

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church

The Sacraments: Part 4

Reminding us of Jesus' love.

Scripture: Mark 14:12-25

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Opening Hymn: #479 The church's one foundation

Closing Hymn: #663 -- God, whose giving knows no ending TUNE: Nettleton

Choruses: #526 Lift up your hearts, Jesus Messiah (both CCLI)

Communion Hymn: #548 Let us break bread together

Many of you have heard this story before...

A woman is complaining to her husband
As he reading the newspaper.

"Susie's husband is so romantic" she says to him.
"He always tells Susie he loves her.
Why can't you be more like that?"

Speaking from behind the paper,
the man replies to his wife:

"When we married thirty years ago,
I told you I loved you.
If I change my mind, I'll let you know."

Not a great example of communicating care or showing affection.
But how do you show your love to others?
And how does God show God's love to us?

PAUSE

Today is our last week looking at the Sacraments.

Last week I was reminded that the word Sacrament
Comes to us from the Latin term sacramentum
Which means “a sacred oath”

A sacramentum was an oath of loyalty that Roman soldiers
Made to those in authority: their commanding officer,
Their Emperor.

In a similar way the Sacraments (Baptism and the Lord’s Supper)
Are seen by some as the commitment we make to God:
Baptism is a once-in-a-life commitment,
the Lord’s Supper it is a periodic rededication.

And yet somehow this explanation of the Sacraments is inadequate.
While Baptism and the Lord’s Supper can express our commitment
The greater oath or promise
is the one that the Lord makes to us.

But this is getting ahead of ourselves...
Let’s dig in to today’s Gospel reading.

From today’s reading, it is clear
That Jesus and his disciples are approaching
A religious holy day.

The word Passover is repeated four times.
The first portion of the reading
Is focused on the securing of a location
For the Passover meal.

For the Jewish people, and for Jesus and his disciples,
Keeping Passover was an important tradition.
The Passover was an annual reminder
that they were God's people.

The Passover reminded them
That when they were enslaved in Egypt
God heard their cry for help.

The Passover reminded them
How the blood of the Passover lamb
Protected them from the avenging angel
And how God finally broke Pharaoh's will.

The story of this rescue
Would be remembered
In the sharing of the Passover meal.

But this Passover would be different for two reasons.

The first reason is that at this meal, Jesus tells his followers
That there was a betrayer among them.

The fact that they all question
Whether they themselves are the betrayers,
(instead of pointing fingers at others)
Makes it clear that Judas' treachery had gone unseen.

The revelation of a betrayer in their midst
Makes this Passover different.

But there is a second, even more important reason
 Why this Passover would be distinct even special.

Theologian Tom Wright notes:

“Jesus, we must assume, told the Passover story,
 as the head of the family always would;

but this time, instead of saying words
 to link the bread and wine back to the Exodus
 and forward to the final liberation of Israel,
 he said new words,

which linked them directly to the death
 he would very shortly die,
 and to the coming of the kingdom of God
 that would be brought about by that death.”ⁱ

Jesus is giving new meaning to the old familiar story.

Jesus is telling his friends that he is the sacrificial lamb,
 That it is his blood (and his body) that will save the people.

At that moment I’m sure they didn’t grasp what he was saying.
 But looking back and remembering his words and actions
 They would realise his death wasn’t a terrible accident
 But a deliberate self-giving act.

In this supper Jesus prepares Twelve
 for the loss that they will soon experience.

In the Gospel of Mark, we are observing the Lord's Supper
As it is being shared 'real time' with Jesus' first disciples.
It is depicted as a one-off event where Jesus is preparing them
For what will soon be taking place.

But if you turn to the Gospel of Luke,
Jesus appears to suggest that this meal will be repeated:
"This is my body given for you;
Do this in remembrance of me."ⁱⁱ

As Paul retells the story of this last supper
In his letter to the church at Corinth
He notes those words remembrance
And add to it:

"For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."ⁱⁱⁱ

This all helps us see that at this last supper, Jesus is not just speaking
To his original group of disciples, but to all those who follow later.
Jesus is instituting a meal that not only explains his death,
But declares his love to us again and again.

There is incredible value in this.

I mean, just imagine if someone told you
"Jesus loves you" at the beginning of your journey with Jesus
And that this was the last time you ever heard that.

Or imagine that your church experience
Is one where you are forever being told
How you need to work harder and be better.

If your leaders fail to teach and proclaim God's love in Jesus,
but you still celebrate the Lord's Supper
This Gospel Message will still be communicated.

You will hear again and again about God's love in Jesus:
"Take it; this is my body...
This is my blood of the covenant,
which is poured out for many..."^{iv}

But this affirmation isn't just communicated in words.
In instituting this sacrament,
Jesus speaks to all our senses.

This I confess, is where we have fallen short
In providing you with these COVID-safe communion cups.

Imagine if when you entered the sanctuary this morning
Instead of picking up these inert little packages
You were greeted by the sight and smell
of a large loaf of freshly baked bread.

Imagine seeing a decanter on the table
And smelling the perfume of wine
wafting among the pews.

You would see this and smell this.

And when the elders passed the elements to you,
You would touch and taste them.

The flavor would linger on your palate

Even as we confessed:

“the bread of heaven...
The cup of salvation.”

We aren't simply told regularly about Jesus' love for us,
But this is spoken to us in a concrete and tangible way.

“Knowing our difficulty in receiving
and responding to divine promises,
the word of God has been supplemented
with visible and tangible signs of gracious favour...”^v

Let me tell you another story.

A different couple than we imagined
At the beginning.

One day this man and women went shopping.

They stopped at the auto store on the way home,
As he wanted to look at new tires.

He browsed the selection with her tagging along.

Eventually he settled on one particular model,
One of the most expensive tires in the whole store.

She was surprised.

They all looked the same to her

“Why are you buying the most expensive ones? she asked.

He replied, “Honey, these are for your car.

I want the safest tires available for you.”

She reflected that her husband could have said,

“I love you” ten times that day,

and it would not have meant as much to her

as, “Honey, these are for your car.”

And she remembered the many ways

He regularly demonstrated his concern.^{vi}

PAUSE

Jesus hasn't simply shown us his love at a single point in history,

In the Lord's Supper he makes it real

Again and again.

ⁱ NT Wright Mark: for Everyone 195

ⁱⁱ Luke 22:19 NIV

ⁱⁱⁱ 1 Corinthians 11:26 NIV

^{iv} Mark 14:22-24 NIV

^v Alister E. McGrath Christian Theology: An Introduction 517,518

^{vi} Story adapted from Wayne Jackson “Show Her! Don't Just Tell Her.” *Christian Courier* www.christiancourier.com/articles/1489-show-her-dont-just-tell-her