

April 17, 2025
Luke 22:14-23

Maundy Thursday
Pastor Jeff Laustsen

“The Meal of Anticipation”

“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”

There was always an air of eager anticipation in my childhood home as a holiday approached and preparations were made for the feast that would be at the center of our festive celebration. It began with pulling out the dining room table and inserting leaves to make the table larger so that it might accommodate all of our dinner guests. The linen tablecloth came out of the drawer where it was kept, and the China plates, cups, and saucers were brought out of the dining room closet. The meal preparation would begin days before the meal would be served, and as the day approached the table would be set with the plates, glasses, and silverware that would be set in their exact places at each table setting. As the dinner hour approached, we would begin looking out the windows as we anticipated the arrival of our guests who would share in this wonderful meal as we celebrated the joy of the day and the love and fellowship that we shared with the special people who gathered at this special table for a most special meal.

As we remember these special meals from our past, we are called on this holy night to remember a most special meal that Jesus shared with his disciples in the hours before his death. In many ways, this meal was similar to other meals that Jesus had shared with family and friends since his childhood: the Passover Seder, the meal that the people of Israel shared each year in remembrance of their liberation from slavery in Egypt and in obedience to the teachings of the Torah that prescribed the manner in which they would share this meal in remembrance of the Lord “*who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery*” (Exodus 20:1).

- “This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance ... You shall observe the festival of unleavened bread, for this very day I brought your companies out of the land of Egypt; you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a perpetual ordinance.” - Exodus 12:14, 17.

Passover continues to be a festive occasion that is eagerly anticipated by Jewish families, a day when the special foods of the Seder meal are shared with the special people in one's life as they celebrate this night in which the people of God remember the goodness of the Lord who freed God's people from bondage and Egypt and led them home to the land of promise. It was a meal that Jesus had looked forward to sharing with his disciples during this week that began with his entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, when *"the whole multitude of the disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the deeds of power that they had seen"* (Luke 19:37). As the first night of Passover approached, Jesus instructed Peter and John to make preparations so that Jesus could share the Seder meal with his disciples, giving specific clues as to how they are to find the place where the meal will be shared:

- *"Listen," he said to them, "when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters and say to the owner of the house, "The teacher asks you, 'Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'" He will show you a large room upstairs, already furnished. Make preparations for us there."* – 22:10-12.

As evening falls upon Jerusalem and the first night of Passover arrives, Jesus gathers at the Seder table to share this special meal that he has shared for many years; but Jesus also knows that this meal will be unlike any Passover meal he has ever shared, for this is the meal that occurs *"on the night when he was betrayed"* (1 Corinthians 11:23). This meal will be his Last Supper with his disciples, the last supper he will share with anyone before he is betrayed, arrested, condemned, and crucified. As he gathers at the table surrounded by those with whom he has shared his years of ministry, he speaks of the uniqueness of this hour and the anticipation that had accompanied his preparations for this special meal: *"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God."* (22:15-16). It is at this moment that Jesus takes the cup that is always shared at the Passover Seder; but instead of following the traditional ritual, Jesus gives thanks and gives it to his disciples, saying, *"take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes"* (22:17-18). Jesus then takes the unleavened bread that is a reminder of the haste in which the Israelites ate their meal on the first Passover (*"Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread; on the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses ..."* – Exodus 12:15); after giving thanks, Jesus breaks the loaf and gives it to them, saying, *"this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."* (22:19). Jesus again takes the cup after supper, proclaiming to his disciples that *"this cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."* (22:20). Jesus gathers with his disciples on the night he is

betrayed at the table he has shared for decades to share with his followers a new meal, the meal we celebrate as Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper. It is the meal that Jesus' followers will celebrate with eager anticipation when we gather at the Lord's Table to partake of the bread and wine that we believe blesses us with the real presence of our Lord, who commands us to remember this night when our Saviour fulfilled God's Will in his suffering and death and commands us to "*do this in remembrance of me.*"

- "[The Sacrament of the Altar] is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to drink ... The words 'given for you' and 'shed for you for the forgiveness of sin' show us that forgiveness of sin, life and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation." – Martin Luther, *Small Catechism*.

