

grace for the unworthy

If you are joining us online this morning, you might want to pause the service for a moment - so you can prepare what you'll need for communion- because the teaching this morning is both on the Lord's Supper and will lead to sharing the Lord's Supper.

And I'm curious *how that make **you** feel* - knowing we are going to share in the Lord's Supper this morning..?

In **Luke 22:15**, as Jesus came to share in this meal with his disciples, Jesus said to them, "*I have **eagerly desired** to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.*"

I want us to linger on those words this morning... An the Q they provoke:

Does it strike you as **strange** that Jesus **looked forward to** this meal with his disciples?

Do YOU **look forward to** - **eagerly desire** - sharing in the Lord's Supper?

When you've shown up at church in the past and discovered that it was a "Communion Sunday", what has this provoked in you? Stirred in you?

What stirs in you today?

*Do you, like Jesus, **eagerly desire** to share in this holy meal?*

When you've walked into church over the years on a communion Sunday or in the middle of the service looked over and noticed the little plastic

cups of juice and bread cubes - and realized what was coming - do you get

anxious in a good way, excited for the chance to receive the bread + the cup?

Is there a ***longing*** that stirs in your heart when you know you will have a chance to participate in the Lord's Supper?

OR... are you somewhat *anxious in a different way* as you've anticipated receiving communion?

Do you ***NOT*** look forward to the Lord's Supper because it feels like just another reminder of how much you've failed of late - or over the years - sinned against God and others..?

Does it feel like just another reason to get down on yourself for things you've said and done, or things you haven't said or done that you know you should have...

Have you ever found yourself - knowing it's communion Sunday - pierced with the sense that *you're not in the place you should be with God and with others, and so you haven't felt right taking part?*

Do you look forward to sharing in the Lord's Supper like Jesus did in Luke 22?

I pose the question because I think many of us, myself included, have ***not*** always shared Jesus' joyful anticipation for sharing this holy meal.

For me, growing up in the church of my youth, Communion Sunday was often a time of *feeling guilty that I didn't feel more guilty, that I didn't feel more broken about my sin...* Feeling & thinking that *if this really meant to me what it should then I should be crying*, and so feeling horrible because I wasn't crying.

Often, over the years, preparing for the Lord's Supper was a time of racing through a quick recall of the last while - *the last few days, the last week* - trying to get a bearing on whether I had everything sufficiently squared away so that I could take part with a clear conscience.

I definitely didn't want to come under judgment for partaking in "*an unworthy manner*" as Paul warns in **1 Cor 11**.

For me, as I suspect it was for a number of you, **1 Cor 11** was the primary, **if only** passage from which the Lord's Supper was explained, and always with great emphasis on **Paul's warning in vs.27-30**,

"Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. This is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep." (i.e. dead)

No wonder communion was always such a solemn and somewhat agonizing experience for me.

What if I came and received the elements and wasn't repentant enough, or simply had forgotten to confess some sin?

What if I partook unworthily, in an unworthy manner?
And how would I ever actually think I **was** worthy?

Many times I, and I think many of us, have been told that this is **a table of grace**, and yet, in spite of this, have only encountered and experienced **condemnation** and **anxiety, judgment** and **fear** at the Lord's table.

Well, this morning, I want to invite us to revisit the Lord's Supper with me - **in the light of what we read in the gospels** - the account of Jesus' institution of this holy meal.

In truth, **I think we need to** - because for a number of reasons - one being a common misreading of Paul's warning in 1 Corinthians 11 - we've ended up allowing the very meal that God has ordained to convey the gospel to become something by which we have proclaimed something other than the gospel.

Because, in its inception, we find Jesus Himself offering the bread and the cup to, **those we would deem**, his "unworthy" disciples.

And we need to take this to heart.

And honestly, for me, doing this has slowly and dramatically transformed my understanding and experience of the Lord's Supper - so much so that I find myself at times now eagerly desiring to share in this meal, and looking for opportunities to invite Christians around me to come and receive this bread and this cup - that we might discover again the grace that Jesus offers here in this holy meal...

So, instead of running to 1 Corinthians 11, I want to invite us to turn together to **Matthew 26**. [We'll come back to 1 Cor 11 later...]

