

I. Preparing for the Meal

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. So Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it." They asked him, "Where do you want us to make preparations for it?" "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." So they went and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal. (LUKE 22:7-13)

OUR JOURNEY WITH Jesus during his final twenty-four hours begins with a meal, or more precisely, with the preparations for a meal.

Jesus sent John and Peter into Jerusalem to prepare the Passover Seder for the disciples. This entailed grocery shopping, making a sacrifice in the Temple, cooking, and setting the table. In their day this was the work of women or of servants.

I wonder how Peter and John felt about being asked to do this mundane work while Mary, Martha, and the other disciples remained with Jesus for the day.

I once met an executive who wanted to be used by God for a great purpose. He was a bit put out when the pastor suggested he begin by working anonymously in the kitchen of the homeless shelter preparing sandwiches on Saturdays. He felt he had far more potential than that—after all, he ran a large company and had leadership gifts. Realizing it was bad form to say no to the pastor's request, he began to prepare meals in the shelter. But an interesting thing happened to him as he served each

week: The act of serving began to change him—to diminish the pride that had crept into his heart and to cultivate compassion and humility. He began to have a vision of the needs of homeless people. Over time he invited friends and families to support the mission. He got his employees involved. Years later he was pivotal in developing a new facility that would better meet the needs of the homeless population. But all of this started with a request that he perform a task that, at first glance, he felt was beneath him.

Why did Jesus choose Peter and John for this task? What role would they play in the church after Jesus' death?

There is an unnamed disciple in this story. He owned a house large enough to have a second-floor guest room that could accommodate at least thirteen for supper. He was a man of some means; nevertheless he gladly played

the part of a servant and freely gave of what he had, simply because Jesus asked. His guest room was likely the place the disciples hid following the Crucifixion and was perhaps even the place the 120 gathered on the Day of Pentecost, when the Spirit was poured out on the believers. If this is so, the man not only gave freely to the work of Jesus without ever being named, he did so at some personal cost. In what ways would you wish to be like this unnamed disciple?

Only in hindsight would Peter and John see the importance of the meal they prepared.

Lord, I offer myself to you. Use me to do whatever is needed, no matter how small. Like the unnamed disciple in the story, help me to serve without recognition. Amen.

2. Supper With Jesus

When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. 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 until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, "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." Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." (LUKE 22:14-20)

IT IS SURPRISING how many of the Gospel stories of Jesus' ministry take place around a supper table. Luke's Gospel alone records eight such meals. At some of those meals

we find Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors. He ate in the homes of Pharisees. He was anointed by a prostitute at a meal and by a woman grateful to receive her brother back from the dead. He fed the multitudes with a few loaves and fish. After his resurrection he broke bread with two disciples in Emmaus and later ate fish with his disciples on the shore of Galilee.

But no meal is of more importance in the story of Jesus, or for Christians today, than the meal he ate after sunset the evening before he died. John's Gospel devotes five chapters to describing what Jesus said and did at that meal. Each of the Gospels tells this story, as does Paul in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

Jesus commanded his disciples to eat that meal and, as they did, to remember him. They were to see their eating of the bread and wine as a kind of participation in his sacrifice and as a tangible way of inviting him into their

lives. (In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul calls it a *koinonia*—a sharing or fellowship with the body and blood of Jesus.)

A man in his early forties died after a long bout with cancer, leaving behind a wife and two children. There was a particular casserole that was his favorite meal. Once a week his wife would continue to prepare this meal. As she and the children ate, she would tell her children stories of their father; and they would recall their own memories of their dad. His chair sat empty at the table, and they remembered him in a way that made them feel close to him and that continued to shape their lives.

I wonder if this is not what Jesus had in mind when he said, “As often as you do this, remember me.” We should remember him not only in a morsel of bread and sip of wine during worship, but every time we sit down to break bread. Here I am reminded of the old tradition, now

nearly forgotten, of setting an extra place at the supper table as a way of inviting the Lord to “be present at our table.” How might you remember him at each supper you eat? Consider reading a passage from the Gospels at every supper and spend time talking about the passage.

Lord, help me to remember you every time I break bread. Be present at my table, Lord. Help me never to forget that you are the bread of life who alone satisfies the deepest longings of my soul. Amen.

3. The Measure of Greatness

A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. But he said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. (LUKE 22:24-26)

During supper Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. (JOHN 13:2b-5)

I FIND STUDYING the disciples in the Gospels to be a hopeful exercise for struggling Christians like me. About the

time I feel that I am hopelessly lost, I read a passage such as Luke's account of the Last Supper where, as Jesus was preparing for his crucifixion, the disciples were sitting at the Passover meal secretly arguing over "which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest" (Luke 22:24). After three years with Jesus, this is what they were arguing about?

It was sometime around the sixth grade that I encountered the idea of popularity. At my school there were certain kids who were considered to be "cool"—defined by some combination of their appearance, their parents' wealth, their self-confidence, and their sporting prowess. By high school the characteristics of greatness were expanded to include those students nearly universally recognized by the student body for their talents. At the same time there was a second tier of greatness, defined within particular groups. In the band it was the