

“24 HOURS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD (#1): THE LAST SUPPER”

(Mark 14:12-25)

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**[PROPS NEEDED:** Pictures of (#1) Leonardo DaVinci’s “*The Last Supper*”;  
(#2) “The Far Side” cartoon “*God at His Computer*”]

[McKendree U.M.C.; 3-10-19]

--I--

1. [Traditional Service ONLY] Read text: Mark 14:12-25 and Pray.
2. [VIDEO SERIES INTRO (0:48)] Throughout history, the events of a single 24-hour period can *and have* changed the future.

A--Whether it’s *cultural* events like Pearl Harbor, Hiroshima, the JFK assassination, September 11<sup>th</sup>, Hurricane Katrina, or *personal* experiences like the birth of our own child, finding out you have cancer, or the tragic loss of a loved one,...

B--...The crucial events of any 24-hours can potentially alter our priorities, change our perspectives, and cause us as individuals and as entire nations to rethink ourselves.

3. But perhaps no 24-hours has had *more* influence on *more* people throughout history than the 24-hours leading up to the crucifixion and death of Jesus of Nazareth -- the events of *that* time changed our world so drastically that its effects still reverberate with us today.

A--Now, those who’ve grown up in the church probably know these events fairly well.

B--But since they're so crucial to understanding who we are as believers, and since there are so many who still have *not* heard (or understood) them,...

C...Today we’re beginning a new series for the Christian season of Lent called “24 Hours That Changed the World”, in which I’m inviting us to take a journey together through the events of those 24 hours... remembering their significance, and how they still have the power to change us today, 2000 years later.

--II--

4. The 24 hours begins on the Thursday evening of what we call Holy Week, with the story from today’s scripture (Mark 14) of Jesus sharing what has come to be called “*The Last Supper*” with his followers in an upper room of a borrowed house.

A--Each of the gospel writers tell slightly different versions,<sup>1</sup> but the central focus in *all* of them is the *Passover* meal of the “*Festival of Unleavened Bread*”, illustrated famously (though inaccurately) by Leonardo’s DaVinci’s 1497 painting [ON SCREEN] <sup>2</sup>

B--You may already know that, both then and today, the Passover (or *Seder*/"*order*" as it's often called) is *the* central ritual of the Jewish faith, connecting them to their past, and offering a sense of purpose and identity in both the present and into the future. <sup>3</sup>

1--The ritual itself commemorates God's work through Moses to free the Hebrew people from bondage in Egypt

2--And each part of the meal (which, by the way, includes more than just the bread and wine of Christian Holy Communion <sup>4</sup>), along with the ritual questions (asked by the youngest person present <sup>5</sup>) are intended to remind participants of the hardship faced by their ancestors, and of God's faithfulness in bringing them out of slavery.

3--In this sense, the Passover was (and still is), in essence, Judaism's "festival of freedom" (sort of a Jewish "4th of July," if you will), reminding them (and everyone else) of the great acts of God in Israel's history bringing freedom.

5. Yet, when we turn to *Jesus'* celebration of the Passover/Seder with his disciples during *this* story, what we need to know is how radically his actions *that night* altered the traditional meaning and purpose of this sacred Jewish ritual.

A--For example, when he broke the bread (*matzah*) & called it "*my body*" (Vs.22), and then spoke of the wine as "*my blood*" (Vs.24), he was *not* quoting from the *Haggadah* (the text that sets out the required order of the Passover) -- no, these were *new* words!

B--And as he had done so often in his ministry, Jesus used traditions and items that people were already somewhat familiar with and made them into an object lesson.

1--In this case, the effect was to take what had been understood primarily to be a memorial **remembrance** of God's **past** work and make it into a **celebration** of His **present** work in the world through the presence of His son Jesus. <sup>6</sup>

2--What had before focused on what God *had done* became a celebration of what God *is doing* and *will do*.

C--And we see this in Verse 24, where Jesus calls this "Last Supper" a "*new covenant*."

1--You see, the traditional Passover focused on the "*original covenant*" of God's relationship with Israel <sup>7</sup>, based on *obedience* to the Hebrew law - on one's strict adherence both to the *Torah* (law) and the *Mishnah* (the oral tradition that was developed to interpret it).

2--But the "*new covenant*" that Jesus introduces *here* is based not on *our* keeping of certain religious rules, but on what *God* through Christ is doing *for us* (i.e., the "*blood*" that Jesus willingly sheds out of love for us).

