

Bellaire Community United Methodist Church

February 14, 2016

“The Last Supper”

“24 Hours That Changed the World” part 1

Mark 14:12-26

(24-Hours That Changed the World promo from YouTube)

You are in the right place this morning. You might think you came by accident today, or maybe you have a “drug” problem – someone, your parents, your spouse, or your neighbor – “drug” you to church this morning. But your presence here is no surprise to God. In fact, it is a gift. We cannot be the church alone. We need each other. So let me just say thanks. Thanks for showing up. Seeking is the first step to experiencing God.

Over the next seven weeks we will be recalling the last 24 hours of Jesus life, and what they mean to the world and to us. It can be a time of incredible change for someone’s life, and we shouldn’t take it lightly. I invite you to pray with me this morning, and if you are serious about receiving a word from God today, I invite to place your hands out, palms up, as a symbol of your readiness to listen and receive that word. Let’s pray.

God, you are the author of life. We come before you as we are, full of doubts, questions, and worries. Take from us that which would hold us back, and replace it with your grace, love, and forgiveness. Give us new life this morning, God, so we can worship you. Send us your Holy Spirit, and help us focus on the Savior, Jesus Christ. In his name we pray. Amen.

Have you eaten any good meals lately? I’m talking big family dinners, like the kind you remember from you childhood. What sort of food was it? Go ahead.

We have a potluck today, so we can build up our appetite a little. What is your favorite home-cooked meal? (*Pause for answers.*)

I can distinctly remember Christmas dinners at my grandparents' farm. There are several reasons. First of all, there were a lot of us. My mom has four sisters, all married, and most with children. I have lots of aunts, uncles, and cousins. I remember having to roll out the sleeping bags because there weren't enough beds for all of us. And the food? Everyone in the family was a great cook. Lots of potatoes and ham and vegetables, pies for desert. Grandma always loved chocolate. You get the idea.

But there is one particular dinner at the farm I will never forget, and it wasn't because of the food. It was the year my grandpa died. It was in fact the first Christmas dinner we had ever eaten without him, so the grief and emotion were very strong. I was 21 at the time, and my grandma did something she'd never done before. She asked me to pray for the meal. That was normally grandpa's job, or at least one of my uncles. But she gave me the honor. It was a powerful memory, and I never forgot that meal.

Do you know the truth about memories? The stronger the emotion, the more powerful the memory. If you are afraid, embarrassed, sad, even crazy joyful, you tend to remember the moment more vividly. Some memories we don't wish would come to mind. Others are comforting and happy. A lot of memories involve tasting and smelling. I believe that is why Jesus used the setting of the Passover Meal, what we now call the Lord's Supper or the Last Supper, to permanently etch an important memory into the minds of his disciples, which we can recall through their story even today.

So what was the Passover? It was the Jewish celebration of independence, somewhat like our Fourth of July. It was a meal with a script, to retell the history of the Jewish people: how they had been slaves in Egypt under Pharaoh, how God, through Moses, had delivered them through the Red Sea into the Promised Land. We can read about this great story in the book of Exodus, where we also find the instructions how to prepare the Passover. The Passover was a complete meal, and a long one. It typically lasted about five hours, starting at sunset. Through foods like salt water, bitter herbs, matzah bread and an applesauce-type mixture called charoset, the Jews retold the most important story in Israelite history: the story of their freedom from slavery.

The most important part of the meal was the sacrificial lamb. In the story of the Exodus, the lamb had been slaughtered and its blood applied to the doorposts of the Israelites' homes – a sign so that the destroyer angel would “pass over” their homes and spare them. It was a powerful sign of God's deliverance, and it was no coincidence that Jesus used this holiday to explain that he was going to be the sacrifice for the world.

The preparations for the Passover meal were very important. Jesus sent two disciples into the city, probably John and Peter, to find the place where they would prepare and eat the meal. They followed cryptic instructions: “Find a man carrying a water jar.” Once they knew the location, they would have spent the rest of the day taking the lamb to the temple for inspection and slaughtering, and then roasting the meat for several hours. When everything was prepared, Jesus and the twelve disciples would have entered a large upper room with a formal table, a triclinium, to eat the Passover.

