

# Instituting the Lord's Supper

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 01 November 2017

Preacher: Rev Donald A Macdonald

[ 0 : 00 ] Let us now turn to the passage that we read. The Gospel according to Mark, chapter 14. Reading again at verse 22.

And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing broke it and gave it to them and said, Take, this is my body.

And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

Truly I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of heaven.

And Mark begins this chapter by relating to us the hostility that existed amongst the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem, how cunning they were in their intentions.

[ 1 : 17 ] They were anxious to remove Jesus from this stage of life. In the first verse, the chief priests and the scribes were seeking how to arrest him by stealth and kill him.

They were only prevented from doing so momentarily from a fear of the repercussions that might ensue in the reaction of the people.

It wasn't the fear of God or what might be the consequence of their actions that dictated how they behaved.

And wouldn't we all love to think that that spirit is no longer abroad in the world. But that's the kind of world that you and I live in.

One that is hostile and filled with animosity towards Christ and the cause of Christ. And yes, the same elements of cunning and hatred are rampant in our world today just as they were in the days in which Christ exercised his earthly ministry.

[ 2 : 44 ] And as you go forward as one, you can be sure that the strength of your unity will be tested to the utmost.

Make it a constant source of prayer at the throne of grace. Because you can be sure that the enemy of your soul will want to break up the new unity that you enjoy as a community and as a people and as a congregation.

Make no mistake about it. It will be tested. I'm not a prophet or claiming to be a prophet. But I know the kind of world in which we live.

And so, it is my prayer as I am sure it is yours that this unity will demonstrate that it doesn't come from man but that it comes from God himself.

And that he is the author of it. Well, the attitude that prevailed in Jerusalem is just an indication of the destructive influence of the power of sin in the human heart.

[ 4 : 06 ] Mark goes on to tell very bluntly about the treachery of Judas Iscariot. And interestingly, in between the evil scheming and plotting of the leaders in Jerusalem and the act of treachery by Judas, we are told of the moving act of devotion by Mary of Bethany in anointing the Lord.

And it seems to me that this moving act of devotion is placed here in beautiful contrast to the wickedness that prevailed in the hearts of so many.

Here is this woman so filled with love for Christ. And Mark places her act of devotion in between his telling of the hatred and the pernicious attempts to remove Christ out of time.

And then the focus shifts to the Passover meal. Mark, he never stays long on one thing. He always seems to move very quickly. It's a style of writing that he has.

And he moves the focus to the preparation for the Passover meal, tells of the prophecy of betrayal during the Passover meal, and then he tells us of the Lord's Supper.

[ 5 : 45 ] Interestingly, it's worth noting that the disciples wanted to know the mind of the Lord as to where the Passover would be observed.

on the first day of unleavened bread when they sacrificed, as it would probably be better translated, when they were accustomed to sacrifice the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?

Isn't it rather intriguing that they don't say, where will we go and where will we eat the Passover? But rather, they're saying, where will you and where will we prepare for you to eat the Passover? And so, the Lord sends two of his disciples on a mission. We're not told in this context who the two were, but we know from another gospel that it was Peter and John who were sent ahead to make the necessary preparations.

These things couldn't be done sort of in twenty minutes or thirty minutes. It needed time. They would have to take the lamb to the temple to have it slain.

[ 7 : 14 ] At the temple, they would have to prepare the lamb and so on and the rest of the supplies for observing the Passover meal and he sends Peter and John and that in itself tells us how much Jesus knew of the intention of the treacherous disciple who was with them.

Normally, you would expect the one who held the purse to go to buy supplies, wouldn't you? You would expect that it would be Judas would at least be chosen to go to purchase the necessary supplies that were needed to observe the Passover meal but he doesn't choose Judas.

It's as if he was keeping secret the location of where they were to observe the Passover and that would thwart for a time the intentions of Judas because Judas couldn't go to the authorities and say Jesus and the disciples are going to meet in such and such a location in such and such a house. Jesus kept these things to himself but he told he gave coded instructions to Peter and John. Why Peter and John?

Well, the only answer that I can come up with is this that they were two of his most trustworthy disciples. These were two of the three with whom he shared the most and so he sends these two in the knowledge that he is sending the most dependable of the group for the necessary preparations.

[ 9 : 05 ] And there is something else that is intriguing about this instruction that he gives.

Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Does that not strike you as odd? A man carrying a jar of water.

Maybe to our western minds it doesn't seem odd. But you see, the practice and the custom in the areas where these people lived was that the women would carry the jar of water.

Now, I'm not making a male dominant sort of point here on belittling women, but that is how it was. It was the women who were expected to carry the jar of water.

And that would mean that the disciples who went to make the preparations, they would have no difficulty in identifying the person whom Jesus told them to follow.

[ 10 : 15 ] Because it would be such an unusual occurrence to see a man carrying a jar of water. And so they would follow him.

