

Maundy Thursday: Jesus' Last Supper & His Family of Faith - 6th April 2023

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Preacher: Matt Wallace

[0 : 00] We're going to watch a clip, a reading from Luke's Gospel, beginning at verse 14 of chapter 22, some of the story of this night that Jesus shared with his disciples.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God. After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, Take this and divide it among you.

For I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them saying, This is my body given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the supper, he took the cup saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

[1 : 39] But the hand of him who is going to betray me is with mine on the table. The son of man will go as it has been decreed, but woe to that man who betrays him.

They began to question among themselves which of them it might be who would do this. A dispute also arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

Jesus said to them, The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors.

But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater, the one who is at the table, or the one who serves?

Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves. You are those who have stood by me in my trials, and I confer on you a kingdom, just as my father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table, in my kingdom, and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

[3 : 12] So we are joining tonight with millions of other Christians around the world on this evening to remember and reflect on the significance of Jesus' last supper with his disciples on that night before he died.

And I think perhaps as the atmosphere of that clip conveys, it was an evening full of both substance and symbolism as Jesus broke bread and shared wine with his closest friends.

We call it Jesus' last supper. He never says it's that. But actually, for Jesus and his disciples, it seems it was their Passover meal.

Now the Passover was perhaps the most important night of the year for Jews, a night when they shared a meal, and they recalled the story of how God freed his people from slavery in Egypt.

And one of the interesting things, therefore, about the Passover meal was that it was originally set up to be a meal eaten by a household. So for example, as part of the first Passover instructions way back in the book of Exodus, it says this, it says, So aside from there being decent portion control, it seems, that the off their slimming world would be proud, I imagine.

[4 : 51] One of the key things, though, is that the Passover was instigated as a household meal, as a family meal. Now once the Israelites had returned from Egypt to Israel, and they built the temple in Jerusalem, the temple itself became the focal point for all of their Passover celebrations, and yet Passover still remained in many ways a household meal.

Indeed, the head of each family would be expected to take their lamb to be sacrificed at the temple, and then the rule stated they'd need to eat it as a family within the walls of the temple, within the confines of the temple area.

You can imagine all these family groups having a bit of lamb kebab or whatever each, a kind of mass shared picnic. However, by Jesus' day, numbers had swollen, so given the thousands of people that were now coming to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, the rules on where families could eat the meal were relaxed, so that the meal could be eaten anywhere within Jerusalem's city walls.

And the meal, therefore, once again became a true household meal, eaten locally in Jerusalem, either in people's homes if they lived there, or if they were from out of town, a hired room or a guest house.

And so with all that in mind, here's how Matthew's Gospel describes the run-up to the meal that Jesus would soon share. He says this, So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

[6 : 51] So in this little passage here, I guess the first thing to notice is that disciples come to Jesus and ask this, Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?

You know, they're looking to Jesus as the one who's in charge, and because they all come from out of town, they want to know what the plans are, where they're going to eat together. And Jesus has clearly made some arrangements for this.

He's organized with someone to use their house, because he says this, He says, Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, The teacher says, I'm going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.

So he's called in a favor, basically, from someone he knows. We don't know who this certain man was. He obviously didn't want his name shared for whatever reason. But his house is the location for the meal.

It's a borrowed room that Jesus has for this meal, a guest room in a local friend's house. But what's fascinating, I think, is that Jesus says to tell this guy, I'm going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.

[8 : 01] Now, given that the Passover was meant to be a household, family meal, this is unusual, I think, to say the least.

He's going to celebrate the Passover, this most important night of the year, not with his family, not with his mum and his brothers, who would presumably have been in Jerusalem for the festival themselves.

No, rather, Jesus chooses to celebrate this traditional family household meal with his disciples. Equally, though, the disciples themselves have chosen not to eat this meal with their own families, but with Jesus and each other.

And yes, some of them were brothers, some of Jesus' disciples. You've got Peter and Andrew, there was James and John. But in terms of extended family, we know some of them did have extended families. We know that Peter was married, he had a mother-in-law.

We know that James and John's mum was also on the scene, because you might recall she was the one who wanted her boys to sit on Jesus left and right when he comes in glory, you know, the original pushy parent, we might think, with that.

[9 : 10] Peter and Andrew, James and John, they're not, it seems, spending this Passover meal with their families, and neither are any of the other disciples. Now, this is a different setting, it seems.

Not of a family household, but we could say of a faith household. Even the way this is planned, it would seem that Jesus is deliberately indicating to his disciples that they are now part of a new household, a new family of faith.

Now, theirs is a family based not on bloodline, or birth, or name, but now on a deeper connection, a shared experience and understanding of who Jesus is.