Let me read for us - **Matthew 26:17f.**

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

We'll stop there - for one reason: If we want to truly understand the significance of the Lord's Supper, we need to think about it in the context in which it comes to us - and here in these opening verses we are given that context: **the Passover Feast.**

Now, many of us are familiar in some way with the story and significance of the Jewish **Passover** feast, but I know I always need a reminder of this, so let me briefly take us back to **Exodus 11.**

To this day, the Jewish people gather together annually to commemorate the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and by this, to celebrate what we read about in the book of Exodus.

For **430 years**, the descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had lived in slavery to the Egyptians. And they cried out to God to save them. And in response to their cry, God came in a way that no one could have imagined and saved his people. He sent Moses to Pharaoh, and then sent plagues of judgment on the Egyptians and their gods...

And in **Exodus 11**, we are told that as the final plague approached, God prepared the Israelites, telling them, *"I am going to send my angel throughout the land to bring about my judgment on the Egyptians."*

And then in **Exodus 12**, God instructed His people to take a lamb for every family, to sacrifice it, to smear the blood on the doorposts of their

homes, to shut themselves in for the night and then to gather for a meal—a meal made from the meat of the sacrificed lamb and unleavened bread (*unleavened because they wouldn't have time to bake with leaven or yeast*).

And in **Exodus 12:12-13**, God declared,

"And on that night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn—both men and animals—and I will bring judgment on the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you."

And so that night, in the ghetto's of Egypt, the Israelites smeared the doorposts of their homes with the blood of a sacrificed lamb, then shut themselves in and **ate** a meal of roasted lamb and unleavened bread, **and the next day God delivered them.**

He saved them. He led them **out** – out of Egypt, out of slavery, and **into** the Promised Land as the redeemed people of God.

And so every year since, on the anniversary of this historic event, the Israelites gather (they still do) to **celebrate** the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, by sharing in a sacred meal – **the Passover Meal** – a meal filled with stories, and prayers, and songs, 4 symbolic cups of wine, a roasted lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread, and a special appetizer. **Each** element recalling some aspect of the events of that night. **Each** element reminding them that **YHWH**, the Living God, is their God, and that they are His people; that He has redeemed them once AND **He will again** – *in a final act of*

*deliverance, freeing them from **all** oppression and ushering in God's kingdom forever.*

And so as the disciples came that night to share in **this Passover meal with Jesus**, they came with these **stories** and **longings** in their *hearts + minds* – this shared knowledge of what God had done for them + this longing for what He would still do.

*And not only that, but they came with **this growing conviction** that **this Jesus** who was sitting at the table with them was, in fact, **the Messiah Himself** – **the One** chosen by God... that **He was** the One sent by God to bring about *this great and final act of deliverance.**

And from all that Jesus had been saying lately, some of them **probably** came to this Passover meal **expecting Jesus** to announce **at this meal** that the time had come for Him to make His move, to rise up, to throw off the yoke of the Romans + to usher in God's kingdom *on earth as it is in heaven...*

You can just imagine the excitement and hope that must have stirred in them that night as they gathered to share this Passover meal with Jesus.

So come again to **Matthew 26:20f** and *listen*. Listen to what Jesus says as they begin this historic meal...

When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. And while they were eating [they'd begun the Passover meal], he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

You can just imagine how their hearts must have **sunk** hearing Jesus say those words. They thought they knew what to expect this night. They'd all

participated in the Passover **countless** times since they were young. They **knew** ever part of the Passover seder – the order of the meal and conversation.

But here, as they began to eat, Jesus broke from the prescribed dialogue and surprised them (as he often did) with **WHAT?**

*With the revelation of **their sinfulness**.*

HE EXPOSED THEIR SIN.

They had **expected** a lot of things from Jesus that night, **BUT NOT THIS**. This was probably the one thing they least wanted to talk about that night.

"Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me..."

It took them by surprise, but each of their response revealed that they **all** knew what they were capable of. Verse 22 tells us, *"They were very sad, and began to say to him one after the other, 'Surely you don't mean me, Lord?'"*

Or as another translations has it, **"It isn't me Jesus, is it?"**

Now, as most of us know, Jesus was referring here specifically to the sin of **Judas** – his betrayal of Jesus, his handing Jesus over to the authorities... for money.