And wherever he would lead them, that was to be the place where they would observe the Passover meal. And so we're told, Mark tells us, when it was evening, he came with the twelve. And then we have the prediction of the betrayal. In my own view, it is at this juncture that Judas Iscariot left the company.

morning. And John tells us that it was night. And that's highly significant. And so Mark goes on to tell us of the institution of the Lord's supper.

As they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, take, this is my body. As they were eating, there is no extra teaching.

[ 11 : 28 ] There is no extra explanation, as it were. There is no preaching, as it were. As they were eating, he took bread, unleavened bread.

And what is the sequence of the verbs here? He took, he blessed, he broke, he gave, he said. But then you, take.

And so Jesus is breaking the pattern of the Passover meal. He interjects, normally the bread was eaten in silence, but Jesus speaks and he says, this is my body.

In other words, Jesus was saying to them, I am the bread. I am the one who is broken for you.

And then the cup of blessing, that's usually the third cup, he interjects another statement. This was probably the source of great surprise to the disciples because he had given no indication of what was coming.

[ 12 : 41 ] He took a cup and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, they all drank of it. And he said to them, this is my blood of the covenant, or of the new covenant, which is poured out for

many.

And of course, with their Jewish background, they would know that he was drawing on information from the Old Testament and I haven't got time to go into that just now.

But let's just focus on three brief thoughts, maybe for just a couple of minutes, because you have many services in front of you. The supper speaks of covenant.

And then the supper speaks of communion. And finally the supper speaks of consummation. Now, if you think of these three things, I think you will find that there is much scope for reflection and yes, for blessing on these three things.

It speaks of a covenant. Here they were observing a memorial meal. They had eaten the Passover meal.

[14:04] They were remembering a significant event in the history of their people. they were remembering how God had delivered them from Egyptian oppression.

How he had brought them out of darkness and bondage. How he had done it through the killing of the Passover lamb.

And you remember how all of the ritual that was involved there is summarized for us by Paul and writing to the Corinthians, Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

And it's as if Paul is saying that the whole of the Passover ritual, under the old dispensation, slaying the lambs, putting the blood on the lintels, the angel of wrath passing over, the blessing and releasing of the people of God from their bondage, their captivity, all of it, Paul says, speaks of Jesus and focuses ultimately upon him.

Points to the coming of the lamb of God. That's why it's so significant that John the Baptist says that in the waters of the river Jordan, behold the lamb of God, takes away the sin of the world.

[15:30] He's the Passover lamb that was slain. And through faith in Jesus Christ, he becomes our substitute. He becomes our sin bearer.

He takes the curse and we who are exercising the grace of faith receive the blessing. Eating the Passover lamb meant fellowship, fellowship in the blessing of the lamb's death, participation in the benefits of the lamb's death, protection from the curse of God's judgment expressed in the work of the angel who passed over.

It meant that the people of God were bound together under the shadow of the blood of the lamb. And the bread and wine now symbolize the signs and seals of the covenant of grace, bloodless signs and seals, because the blood has already been shed.

And all the blood that was poured out on the Jewish altars pointed forward to the coming of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

So, Jesus is saying here in the upper room through this symbolic ritual, he is saying, I die in your place.

[17:04] I ratify a new covenant with you, a covenant that is sealed and signed in my blood. And you remember how this caused deep agonizing in the life of the Son of God.

You remember how he was prostrated in the garden of Gethsemane. My father, if it be possible, let this cup, this cup of judgment, this cup of wrath, this cup that represents the holiness of God against sin, let this cup pass from me nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.

he drunk that we might not have to drink, that we might receive the cup of blessing, the cup of covenant love, the cup of faithfulness, the cup that says to you and to me if we are in Christ tonight, your sins are forgiven you, the cup that says you are now a child of God, a cup that says I will never leave you, nor forsake you, a cup that says he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion of the day of Jesus Christ, but for him, on that momentous evening, he opened the door out of the upper room that led into the darkness of Gethsemane and the horrors of Calvary.

he bears the curse of a broken covenant so that sinners like you and me through faith in his name come to share in the blessings of the covenant made with him.

So this meal speaks of a covenant, of curses born and blessings promised, a covenant that is forever, that cannot be broken, that cannot be annulled, that cannot be undone.

[19:24] But it speaks of communion, it speaks of participation, it speaks of union and fellowship with Jesus Christ. When Paul comes to reflect on this in 1 Corinthians, he says, the cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation, or a fellowship, or communion, in the blood of Christ?

The bread that we break is it not a fellowship, or communion, or participation in the body of Christ? What does Paul mean? We don't commune with inanimate objects, you don't commune with a

piece of bread.

If you were, somebody would be questioning your sanity, communing with a piece of bread. Well, you may be doing it, but it wouldn't be a rational exercise on your part.

you commune with a living person, and the communion of which the bread and wine are mere symbols, your communion was with Jesus himself.

Do this, he says, in remembrance of me. It was part of the ritual of the Passover that they were to remember. They were to specifically rehearse the story of God's redemptive purpose, deliverance of the people out of Egypt and out of bondage.

[ 20 : 48 ] But here, it is communion in the sense that the bread which we eat and ingest, the wine which we sip and swallow, take into ourselves, it represents our fellowship and communion with Jesus.