3--It's as if -- when Jesus said "*this is my body and blood, given for you*" (what we call the "words of institution") -- he was saying "*I'm doing what I'm doing (i.e., sacrificing my body and my blood) to show you how very much I love you, and how very much God loves you!*"

4--The result of this is a ritual that's *now* a testament to the power of *love*, not *law* -- a sign to all, telling of a God whose love for people is so amazing & profound that He would send his Son to die for imperfect people like ourselves, and to invite us all to become His covenant people forever.

D--So, by his very *different* words and actions, you see, Jesus transformed the old Passover/Seder meal into one by which we Christians remember *our* story and identity with God --what we now call the "Sacrament" of *Holy Communion/The Lord's Supper/Eucharist*.

--III--

6. So what, then, does all of this mean for you and me today? How does this story of Jesus' "Last Supper" relate to US? Well, let me suggest at least two things:

A--First, we've talked already about two fundamental meanings of this meal: that it was (and still is) meant to help us (1) **Remember** God's faithfulness in our *past*; but also to help us (2) **Celebrate** God's presence in the here and now. <sup>8</sup>

1--You know, in life, sometimes we focus so much on "Remembrance" that we miss the "Celebration" -- there've been times in my own life, for instance, when I allowed the pain, hurt and mistakes of my *past* to keep me from experiencing God's presence and work in my *present*.

2--And yet, the way Jesus re-shaped it, Holy Communion is as much about receiving God's forgiveness and strength and hope for the *present* (and the future) as it is about remembering what God *already did* in the *past*.

3--So, that means some of us today need to rethink our practice of Holy Communion... not as some dull, boring ritual that merely remembers the *past* life of a dead man, but as a vital experience where we encounter a *living* Savior.

4--In fact, an old Christian tradition says we should always leave an extra empty seat at every meal as reminder of Christ's presence with us <sup>9</sup> -- some of us need to see Communion this way: not only as a participation in Jesus' *sacrifice*, but also as an invitation for him to come *live and walk with us* today. <sup>10</sup>

B--The second meaning for us, I think, has to do with the transformed nature of this meal as the "new" covenant.

1--Many people (perhaps even some of us here today) have the notion that God is a God of *law* alone, and that Christian faith is defined by a strict adherence to a list of rules and regulations -- legalistic do's and don'ts that either *define* us as saints, or send us straight to hell if we disobey them.

2--For some of us, *this* is our view of God [SHOW "**Far Side**" cartoon "**God at His Computer**"]...an angry, vindictive bearded old man just itching to push the "smite" button at the first wrong move we make!

3--But, the image of God that Jesus shares at his Last Supper is one of a God who yearns to love & forgive *in spite of* (often *because of*) our imperfections...

4--...A God more willing to suffer *for us* than to make *us suffer*; a God who seeks a relationship *not* with "perfect," religious saints who "have it all together," but with broken, imperfect people such as those around his dinner table that night -- one who would betray him (Judas), another who would deny him (Peter), and 10 others who would abandon him!

5--And if GOD is a God of *love*, not *law*, then that means OUR practice of faith should imitate a spirit of love not legalism, compassion not judgement, grace not criticism -- this is, after all, what Jesus meant when (in another Last Supper account <sup>11</sup>) he said "*I give you a new commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you.*"

--III--

7. Of course, there's more that happens in the Upper Room on Jesus' last night than just the Last Supper. No. Other passages tell us that Jesus washed his disciples' feet, had a discussion about kingdom "greatness," and talked he about his upcoming betrayal and suffering, to name a few. <sup>12</sup>

A--But I believe the essence of it ALL is captured in the meaning of the "Last Supper" which is meant to help us **Remember** our story and God's faithfulness, to **Celebrate** Christ's presence with us always, and to challenge us to practice the way of **Love**. <sup>13</sup>

B--You see, through this meal, we see *WHO* we are, *WHOSE* we are, and who we *CAN BECOME* by and through the power of Christ -- ...

C--...Which is why my prayer is that whenever you and I experience and participate in this great feast, we would all remember, celebrate, and love God and others more and more.