Adam Hamilton has a nice example of how this may have looked and where everyone would have sat. Let's watch this clip together.

(Last Supper clip.)

How difficult must it have been for Jesus to eat this meal with his disciples, knowing it was the last time they would do this? How many meals had they shared? This was probably their third Passover together. It should have had a familiar feel to it. Yet, there was a lot going on that would have made the disciples anxious. The conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leaders. The death threats. Jesus' odd predictions of his pending suffering and death.

The emotions during this would have been very high. They would have hung on every word Jesus said. When he said, "One of you will betray me," they must have gasped. And yet, they were sharing this precious meal together.

Can you imagine sitting next to Judas, sharing the same food with him? Can you imagine Jesus washing their feet? These men would betray Jesus, desert him, deny that they ever knew him. They would become cowards, afraid of the Jews. They would fall asleep when Jesus needed them the most, which, after a five hour meal and four cups of wine, in understandable, but still!

Here is the thing you need to know. We have all failed Jesus at some time in our lives. We have all betrayed Jesus. Denied him. Walked away. The bible tells us that no one is righteous. (Psalm 143:2) We have all made mistakes. Each one of us is a Peter, a Judas, or a John.

Sometimes, those memories of those mistakes overpower us. They try to define us. They try to define our relationships. But Jesus was there at that meal, loving his disciples, and showing them that he forgave them. He washed their feet. He broke the bread and called it his body. He poured the wine and called it

his blood, his promise of a new life of forgiveness. And he did all of this while they still didn't understand fully what was happening.

The Last Supper is a meal that reminds us that we are not defined by our mistakes. We are part of a larger story, God's story. A story of redemption. Think about it. The Passover story starts with the Jews in slavery. But by the end of the meal, they are free again. We can experience that freedom, as well.

The season of Lent is an incredible time to remember forgiveness. It is a historic time of self-inspection, penance, and reconciliation. There were two traditions in the early church, as the season of Lent and Easter came upon them. One: new converts to the faith would be taught, examined, baptized, and proclaimed full members of the church, the body of Christ. We do that here in Bellaire, too. But the second custom was even more powerful. Lent was a time to seek out members who were lost, who had walked away, who had sinned and broken their relationship with the church. Lent was a time of healing.

This is why we have the Lord's Supper. We need this constant reminder of forgiveness and healing. Think about it: Jesus was surrounded by his friends, including zealots, betrayers, cowards, deceivers, uneducated fishermen, bold and brash men who didn't always get it right. Jesus loved them, and he needed them in this difficult time. We need each other as well, and we need to follow Jesus' example. Can you imagine washing Judas' feet, hours before he would be betrayed in the garden? That is unconditional love, the kind of love we receive from God through Jesus. Jesus never wavered in his commitment. Jesus was going through the most terrible moment of his life, and he was surrounded by his friends.

Why do we need the Lord's Supper? Because it reminds us that Jesus is always present with us, even when we fail him.

Some people feel that they can't come to church because of what they've done. They can't face God, so they hide instead. Or they become calloused, apathetic, or hold grudges. Lent is a time of penance, of forgiveness and reconciliation. A time when wounds are healed, relationships reconciled. People who have left the church are brought back.

Jesus is always present with us, even if we think we are hiding. That's why he gave us this meal. The strong emotions are tied to a strong memory. Food, smells, tastes. Every time we eat bread, every time we drink juice, it can be a moment to remember Jesus, to say, "I'm sorry," and to tell him, "I love you."

Will we remember this meal, and what it meant to them? What it means to us, and what it can mean to others?

Let's pray.

Memory verse

"I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever; and the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."

John 6:51 NRSV

Reflection questions

1. Recall a memorable meal you have eaten. Who was there? What happened that caused you to remember it so vividly?
2. If you knew you were eating your last meal with your family, what would you do and say? Whom would you eat with? What would you eat?

3. Have you ever eaten with someone you didn't get along with? How did that feel?
4. In what ways are we like the disciples? Do we misunderstand Jesus? Do we deny, forsake, and abandon him? How?
5. In what ways can you remember Christ and what he has done for us?