In fact, I suggest that this Passover meal at Jesus' Last Supper is a prime example of how Jesus wants us to see our family of faith as being, perhaps even of greater importance than whatever family of birth, or upbringing, or name, we might also belong to.

And I feel confident saying that, because it's a theme which actually runs all the way through Jesus' teaching. So, for example, in Mark's Gospel, we read this one time.

[10 : 29] It says, Then Jesus' mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told Jesus, Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.

Who are my mother and my brothers? He asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, Here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.

Well then, how about this? A little bit later in Mark's Gospel, as after Jesus has been saying how difficult it is for rich people to enter the kingdom of God, we're told this.

He said, Then Peter spoke up. We have left everything to follow you. Truly I tell you, Jesus replied, No one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the Gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much as this in the present age.

Homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields, along with persecutions, and in the age to come, eternal life. Now yeah, Jesus throws in the minor matter of persecutions it seems, just for good measure there, but he seems to be saying that not only might following him mean immediate family life might need to come second, but the reward for doing that will mean we belong to a much bigger family.

[11 : 59] A hundred brothers, sisters, mothers and children and so on. You know, a whole family of faith might say a church full of brothers and sisters in Christ.

Now if this is what Jesus is saying, that the Jesus family of faith is more important than any individual family unit, then I think it also adds significance to what Jesus says about his blood.

You see, when Jesus says a bit later, this is my blood shed for you, might also be his way of saying, yes, your family bloodline may be important, but in sharing my life, sharing my blood with you, I'm inviting you to join a new bloodline, a new family, a new covenant where we are all brothers and sisters under the same heavenly father.

And so what might the implications of this be for us? Well, I think there are a lot, but just three in particular to briefly consider tonight. Firstly, I think, if for Jesus our family of faith is to take precedence over our individual family units, then that means that whether we're married or partnered or single or divorced or widowed, whether we're part of a large family unit or a small one, whether we live alone or with others, Jesus invites us all to become part of the wider family of faith.

So whether you like it or not, I am your brother, all right. Working out what that looks like in practice, in how we live, what people might actually want or welcome in light of that idea of a wider family.

[13 : 53] Well, it's not a particularly easy thing to consider, I don't think, in our day and age where either nuclear families or individualism are often championed as all important. But I'd say this idea of us belonging first and foremost to a family of faith, well, it's both a challenge and an opportunity that we do well at grasp as a church because there's actually something quite exciting, I think, about that model of community.

And I say that because secondly, what's exciting is that whatever family or household we may already be a part of, then the good news is that those families get to be a part of a much bigger extended faith family themselves.

So, for example, I'm married at Gemma, we've got two children, Heidi and Bobby, and yeah, we have our own household, we have our own family as a unit, but even more importantly for us, we're all part of this bigger church family.

I know for us as a family, I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am that our two kids get to be part of this wider church community, to have so many loving and kind role models, you know, to be encouraged and inspired by.

Their life as our children, our life as a four, it would be so much poorer, so much less whole, if we weren't part of this wider church family.

[15 : 37] They say it takes a village to raise a child, I'd suggest it also takes a church to raise a child, and that means that regardless of whether we have children or siblings or parents of our own, we'll all have a role to play and benefit from being the parental figures, the brother or the sister, the son or the daughter figure, to those around us.

That's a real gift, I would say, that comes with community, a real privilege that comes with being church. And again, that's something which as a church, I think we'd do well to work out how best to embrace that.

But then thirdly, and finally, back to Jesus. It's interesting that having instigated this family of faith idea with this Passover meal, Jesus then outlines how we're to best relate to and serve one another within this faith family.

See, a little later in the meal as we saw in that clip, and I guess as is typical of any kind of family gathering where there are 12 brothers as there were with the disciples in many ways, the disciples are arguing about who's the greatest among them.

I mean, talk about an inappropriate argument on the night before Jesus dies, but still they go for it saying, I'm better than you, I'm better than you. And in response, Jesus says, no, come on, you've got it all wrong.

[17 : 05] Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves. For who is greater? The one who is at the table or the one who serves?

He's not the one who's at the table, but I am among you as one who serves. and so in this new family of faith, Jesus calls us to serve one another out of love.

How we grow into that life of service? Well, says Jesus, follow my lead. Remember all that I've done for you. Wash each other's feet as I have done for you.

Eat bread, drink wine, be broken, be poured out in remembrance of me for each other. Let my love, let my example, my forgiveness, my joy nourish you and shape the way that you treat each other.

Keep feeding on me, let me be your daily bread, in other words, and you'll grow as my family, you'll grow my kingdom. I think that's how God's kingdom comes and God's will is done, by us feeding on Jesus, remembering his sacrifice, his suffering, his death, but also in the days to come, by remembering his resurrection life, shared with us, that we might share his life and his love with those around us.

[18 : 42] Thank you.