8. [PRAY]

9. [HOLY COMMUNION]

### ENDNOTES:

<sup>1</sup> These accounts are found in Matthew 26:17-30, Mark 14:12-26, Luke 22:7-38, John 13:1 - 17:26, and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

<sup>2</sup> Though very famous and quite beautiful, DaVinci's painting does not accurately portray what a typical Passover meal would have looked like in that day and time. For one, the participants would not have been seated on benches or chairs, but rather reclining on pillows, and the table top itself would have therefore been much closer to the ground. The table would not have been a long rectangle, but instead what was known then in Roman culture as a "*triclinium*" -- a U-shaped table where the "head" was *not* in the middle (as portrayed by DaVinci), but in the seat that was second from the far right side of the "U."

<sup>3</sup> The word "*Seder*" means "*order*" and is a reference to the strict order/agenda that must be followed during the ritual of the Passover meal. The word "*Passover*" refers to the original sacrifice of a lamb by each Hebrew family and the placing of its blood over their door, causing an angel of death to "pass over" their house when striking down the firstborn of Egypt (For more information about this order, visit Wikipedia's article about the "Passover Seder" at [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover\\_Seder](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passover_Seder))

<sup>4</sup> For example, the Seder meal includes a blessing of *four* cups of wine (not just one), the dipping of bitter herbs in salt water (symbolic of the bitter, cruel way the Israelites were treated while in slavery in Egypt), three cakes of unleavened bread, or *matza* (not just one), eating a hard boiled egg (symbolic of God's loving kindness), and a shank bone (roasted lamb, symbolic of the Paschal lamb eaten in ancient times). There is always a recounting of the Passover story from Psalm 113-114 (sung), and the ritual concludes with the singing of the "Hallel" ("Hallelujah") from Psalm 115-118 and the "Great Hallel" from Psalm 136. The exodus story that gives this ritual its context is found primarily in the Bible in Exodus 12:1 - 13:16.

<sup>5</sup> The questions(spoken by the youngest) and answers (spoken by everyone else in unison) are: (1) "*Why is this night different from all other nights?*" Answer: "*To remind us of the Exodus when our ancestors didn't have time to bake their bread*" (2) "*On all other nights we eat all kinds of herbs; why on this night only bitter herbs?*" Answer: "*To remind us of the bitter, cruel way our ancestors were treated in slavery*"; (3) "*On all other nights we need not dip our herbs even once; why on this night must we dip them twice?*" Answer: "*To remind us of the hard work our forebears did while building the Pharaoh's buildings, and to remind us of the tears shed by the Jewish slaves*"; (4) "*On all other nights we eat either sitting or reclining; why on this night do we recline?*" Answer: "*To be comfortable, and to remind us that once we were slaves and now we are free.*"

<sup>6</sup> It is true that the ancient and contemporary Passover/Seder is not *only* focused on the past (after all, it is the recollection of God's faithfulness from the *past* that Jews believe also imparts strength for the *present* and into the *future*, as well). Nevertheless, the focus of the ritual itself is oriented backwards towards the past, rather than forwards towards the present or future.

<sup>7</sup> The old covenant is found in Exodus 24:3-8.

<sup>8</sup> This dual meaning is also found in the meaning of the original Greek word "*anamnesis*" (*remember*, as in when Jesus said "*do this in remembrance of me*") -- more than just an intellectual recollection about a past event, it is more properly an experiencing of a past event so that its effects are felt in the present.

<sup>9</sup> This idea is even captured in the old hymn often sung before meals: "*Be present at our table, Lord; Be here and everywhere adored; Thy creatures bless, and grant that we May feast in paradise with Thee*" (Words: John Cennick, 1741 sung to tune "Old 100th").

<sup>10</sup> In 1 Corinthians 10:16 Paul calls it a *koinonia*, -- a sharing in Christ's body and blood. This is why when talking especially to children, I often describe Holy Communion as a place where we "meet Jesus in a special way."

<sup>11</sup> John 13:34

<sup>12</sup> In other words, though the focus of this sermon was on the meaning of Jesus' Last Supper, at that experience Jesus also taught the disciples about his upcoming betrayal and suffering and death (Mark 14:18-21), the importance of *servicing* others (demonstrating this by becoming a servant himself and washing their feet, John 13:1-20), reminding them that "*loving one another*" was more important than whether one was "right" or "wrong" (John 13:34-35), and finally, *praying* for them, reminding them that prayer is not so much for *God* as it is for *us* (John 17:1-26).

<sup>13</sup> Several introspective questions can remind us of the themes I mention here: When you receive Holy Communion what do you remember of Jesus' story? In what ways does your celebration of the Lord's Supper help you recall your own deliverance from sin and bondage? How does your celebration of Holy Communion shape and define who you are?