

**Sermon preached at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Kingstowne, Virginia,
by Dr. David Fischler, on Thursday, April 13, 2017
Maundy Thursday**

BETRAYAL AND GRACE

Luke 22:14-23; 31-34

The last night of the mortal life of Jesus of Nazareth began with celebration. He and His disciples came together to observe the Passover, a joyous reminder of the mighty acts of God in delivering His people from slavery in Egypt more than a thousand years before. They talked, they sang, they ate and drank in praise of God's work on behalf of Israel. But this Passover was like none that had gone before. This night of celebration of God's grace was also a night of betrayal. It's an evening that began with Jesus and the Apostles gathering in an upper room in a house in Jerusalem. According to verses 10-11, Jesus gave them very specific directions. He said, "As you enter the city a man carrying a jar of water will meet you." And I don't doubt for a moment that when they came into the city they didn't see a dozen different men with jars of water, trying to figure out which one they were supposed to speak to. They saw one man with a jar of water and they were to follow him to the house that he entered. And they were to say to the owner of the house, who may be the same man or may be a relative, "The Teacher asks where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with my Disciples?" The fact that they would ask the question, "Where is the room that the Teacher may do this?" indicates that this was no random choice or place to have the Passover. Instead, it was a place almost certainly owned by someone who already knew Jesus, was familiar with His teaching, perhaps even was a disciple of the Rabbi. The owner, as they asked, lent his upstairs guestroom to Jesus and the Twelve so that they could come together and celebrate the feast.

Now what they did when they got there is also found in verse 11. They would eat the Passover. When it says, "eat the Passover," then, as now, they were actually talking about an entire evening with two different components. One aspect of that evening was what came to be called the Seder meal. The Seder was a ritual re-telling of the story of the exodus. It would include the eating of motzoh, unleavened bread, as they ate when they departed from Egypt. It would include the drinking of wine as a reminder of God's bounty and at the same time would also involve fellowship. And that's what you would see in a typical Seder day – both the ritual portion, which is partially read by the head of the household, but the rest of the guests all have a part to play as well. And you would have in the middle of that a meal like you would have on any other night except that this is a meal of great honor, of a great moment, and the guests who are there are certainly honored being so.

The Passover Seder, His desire to eat the Passover, was a reference to both His impending death and the fact that something unusual was going to happen as a part of this particular Seder meal. He earnestly desires, as one of the other Gospels says, actually Luke does too: "I eagerly desire to eat this Passover with you specifically, before I

suffer.” This was the last one that He would celebrate in the course of His life and because it was the last one something unusual was going to happen.

According to verses 17 and 19, He took the cup and He gave thanks. Now this is not the cup of Communion. We have to wait a moment for that. But He takes this cup, which was most likely the second cup of the Seder. You’ll remember there are four in the course of a Seder meal. This was the second, and He gives it to them and tells them to divide it among themselves and He tells them, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes.” Which is simply His way of saying, “This is the end.” Wine which would have been a typical omnipresent part of almost any meal was no longer going to be part of His life. So He wanted to drink this with them one final time as a sign that He was about to depart.

He took bread earlier and when He took that bread He gave it to them and He said that He would not eat of it, in verses 15 and 16. “I will not eat again of this bread until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God. Once again He was saying that tonight was it. Tonight was the last night.

Then, still as part of the Seder ritual, the third cup comes and it is that cup that He refers to in verse 20: “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.’” This third cup had a special significance. Each of the cups of the Seder had a particular significance. The first cup was referred to as the cup of sanctification. The second was referred to as the cup of deliverance, because that was the one that specifically recounted the exodus. The fourth one is the cup of restoration, because that’s where, in the Seder meal, Israel looked forward to what God would do in restoring Israel to its proper place in the world and in the Kingdom of God. This third cup is the cup of redemption, and it’s not any mistake or any coincidence or any chance remark by which Jesus indicates that this is the cup by which they are to celebrate the new covenant. The new covenant is a covenant of redemption. It is a covenant by which a sinful people will be bought with a price. It is a covenant by which a people will be freed from their sin. It is a covenant by which this people will be freed from the powers of darkness, the devil and the world and the sin that face them. They will be as a people delivered from slavery. They will be delivered as well. They will be free and the way that was going to happen was through the shedding of blood, specifically the blood of the Son of God on the cross of Calvary. And it is by virtue of the shedding of that blood, by the virtue of that shedding of blood of our behalf, that the grace of God is poured out upon us. At that cross, God said, “You do recognize that this should be you up here, right? “ This is not about the other guy. This is about you! And me! We always point the finger back at others. It is Jesus who is on the cross but it is we who should be. It is we who have sinned against God, not Him. It is we who have broken His law, not Him. It is we who have rejected Him, not Jesus. The cross was meant for us. However, the people I pointed at, including me, could’ve done nothing for ourselves, much less anyone else. The sacrifice that was necessary was a sacrifice on behalf of all of God’s people, even as the sacrifice of Yom Kippur, the sacrifice of the Day of Atonement in the Holy of Holies in the Temple of Jerusalem when it stood, that was for all the people of Israel. In the same way, the sacrifice made on the cross couldn’t

just be you. We couldn't even by our death atone for our own sin. Jesus, on the other hand, had no sin and Jesus' person was of such value that His sacrifice could cover all of God's people.

The grace of God was poured out there and the cup of Communion was a sign of that as His blood is shed for the new covenant which is for us, not because of anything we can do to earn it, but because of what He does on our behalf.

