions, the best and most meaningful, will be saved by the next generation. What they treasure most I do not know, and maybe they don’t yet either. But they will take those most treasured things, and they will build on them and mold them into something beautiful and meaningful for themselves, and God-willing, their families. Those beloved traditions which were once shared around our home will be changed into something better for a new people living in a new time.

So Jesus looked at the Passover and knew it was over. He looked at this Passover which would cease because He, Jesus, would offer himself as the true payment for sin. He would make all the other symbolic lamb sacrifices meaningless, in fact, a mockery if continued, and Jesus starts another celebration.

As either the third or fourth cup of the Passover was passed around Jesus went off script. ***“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.’ In 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.’ ”***

And the disciples thought, “Wait that’s not in the script. It’s about the blood of a lamb. Our Teacher talks about His blood, shed for us. And he talks about drinking it. And it giving forgiveness! What’s going on?”

We can see what they could not yet fully see. In the next 24 hours Jesus would sacrifice himself. Not so that a people could get out of a few years of slavery, but so that they could be freed from the guilt of their sins forever. He would die, not for one ethnicity of people as the Passover lamb had, but he would die for the salvation of the world.

Like the best of family traditions, both ours and yours, Jesus did not start from scratch. But he took the old and recast it. He took the Passover and rebuilt it and extended it. Jesus celebrated the Passover so that from its midst he might raise something even more glorious! He, the Son of God, established a new tradition (though “tradition” be too light a word for it) for the new age which would dawn with his death and resurrection. And so Jesus, using elements from that first Passover recreated it into something even better for us. He gave us what we now call the Lord’s Supper, or, Holy Communion.

This new Holy Supper is even better. It is no simple earthly meal, but as Jesus declared, “This *is* my body and blood.” It is no mere remembrance; over and above being a reminder it truly offers the forgiveness of sin. It is infinitely more precious because it is not a sacrificed lamb, but the sinless Son of God.

How wonderful to see the great thought, care and concern that our Savior put into creating a new “tradition” for us. One with a continuity to the past, to God’s greatest acts of power for his people, but which has been recast for the Christ’s Church on all the earth.

May you come this evening to this supper, desiring what it offers, treasuring how it strengthens, given new life to live for him who died for us. Amen.

1. Edersheim, *The Temple*, chapter 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)