But it wasn't just **Judas'** sin that Jesus exposed that night around this table.

In a similar way, after the meal, as they left to go out to the Mount of Olives, Jesus announced that **they would ALL fall away**; that they would **all** abandon Him. And that **Peter**, the one **most** confident in his own faithfulness, would deny ever knowing Jesus, *three times, that very night*.

As they gathered that night to celebrate the Passover, Jesus exposed their sin. He revealed that he knew **about it ALL**.

He knew about what Judas had already done and was planning to do.

He knew about what the ten thought was **possible** but never would have wanted or expected.

And he knew about what Peter would vow could **never** happen, and yet **would**.

Nothing was hidden from Him.

He knew about EVERYTHING...

And **I wonder**, as Jesus revealed His knowledge of their sin, if any of them expected him to **just call off the dinner?**

I mean think about it! Someone you love has prepared a special meal for you – maybe a special anniversary dinner or a Christmas dinner.

You arrive at the meal, sit down at the table and as you are spreading some **borsin** on your **gluten-free baguette**, they turn to you, with sadness in their eyes and say,

*"I know what you did... I know **how** you're planning to betray me... I know what you are going to do later tonight."*

Really, the next thing **I'd expect** would be for them to say to me,

*"Just go. Get out.
You don't deserve this meal.
Go fend for yourself."*

But that's **not** how **Jesus** responds.

In many ways, this was possibly the lowest night for the disciples collectively – all of them **in the midst of** or **on the verge of** some act of denial, betrayal, abandonment of Jesus... **and Jesus knows it.**

Everything they wanted to hide, **he knows.**

And how does Jesus respond to them? As Jesus sat there with his sinful, unworthy disciples, having revealed that he knows about **all** of their sin - **what does he do? what does he say?**

Note that He **doesn't**, in the knowledge of their sin, say to the 12, or even to Simon Peter and Judas, or even just to Judas,

"Sorry guys, **not tonight.**

I know you were expecting a good spread tonight, but, honestly, **I know about everything. I know** about what you've done + are planning to do.

I know about what you are **about** to do.

And, with all due respect, I don't think it would be **right** for you to participate in this meal tonight. I think you need to **take some time** to deal with the sin in your life, and when you've got that squared away, **then, maybe,** we'll talk. **Then, maybe,** we could share this meal together."

Is that how Jesus responded to the disciples?

Is that what we'd expect? **YES.**

But is that what Jesus said?

NO!

Looking around the table, having revealed his full knowledge of their sin—of *all they'd done and would do*—Jesus **didn't** turn them away. He did not tell **any** of them to leave or just watch, to sit it out.

No!

In the full knowledge of their sin, he invites them **ALL** to eat and drink - to understand + receive His grace. To know that His death was for them... *that he wasn't about to die for them* **because they deserved it**, but **because they NEEDED it**.

In the full knowledge of their sin, Jesus invited them **all** to eat and drink - that they might, in that moment, begin to understand and receive and experience this grace that alone could and ultimately would enable and transform them to turn from their sin.

Listen with me to **v.26-28**.

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "**Take and eat; this is my body.**"*

*Then he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "**Drink from it, ALL OF YOU. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."***

On the night that Jesus was betrayed,
He turned to His betrayers + said,

"Come. Take and eat. This is my body **given for you.**

Come, take and drink this cup, **ALL OF YOU...**

This is my blood of the new covenant poured out **for you - for the forgiveness of sins.** (including **your** sins!)

Come, take, eat & drink, + receive, by faith, my grace
– that is **for you...**"

And in the same way, this morning, Jesus gathers with us around this table and invites us – **his fickle, at times failing disciples, his betrayers even** – to come, take and eat, to understand and receive His grace for us...

Now, sadly, the Lord's Supper has often been presented as something **only** for the righteous.

But this could not be further from the truth.

For at its inception, Jesus offered this meal **not** to a bunch of saints, but to a huddle of sinners.

And He does the same today. That at this table, in this bread and this cup, we would again, or like never before, be **confronted with grace**.

