

St Mark's Lutheran Church
Maundy Thursday
Pastor Ben Pfeiffer
1 Cor 11:23-26

Introduction

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen. Our sermons for Holy Week will focus on the theme of 'The Finality of Easter,' how definitive and decisive these events are in our lives of faith. Tonight, we will look at the final meal Jesus had with his disciples, tomorrow the final moments leading up to his death, and on the Easter Sunday, the final victory over death. Let us pray.

The Final Meal

What would you choose for your final meal? A quick online search suggests that prisoners on death row choose all sorts of interesting things, from filet mignon and Alaskan King Crab to cheeseburgers and chips. Robert Harris, who was executed in California in 1992, requested a 21-piece bucket from KFC, as well as two large pizzas, ice cream, jellybeans, Pepsi and a packet of Camel cigarettes. What a way to go!

Then there is the case of Odell Barnes, in Texas in the year 2000, whose final meal request was for 'justice, equality and world peace.' I am not sure it was granted. Or the case of Philip Ray Workman, in Tennessee in 2007, who declined a final meal for himself, but asked that a large pizza be delivered to a homeless person in Nashville. Apparently, that request was denied by the prison but taken up by others across the country.

What would you choose for your final meal, if indeed you had the choice? Roger Casement was put to death in the UK in 1916 for treason. His request was for Holy Communion. Having converted to Catholicism in prison, he said he wanted to die with the body of his God as his last meal. What would you choose, I wonder?

The Passover

Jesus chose to celebrate the Passover, one last time, with his twelve closest companions. The Passover was an annual celebration commemorating Israel's release from slavery in Egypt. It consisted of a great deal of ritual, washing, teaching, blessing, not to mention the eating and drinking of roast lamb, bitter herbs, bread, wine and so on.

Jesus had already celebrated a special meal with them, during which he commanded them to love one another, and gave them an example to follow, by washing their feet. That mandate, from which we get the word *Maundy* Thursday, remains one of his deepest desires for how we should live as Christian people. Now, on the night of his betrayal, he puts his love into practice.

The Lord's Supper

Tonight, we heard the words of the Last Supper from Paul's account in 1 Corinthians, where he says, *'I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you..."*' I received from the Lord.

His first point of teaching is that this is the Lord's Supper. Not theirs. Not ours. Not the Catholics. Not the Lutherans. But first and foremost, the Lord's. His idea. His institution. His gift. That's important because it means the various thoughts and feelings and opinions we bring to his table, are not the most important thing. He is the centre of this meal.

You can see that in the wooden sculpture we have displayed tonight and on the screen. It comes from Jerusalem and was chiselled out of olive wood and belongs to Malcolm and Pauline Paech. It's very intricate and very beautiful. And it shows, among other things, the centrality of Jesus. This meal revolves around him. It is the *Lord's* Supper. But he certainly doesn't want to eat it alone!

Holy Communion

The second point is that it is a communal meal, a Holy Communion, a shared experience. This meal has blessed and sustained Christians down through the ages in their fellowship with Christ and with each another. We do bring our thoughts and feelings and opinions to this table, but even more than that, we bring our baggage, our sin, our shame, our sadness, our confusion.

Like the people sitting around him at that meal. Like Peter. Like Judas. We come as we are, to receive what he is. *'Just as I am without one plea/but that Thy blood was shed for me/and that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee/O Lamb of God I come.'* You can see some of that in the sculpture too, the growing confusion among the disciples, the mixture of guilt and shame and uncertainty, while Jesus remains central and stable and steadfast.

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.'

This meal is many things, but here Jesus calls it a covenant, an agreement of grace and a proclamation to the world, of all that he has done for us. Our proclamation of all that he has done. The menu is simple. Bread and wine. Body and blood. Jesus is pretty clear on that! We don't have to explain it or try to comprehend it. What does he say? Take it. Drink it. It is for you. It is a mystery by which our lives are graciously interwoven with his.

Conclusion

Jesus was on death row. He knew that, even if his disciples were still getting their heads around it. He would soon be betrayed, arrested and sentenced to die, not for his own sins, but for ours. Like the prisoner who asked for world peace or the one who asked for a meal for someone on the streets, Jesus' final acts were for not for himself but us.

His final meal, his final moments and his final victory, were all for us. So, the definitive things in our lives are not guilt and shame and uncertainty, but grace and mercy and peace. I hope you never have to choose your final meal, because it's probably not a good sign! But I hope the meal that has finality in your life is the one Jesus gives you, the meal of forgiveness, life and salvation. May this meal sustain you, as it has countless Christians, as you journey with Christ to the cross and beyond. Let us pray.