In the same way, of course, the bread was also given and the bread signified His body because it wasn't just His blood that was shed on the cross. It was His body that was broken there as well. And think about this: Talk about the body. Talk about the blood. He was flesh and blood, right? We are people of flesh and blood. And that's a way of indicating the whole of our physical systems. Jesus gave his flesh. Jesus gave His blood. Jesus gave the whole of His human existence on the cross, and did so for us.

Now He also tells them, before we get to the second part of the story, in verse 19, "This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." That word "remembrance" is perhaps the key to this entire passage, because what He's telling us is not that we come together tonight to remember what He did. Is there anyone who, before stepping into this sanctuary this evening and beginning to worship the Lord, who had forgotten what Jesus had done for you? No one wants to admit it. I don't doubt that there's not a person here who goes through a day without thinking of what Jesus did for you, what He did solely on your behalf and did because of His love for you. We don't need this in order to remember something. We need this to make something present. The word "remembrance" here translates the Greek word *anamnesis*, which refers to an objective act in and which a person or an event commemorated is actually made present, or brought into the realm of the here and now.

When Jews the world over come together for Seder and they rehearse the events of the exodus, before the description of those events, the youngest child asks four questions. The first of those questions is: "Why is this night different from every other night?" Not "Why was *that* night, the night of the Passover and the death of the Egyptian first-born, and the deliverance of Israel from Egypt different?" "Why is *this* night different?" Because the deliverance that Israel experienced from Egypt continues to be a reality in the life of Israel. Israel as a people sees the exodus as absolutely formative for who they are and the nature of their relationship with God. In the same way, what we celebrate here this evening, in the incarnation and the life and the suffering and the death of Jesus Christ is formative for who we are. And it didn't just happen 2,000 years ago. It also happens this evening. That's why it's called Communion. Because as we come to the table we experience in the here and now, and not just in memory, but in life, we experience the reality of God's grace poured out upon us by Jesus.

So this is given to us by God's grace as a way of connecting us on a continual basis, on a repeated basis. Not that the death of Christ is repeated, but on a repeated basis we are brought back to the foundation of Communion in the grace of Christ. That's one thing that this evening is about.

But there's something else. Something else that's really important to hear and keep in mind and that's found in verse 21. As I was preparing this sermon I noticed for the first time that in Luke's version you have this jarring contrast, jarring transition. In verse 20 we're told that in the same way after the supper He took the cup and said "This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you." We have the grace of God as it's given to us in Communion. Then, in verse 21, immediately following that He adds, "But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table." Betrayal is part of the evening as well. Matthew and Mark both take note of the fact that Jesus says that "The one who dips his hand in the bowl with me is the one who is going to betray me." Which is a way of indicating just how close the person was who was going to do this. Both Matthew and Mark then go on to say, as Luke does not, "Surely, you don't mean me, Lord?" Each of them asks, "Surely, you don't mean me?" Think about that for a second. Can you imagine, Andrew is sitting there at the table and he's taking part in the Seder and Jesus says, "The hand of the betrayer has dipped in the bowl with me and I'm going to be betrayed this evening and one of you is going to do it." And Andrew, who we know didn't do it says, "Surely, you don't mean me, Lord?" Why would he say that knowing that he wasn't the betrayer? They took His words as prophetic, not as descriptive. They looked around and they saw men with whom they had spent the last three years, eating together, drinking together, preaching together, seeing miracles done together, listening to Jesus together. These men were practically a community unto themselves. And yet they looked around that table and they had no idea who might do something like this. And at the same time they knew, because they all recognized their own shortcomings, they all recognized their own sinfulness, recognized in fact that any of them were capable of it.

Well, of course we know that all four Gospels identify the betrayer as Judas Iscariot. But we can't stop there. We jump over the dispute that arose among them about who was the greatest which in light of what Jesus has just said had an almost comic element to it. They've just been told that one of this incredibly close-knit group of people is going to betray the leader of it and so naturally their response is going to be to argue about which of them is the greatest among the group. What they were thinking is anyone's guess. But following that, Jesus says in verse 31 that Satan has asked to sift Peter, Simon Peter, as wheat but Jesus has prayed for him that his faith might not fail. And Peter, of course, being who he is immediately says, "O, Lord, you don't need to worry about that. I'm ready to go to prison. I'm ready to die for you. Just nail me up and I'll be right there alongside of you." And Jesus, of course, sees through this façade with ease and He says, "No, you won't go to prison with me. You won't go to trial with me. You won't suffer alongside of me. You certainly won't die with me. In fact, by the time of the next sunrise you will deny that you even know me. And you're going to do it over and over and over again.

So Judas Iscariot was not the only betrayer. Peter was as well. In fact they all were. Because as Jesus makes quite clear, all of them would desert Him.

This evening we need to recognize that this is in fact where the sacrament comes in, because the sacrament comes as a means of grace, the grace that we need so desperately.

Because we're in no position to stand in judgment on Judas, on Peter, or any of the others. If we had been there that evening any of us might have been the betrayer. Any of us might have the denier. But instead, we can look back 2,000 years later and recognize that even though we might well have stood in that position, we blessed this evening because even as we recognize that fact we are privileged to come to this table and to remember, to make present now the grace and the forgiveness and the mercy that God gives each of us, even as we stand in the place of Judas or Peter or any of the Twelve.

This table is about grace, even as this evening is about remembering the trail, too. It is to that grace that you are now invited.