We feed upon Jesus. We draw nourishment from him. We draw strength and vitality from him in the spiritual sense.

We are in union with Christ when God sent a son into the world in the likeness of sinful fashion for sin. He sent him in flesh and blood. He didn't send an angel. He didn't send some kind of spirit.

He sent someone like you and me and yet without sin. We commune with Christ in his exalted humanity at the right hand of God.

We're not communing with the bread. We're not communing with the wine. We're not having some warm, fuzzy thoughts about the piece of bread or the wine that we're swallowing.

[ 21 : 56 ] at the point of celebration of the Lord's Supper. We are to lift our hearts to commune with Christ who is symbolized in the bread and wine.

A Christ who is exalted to the right hand of God above. You know, we often tend to think of Jesus coming down, but when you're celebrating the Supper, it's actually been lifted up.

Father of Christ coming down, to be lifted up to where he is, through the Spirit, communing with him.

Because they speak of him, the broken bread and the wine speak of Christ. You to think of me, you to fill your minds and your hearts with me.

And through the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, enabling us by his power and energy to feed on Christ, and to recall that in glory we have one who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust.

[ 23 : 18 ] You know, well he knows our feeble frame. is a comforting thought, I believe, to every Christian in the world. Well he knows our feeble frame.

The extent of that knowledge is all impressive. He knows our feeble frame.

he is able to sympathize with our weaknesses because well he knows our feeble frame.

These disciples, they ate the Passover meal in the presence of Jesus. No, I don't believe that they thought as they ate the unleavened bread and as they drank from the third cup that something mysterious was taking place with the elements of the bread and wine.

No, it was to Jesus that they pointed. And it was to Jesus that Jesus called them to meditate upon.

[ 24 : 32 ] Speaks of communion, speaks of fellowship, speaks of participation, speaks of union with Jesus Christ that when Jesus died we died with him.

When Jesus rose from the dead, we rose from the dead in him. But it also speaks of, not just of covenant and communion, it speaks of consummation.

I did say a few minutes. Jesus says something quite extraordinary at this point, where the fourth cup would normally have been drunk.

And he says, truly I say to you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine till the day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God. I will not drink of this cup.

Because if I drink of this cup the implication is that it's all over. It's all finished now. And there is a very real sense as you and I know that it's not all over.

[ 25 : 37 ] God. Yes, the mighty decisive battle against the forces of darkness was won at Calvary. But you and I live in the period between the ascension of Christ and the second coming of Christ.

And although the decisive blow has been struck against Satan, it's not over yet. And the Bible has much to say on the need for being watchful in the life of the Christian.

Why? Because your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion seeking someone to devour. We're pilgrims. We're on a journey towards the new heavens and the new earth.

And along that journey you have to stop. every so often for refreshment and strengthening and fruit. And the Lord's Supper in some ways is like that.

It's like stopping every now and then for sustenance on your journey that will end in glory with Christ. Who knows whoever's here this evening may be the closest to glory.

[ 27 : 01 ] But there is a sense in which every single person here tonight in Christ. It is going to be true of them to be with Christ.

For that is far better. In this world we have trials and there are persecutions, there are problems in this rubbish, sin-tormented environment in which we live because we experience the fallout of the fall.

This isn't heaven by a long way. Jesus is saying, rest a little while on your journey. Take a little food, food that will remind you of who I am and what I've done and what I will yet do for you. My children this do until I come. And then I'll drink that fourth cup. Then there will be true celebration.

That will be unending for then it will be the time of the marriage supper of the lamb. Then I'll stand before the father and I'll say, behold I and the children whom you have given me.

[ 28 : 13 ] Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are reminded vividly that we're not home yet. We're not home yet, but that doesn't mean that home is not a certainty because he has said I go to prepare a place for you.

If I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and take you to myself. But where I am you may be also. You're not going to a dark unlit house, but one where all the lights are on.

A place of tremendous warmth, a place of welcome, a place of eternal love, a place of true celestial happiness where there is no discard.

And there is one overwhelming response that I think we're meant to see here. It was a response that the early church saw. It was the fact that as they were sitting he took bread and after blessing he broke it, he took a cup when he had given thanks.

The Greek word here is eucharistio, sometimes used the word eucharist. Well, there is the element of thanksgiving in the Lord's Supper.

[ 29 : 31 ] We don't have to wait until the Monday service to say thanks. To say thanks to the one who delivered us and rescued us from death, who took us out of the mirey pit, put a new song in your heart, who gave you a new heart, who opened your eyes, who enabled you to see things that you would never have seen, to give you such extraordinary promises that can never be broken.

Oh, is there that kind of thanks in your heart and mind to the Jesus who is set before us in the supper?

Yes, spend the next few days of preparatory service, mulling over in your mind and in your heart, until in the goodness of God, you come together and you actually taste of the elements of the bread and the wine that speak of a covenant, of communion, and of consummation, and may your hearts be truly thankful.

Let us pray.