On this holy night, we gather in obedience to our Lord's command to "*do this in remembrance of me,*" the basis for this day being known as Maundy Thursday, from the Latin *mandatum* ("mandate"). This commandment is one of the three necessary elements that Lutherans believe and teach must be present for a Sacrament, a means through which God's grace is bestowed upon us. A Sacrament must have as its origins a command of Christ (as the risen Lord Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to "*go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*" – Matthew 28:19); an earthly element (water for Holy Baptism, bread and wine for Holy Communion) and the word of promise that accompanies the earthly element (baptism in the name of the Holy Trinity, Holy Communion in the Words of Institution). Every time we gather to receive the Lord's Supper – no matter the time of year or the setting of the meal – we are commanded to remember this holy night, when our Saviour gave us this supper in remembrance of his sacrifice of his body and blood for our sake, so that we might remember and give thanks for the gifts of forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation that are ours whenever we partake of the bread and wine that we receive as the Body and Blood of Christ. When we come to receive the Holy Supper, we come in confidence that the Body and Blood of Christ have been given and shed "*for you ... for the forgiveness of sins.*" It is our belief and trust in these two words – "for you" – that make a person worthy to take their place at the Lord's Table and to receive this blessed gift that we remember on this night when our Lord eagerly gathered at the table with his first disciples to share this gift that will be a blessing to his disciples of every generation:

- “The Lord’s Supper *is* the forgiveness of sins. It *works* the forgiveness of sins. The words ‘for you’ and ‘for the forgiveness of sins,’ says Luther, ‘when accompanied by the bodily eating and drinking, are the chief thing in the sacrament’ – the chief thing.” – Martin E. Marty (1928-2025).

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As there is great eagerness in the anticipation of a special meal that we are preparing to share on a special day with special people, there is also eager anticipation that accompanies our presence at the Lord’s Table and our reception of the Lord’s Supper. Jesus’ give of his body and blood in the Sacrament of Holy Communion focuses our attention on the past, present, and future; every time we receive this holy meal, we are called to remember this night when our Lord was betrayed, along with his death and resurrection that are at the heart of the hope of the Gospel. When we put out our hands to receive this blessed gift, we believe that our Lord is truly present in our gathering, blessing and nourishing us with this heavenly food and drink so that we might be strengthened and sustained for our journey of discipleship. As the meal that we have been eagerly anticipating finally arrives, we are also called to look ahead in eager anticipation to the time when our Lord gathers us together into our eternal home, where we will be joined at the heavenly banquet with all who are invited to feast with our Lord in the place where “*death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away*” (Revelation 21:4).

- “On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death forever. Then the Lord God will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.” – Isaiah 25:6-8.

When we prepare ourselves to come to the Lord’s Table in worship, we express our eager anticipation of the gift we are about to receive as well as that which awaits us when our Lord fulfills all that has been promised as we sing that God will “*grace our table with your presence and give us a foretaste of the feast to come.*” (ELW Hymn 182).

- “God, who has given the fruitful vineyards and fields, gives yet more – the bread of life, the joy of salvation, the body and blood of Christ, a foretaste of the all-healing feast – and so turns our giving towards other people, who also

have broken hearts and needs and hopes and dreams.” – Lorraine S. Brugh and Gordon W. Lathrop.

On this Thursday of Holy Week, many of us are preparing to celebrate Easter dinner with family and friends. This special meal will undoubtedly require a great deal of preparation in anticipation of sharing this feast at our family tables; but the work involved in the preparation of the meal will be rewarded as we eagerly anticipate and welcome those most special to us to share in the special meal that will not only nourish our bodies but will bring delight to our souls in the company of those with whom we share love and support. The meal we share on this holy night is one that reminds us of all that our Saviour has done for us through the gift of his body and blood, assures us of his presence as we partake of this meal that is given “*for you ... for the forgiveness of sins,*” and points us toward our future as God’s children as we eagerly anticipate the fulfillment of God’s Will and promises for us. On this night of our Lord’s commands, let us gather in anticipation and thanksgiving for all the blessings that we receive on this night and on all occasions when we gather at the Lord’s Table to receive this blessed Sacrament, partaking of the meal our Lord prepares for us as we look to that day when all that we eagerly anticipate “*is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.*”

Amen.