Confronted with the reality that God loves those who don't deserve it, that God's grace is for the unworthy...

That when we are most unworthy, when we least deserve it, when we have nothing to offer God, God gives His all–Himself– to us.

If Jesus' response to his original disciples is any example for us - **and it is, it must be** - then there is no sin, no failure, that should cause us to stand back today.

No matter how unworthy we may feel or be, **Jesus invites us to come...**

Now some of you may be wondering, as I often wondered, but doesn't the Bible somewhere say that if we have some unresolved sin or broken relationship then we should hold off, go fix things, and **then + only then**, come and partake **afterwards**?... Well, actually: **No**.

(And fear not, I'm not messing with scripture here!)

In **Matthew 5**, Jesus does teach something like this, but He speaking **not** about **communion**, but about **worship** - our offering to Him. He says that God's not that interested in our songs or words of love and worship if we are mistreating others. Our songs and words of love for Him are empty if they aren't accompanied by love for others.

But this is fundamentally different to our taking the bread and the cup - for *in worship* **we** are bringing our offerings to God, but *at the Lord's table*, **God** is offering Himself **to us**.

Ok, but still, doesn't Paul say in **1 Cor 11** that we should be careful to not take communion "*unworthily*" or in "*an unworthy manner*"?

Yes. He does. But what does Paul mean by this - that's the question?

Because if we read the whole of Paul's instructions in 1 Cor 11 about the Lord's Supper, we discover Paul repeatedly emphasizing that his concern is not primarily with **who** is at the table, but **how** the way that the Christians in Corinth celebrated the Lord's Supper **was itself a betrayal of the gospel**.

How **their very practice of** the Lord's Supper was a denial of their oneness in Christ.

And so Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:29,

"For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on himself."

This is the heart of the issue: *Will we discern the body of Christ - that all who are in Christ are our brothers and sisters - equally in need and equally invited to this table?*

In 1 Cor 11, Paul was not rebuking the church for **allowing failing Christians** to take the Lord's Supper. Instead, he was rebuking the church for dishonoring Jesus in the very way they shared this meal - giving privilege to the some, while sending others away hungry...

Gordon Smith distills it well in his book on the Lord's Supper.

He writes:

The issue is not whether we are worthy of partaking of the Lord's Supper. We are always unworthy. It is always by mercy that we come to this table. It is always a gift. Rather, the issue is whether the mode or manner of observation is worthy of the meaning of the event. It is not a question of introspective examination of the sin in our lives so that we become worthy. Rather, the critical question is whether we discern or recognize the body of believers with whom we have gathered." ([A Holy Meal](#), 53)

Truth is, **none of us are ever worthy to receive God's grace.**

In fact, it is **because we are unworthy** that we need God's grace - that we need to partake. This is at the very heart of the Lord's Supper - and at the heart of how Jesus approached sharing in this meal with his disciples. In the full knowledge of their sin, he invited them to come and receive.

And it's the same for us. As a friend of mine once put it,

"It is when we are most unworthy of communion, that we need most to come and receive this grace."

So, let me say to you this morning:

Whatever sin has gone on in your past; whatever sin is going on in your present, whatever sin is still to come, **Jesus knows about it**, and **in this knowledge** he doesn't ask you or me, or any of us, to stand back and wait till we've fixed it (*He knows we can't fix it on our own anyways*).

No, he says to us, to you and to me,

"Come.

Come + know that I have died for you - for your sin;

Come + receive all that I have done for you;

Come + receive all that I long to give you - forgiveness, grace - for the past, the present + the future.

Come + receive my grace that alone can save and transform you --- my grace **that makes you worthy...**"

Come.

Take. Eat. Drink.

This is **My body** + this is **My blood** - for you.

Can I invite the worship team + the communion servers to come forward?

If you're new to Lambrick, our practice is to come forward and receive the bread and the cup **from the hands of another**.

And as did before the pandemic, I'd like to invite those in the back of the room to **come first**.

As you see the row behind you file out, feel free to join the queue...

When you come to the station, we invite you to take and **consume** the elements right here - **and then** return to your seats.

There's no rush.

If you have dietary concerns, all the bread is **gluten free**.

Let us come to Christ today.
He invites us to His Table.