

*And when the hour came, Jesus reclined at table, and his apostles with him.
 And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."
 For I tell you I will not eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."
 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves.
 For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."
 And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said,
 "This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."
 And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying,
 "This cup that is poured out for you is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.
 But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table.
 For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"
 A dispute arose among them as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest.
 And he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them,
 and those in authority are called benefactors. But not so with you.
 Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.
 For who is greater, one who reclines at table or one who serves. Is it not the one who reclines at table?
 But I am among you as one who serves. And you are those who have stayed with me in all my trials,
 and I assign to you as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my
 kingdom
 and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."*

Luke 22:14-30

"...I Am Among You As One Who Serves"

Luke's account of the Last Supper opens with Jesus once again checking the prophetic box that Moses left for God's people to check whenever they weren't certain that a prophet was speaking for God. In Deuteronomy 18, Moses taught that the big overarching message of prophet could be trusted if the small, short term prophecies he offered all came true. So Jesus prophesied there would be a donkey waiting for him in a village, that was his to take, on Palm Sunday. Before he prophesied that the Romans would come within a generation and tear down his Father's house because the people who ran the place wouldn't let Jesus be king.

So now tonight, five days later, Jesus sent out Peter and John on an even wilder prophetic errand, this time to the Jerusalem city gate, where he prophesies that they will be met by a man "*carrying a jar.*" A man carrying a jar at the city gate? That's like prophesying that there'll be a car on the Southwestern at rush hour. The problem isn't "Will there be a man with a jar headed through the city gate?" The problem is identifying which man with a jar did Jesus have in mind. And Luke never explains! He only says again, with wonder, that "*...they went and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.*"

I do have a theory about how Peter and John might have known which man with which jar to follow but, for our purposes tonight, it is enough to note that Jesus is acting as a prophet, that the events he's facing, the betrayal at table, the defection of his friends at the garden and in the high priest's courtyard, Jesus foreknew everything headed his way that night and willingly accepted what it meant for him personally. Which is not to say that he is cool, calm and collected about it all.

Once they are all reclined at table, Jesus' opening sentence uses the Greek word for "passion" twice in a row. You could translate Jesus' words, "*I have passionately longed to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*" He went on with more prophecy, "*For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*" In other words, this is not just only the last time Jesus will sit at table with his men, this is the last time that Passover will primarily be about the story of Moses and old Israel fleeing slavery in Egypt.

In the next 24 hours, Jesus will endure God's curse against the firstborn in a way that will free all humanity from slavery to sin. So Jesus spends the next few hours rewriting the script of the Passover so that it is primarily about him and about the new kingdom of God that will arise because he has paid for peoples' sin, conquered death, and unleashed a new kind of spiritual power which will escape old Israel's national borders and bring people together, make people neighbors and brothers and sisters on a scale that Moses and old Israel only hinted at. So Jesus toasts the new reality with the first of the four cups of wine he will offer his men that night.

He sends the first cup on its way around the table with these words: "*Take this and divide it among yourselves. For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.*" In other words, tonight's the night, tomorrow's the day. We know from John's gospel that Jesus will accept a drink of sour wine from a sponge just before he declares from the cross, "*It is finished.*" Mission accomplished, sins are paid for, the chain

reaction which would lead from Jesus' death to burial, to resurrection, to ascension, to Pentecost, to you and me sitting here tonight, remembering it all.

Some time after that first cup, Jesus took a piece of that flat bread, unleavened bread, and Luke tells us that *"when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you, Do this in remembrance of me.'"*

Ofer Levy taught us at the end of last month that what Jesus broke was one of a number of loaves in the Passover ritual, but this loaf, after being broken once, was hidden till the end of the meal and then distributed in small pieces to everyone there, a picture, Levy thought, of Jesus' body being buried and then rising from its shroud to become that body to which we all belong, that nourishing presence we all share.

David Lyle Jefferey imagines that it was the third cup of the Passover meal that became the cup we remember. Ofer Levy taught us that it was the cup of redemption, the cup Israel drank to toast their freedom from slavery. Luke simply confirms that it was late in the meal, he writes: *"And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the cup of the new covenant in my blood.'"*

Once again, the words of Jesus here are prophecy. Six hundred years before, Jeremiah, like Jesus, had wept at the thought that God's holy city would go down, stone by stone. But God showed Jeremiah a future where truth would live in peoples' hearts and not on paper scrolls and in brick and mortar monuments. So Jeremiah sang, *"Behold the days are coming declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God and they will be my people...for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sins no more."*

So when Jesus called this next cup *"the new covenant in my blood,"* he was saying once again, tonight's the night, tomorrow's the day when everything changes. No more parades up temple hills, no more physical symbols for spiritual realities, after tomorrow the kingdom will be in, sins will be covered, commandments will get written in our hearts, we'll not only know the words but understand the meaning. All of us together will know God by heart, learn his word, respond to his Spirit, be accountable together in his presence. But it won't be happy valley. Jesus' very next words assure us of that.

"Behold," he says, *"the hand of him who betrays me is on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"* The world, the flesh and the devil will not simply sit back and let all these wonderful things happen unopposed. Unlike the other gospels, Luke doesn't provide the human reasons for Judas defection and betrayal. He simply notes that: *"...Satan entered into Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve."* The truth is that no one saves his soul and becomes God's child without that faith being challenged, first, by our own prejudices and second, by the demonic forces arrayed against us.

The announcement of the betrayal set the disciples off into a controversy as to which of them was truer and greater and better than the rest. No, no, Jesus intervenes. *"The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those in authority are called benefactors. But not so with you. Rather, let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves."* This was not new territory for Jesus and his men, they'd heard it before, failed at it before. Because, truth be told, it's a topsy turvy kingdom we've bought into. It is anything but performing by instinct and doing what comes naturally.

They all thought that reclining with the King at table was where they belonged, their rightful reward. Somehow not remembering that Jesus had begun the night in a slave's tunic with bowl and towel and water. *"But I am among you as one who serves."* Jesus had to remind them. They were still a long way off from the leaders Jesus wanted them to be. And so are we. To the extent we imagine that we are wiser and more noble and better than the people around us, we have missed the point of gospel and grace.

But missing the point need not be fatal. Jesus saw his men as something other than the sum total of their failures. So he says to them: *"... you are those who have stayed with me in all my trials, and I grant to you as my Father given to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* It's another word of prophecy.

Jesus is looking past the men who that night who would flee from him at the first sign of danger. Where you and I would have seen a collection of braggarts and cowards, Jesus saw men, most of whom in the years to come, would give their lives for him just as he was about to give his life for them. That's how Jesus looks at us, as what we'll become if we only stick with him, trust in his grace and deal with his truth.