

Sermon: Maundy Thursday

Text: Luke 22:7-20 (v. 8)

Theme: Prepare the Passover!

Goal: As the disciples prepared the Passover, we have to prepare the New Covenant to share Jesus' blessings.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: *We are gathering tonight for a meal that has remained the same for almost 2000 years. The menu never changes: it is always bread and wine. It is a simple meal and yet the most important one this side of the heavenly banquet. It is not, like the Old Testament Passover, intended to be celebrated only once a year but is to be observed* (Series C, 117) whenever we gather in remembrance of Jesus. As the disciples prepared the Passover, we have to prepare ourselves and celebrate the New Covenant as well to share Jesus' blessings to all.

I – The disciples prepared the Passover

Jesus gave order to Peter and John to prepare the Passover according to the Old Testament ritual. There are very interesting details Jesus forecasted and specified about the preparation: a man carrying a jar of water would meet them (usually water was carried only by women); a furnished upper room would be ready and reserved for the Master... The disciples had to prepare a one year old lamb for supper, unleavened bread, bitter herbs as salad, and wine. Maybe they had the help of the women who used to be around serving Jesus and the disciples.

The Jewish Passover was in remembrance of the deliverance from slavery in Egypt through the hands of Moses. Every year the Jews

celebrate it for the period of seven days, even nowadays – the Pesach, recalling the events of the deliverance. The most important remembrance was about the blood of the slaughtered lamb that was put on the sides and on the top of the doorframes of the houses. The blood was a sign. God said: “On the same night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn... I am the Lord. When I see the blood, I will pass over (Passover) you. No destructive plague will touch you when I strike down Egypt.” From the OT reading, Exodus 12:7,12-13).

During the meal, usually they passed the cup with wine four times, sharing it with all at the table, while the story was recalled.

II – Jesus prepares the New Covenant

The Supper which was a normal church festival for the disciples, was a very special occasion for Jesus. He says: “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.” This means, He had planned something different for this meal. He knew this was His last supper with His disciples, and He was to inaugurate a new era. The Passover lamb was a pre-figuration of Christ and the redemption by His blood would be now forever: a deliverance from sin, death and Satan by the sacrifice of Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Christ, the Messiah Himself, is central in this meal. *The Jewish Passover was basically a remembrance, but the Lord’s Supper is both a remembrance of Christ’s death and a seal of His forgiveness.* (Series C, p. 117,118).

Jesus took what He had on the table to make the New Covenant with His disciples: “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.’”

More: Jesus points twice to the future in this text. He says: “I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfilment in the kingdom of God... I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes.” As the Jewish Passover had its fulfilment in Christ’s sacrifice, the New Covenant will have its fulfilment in heaven! Christ lifts up our eyes to the city of God when we celebrate the Holy Communion! As we sing in a Communion Order of Service: *Let this be a foretaste of all that is to come, when all creation shares this feasts with you.* The Apostle John writes in Revelation 19:9: “Then the angel said to me, ‘Write: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ And he added, ‘These are the true words of God!’” This is our hope every time we come to the Lord’s Supper!

III – We prepare and celebrate the Lord’s Supper

On the one hand we also prepare the physical conditions of the Lord’s Supper with care to kneel with our brothers and sisters at Jesus Table. We have a team of faithful people who prepare the bread and the wine on the Altar every time we celebrate the Holy Communion. The pastor celebrates the Liturgy of the Lord’s Supper, proclaiming the Word, praying and praising God with all of you, and consecrating the elements for the Holy Sacrament, this means, separating the bread and the wine from the common use for a very special use. After these preparations, the bread and the wine are shared with all the believers together with the Words of Jesus, “Take and eat, this is the true body of our Lord Jesus Christ, given for you for the forgiveness of all your sins. Take and drink, this is true blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.”

Luther explains in the Small Catechism: *These words, ‘Given and she for you for the forgiveness of sins’ show us that in the Sacrament*

forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. ... These words, along with the bodily eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament. Whoever believes these words has exactly what they say: 'Forgiveness of sins.'

On the other hand, we prepare ourselves to receive the Sacrament. We confess our sins and come humble asking for forgiveness. We examine our faith if we believe that the body and blood of Jesus are given to us under the bread and wine. Luther wrote good questions and answers for those who intend to go to the Sacrament. We are putting them on the screen during the distribution to remind us and to teach about the right preparation. But above all *that person is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words: 'Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.'* We shall come to the Lord's Table without fear, in confidence and faith that Jesus has prepared this Table for us and invites us poor sinners to receive the benefits of His death and resurrection: the forgiveness of sin, life and salvation.

Conclusion: Jesus concludes saying: "Do this in remembrance of me." *Just as the Passover was a constant reminder and proclamation of God's redemption of Israel bondage in Egypt, so the keeping of Christ's command would be a remembering and proclamation of the redemption of believers from the bondage of sin through Christ's atoning work on the cross, available through this Sacrament.* (CSTB, Luke 22:19). And the Apostle Paul wrote: "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). This is a public testimony of our faith and of our hope in Jesus, our Saviour. Let us come and receive the blessings of this Sacrament. Amen.

