



Hear the Word

from Pastor Paul E. Hoffman

Gather... Encourage... Equip... Send...

Maundy Thursday

March 29, 2018

7:00 pm

Mark 14:17-26

We call it by many different names: The Eucharist, Holy Communion, The Meal, The Lord's Supper, the Last Supper. In these few moments reflecting together tonight, it's the final one that I'd like to consider with you – the Last Supper.

It's been said that every grief of the present brings up the griefs of the past. Judging from my own experience that's certainly true. I never hear of a death that doesn't take me right back to the death of my own father, even though it happened almost 50 years ago.

So it is with this holy meal. When we gather around this table on this particular Maundy Thursday, if we let them, our hearts will take us to all the other last places of our lives. The last meal we shared with parents before they died, perhaps. Or a last conversation with a spouse before their death, whether sudden or prolonged. On our knees with a crust of bread and a sip of wine, we might remember. Remember the last time our son or daughter was beside us in church. The last time we ate and drank with our community before our cancer diagnosis. Or heart attack. The last time we ate and drank with our spouse before the betrayal. The memories, the griefs of the present tend to bring up all the griefs of the past.

Those closest to Jesus at the Last Supper had at least some clue that things were coming to an end. They no doubt remembered the foolish time they asked if one could sit at his right and one at his left in the kingdom. Perhaps Peter was thinking about all the times he blurted when he might have stayed silent. I have to think that Judas was already deep into his own stuff around being taken in by Christ's enemies, the conflicts of his own soul pounding through his head like a hammer with every heartbeat. These dinner guests are no different than us, their lives were every bit as complicated by regret and pride, by joy and sorrow, by anxiety and fear as ours.

Yet here they are, in the presence of Jesus. At the Last Supper. And here we are, in the presence of Jesus. At the Last Supper.

It's that *presence of Jesus* that makes all the difference in the world. Because of his presence, this ordinary holy Passover meal in the lives of this handful of Jews in an Upper Room is not ordinary at all. It is a last supper.

That is, it is a supper that lasts. And lasts, and lasts, and lasts.

Immediately following our eating and drinking together tonight, we will witness the stripping of the altar, reminiscent of Jesus' being stripped of his life and being handed over to be crucified. The one who stands at the table and offers bread and cup offers so much more. He says as much, but they don't understand, they can't. He says as much to us and we, too, do not understand. We can't. But he says it nonetheless. "Do this in remembrance of me."

Jesus' holy supper lasts and lasts and lasts even into our own day, into this very room. Because his last supper and his stripping, his suffer-ing and his dying was not the end for him. That Last Supper with his handful of friends has become the first supper for us. The first meal of the new creation. The meal of hope. The meal of promise.

We bring to this table exactly what they brought to theirs: our regret and our pride, our joy and our sorrow, our anxiety and our fear. Yet we bring one thing more, one thing that they did not have, one thing that they could not have. We bring the hope and the promise that this is not the last supper at all, but instead the supper that lasts. The supper that lasts all the way into the kingdom of God where our anxieties and our sorrows and fears, our pride and regrets are swallowed up forever, as easily and as powerfully as we swallow a bit of bread, a sip of wine.

They are swallowed up by the Risen One who gives himself in this meal. Because the one who is both host and guest at this meal is the One who offered his body not only as holy food, but as fruit for the grave, fruit that in three days ripened into the decisive defeat of sin and death. The fruit of Jesus' body became fruit that will last.

Welcome once more to the Last Supper. Welcome to the supper that lasts, and lasts and lasts. That lasts as long as "we eat of this bread and drink from this cup and proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." Welcome to the Last Supper. The supper that lasts. The supper of your new, lasting life in Christ.

In the name of the Father and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.