

## **In the Garden: The Supper**

Dr. Tom Pace

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Luke 22:15-20

*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 22:15-20 (NRSV)*

Join with me in prayer. *Gracious God open us up. Open our eyes that we might see and our ears that we might hear, and open our hearts, God, that we might feel, and our compassion might be renewed. And then, O Lord, open our hands that we might serve. Amen.*

Howard and Charlene Morrison were missionaries for 14 years in Central America. When some health issues made it time for them to retire and come home, they had been with this single village doing agriculture and education and evangelism for all this time. So they deeply loved the people of that small village. So before they left, they had a great meal together and the people put together a great feast. They were asked to get up and speak and tell what it had meant to them. It was hard to come up with the words at that moment when you've invested so much of your life in being with these people that you care about. They said that all they could really say was "We love you and just remember to keep Jesus central in your lives."

This story today is the story of a last supper. I wonder if you've had any last suppers with people you love. Times when you gather together for the last time and you know maybe it's the last time and you want to express what's in your heart. You want to be eloquent, but you just can't quite find the words.

In this passage today Jesus is trying to find a way to express what he really wants.

I love the way it begins. He says, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover meal with you." *Eagerly desired* - what an interesting phrase. He's on the way to the cross and this is the last thing before the cross. He says, "I eagerly desired it." Why?

Let me share four things that I think is why he wanted so badly to have this meal with his disciples.

The first is he eagerly desired it for the sake of relationship. I don't want us to miss the obvious. He says in verse 15: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover *with you* before I suffer." With you.

I don't know if you remember Christmas Eve when we talked about the essence of the Christmas message is really contained in a simple preposition *with*. That God came to be *with* us. That he wants to be in relationship *with* us. And here in this passage he is reaching out saying, "I want to be *with you*."

But here's what I want you to recognize. He doesn't just want to be with us for our sake because he thinks we need a relationship with the loving Christ. He wants to be with us for his sake. He doesn't want to go through this alone.

There's a fancy theological term... there will be a test on at the end of the service. It is the *hypostatic union*. You can go and tell people after church that your pastor talked about the hypostatic union, and you can ask them, "Do you know what that is?" And they'll say, "Wow, you go to a really smart church!"

But please don't because they probably won't come back if they think that what we're talking about is the hypostatic union. The Council of Ephesus in 432 stated that the hypostatic union simply says that Jesus is fully human and fully divine. There were those who said that Jesus was half human and half divine. Now that may seem like a small distinction, but here's what people were saying. They were saying Jesus is just God in a human body. So that all the emotion and all the spirit and all the challenges that we have in our hearts they say Jesus never had those. He was God. He didn't have any of those challenges.

That's not what we see in Scripture. We see a God - Jesus - God as fully human with all the pain and the anguish and longing and the fears. All of those things you and I face every day, and more so. When Jesus gets to this place where the cross is looming in front of him, he's thinking, "I don't want to go through this alone. I love you all - the twelve disciples and the women who traveled with them, and I need you to be with me."

Let me just say that that's what I hope when you come for this meal. Remember a meal in the time of Jesus was an intimate experience. You only ate with people you loved. Only ate with people with whom you had a close relationship. When Jesus wants you to come to the meal, he's saying, "I need you. You need me but I need you. I will not be complete unless all of my children are here with me."

He eagerly desired for the sake of relationship. In verse 19 it says, "He broke it and gave it to them saying, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." He eagerly desired to eat this meal because he wanted to be remembered. Jesus knew we are a people who are prone to forget.

I shared with you some months ago about going through my mom's stuff after she passed away. We found pictures - pictures of my childhood, my adolescence and pictures of my brothers and sisters, people I remembered. It brought those memories back to me. The house I grew up in, things like that. But then there were other pictures that were more troubling to me and here's why. I'd see a picture and I could tell that one person in that picture is my grandfather when he was young, but I had no idea who the other person in the picture was. I'd think to myself, "I need to go ask my mom who that other person is. She'll know." But I can't ask my mom. Then it occurred to me that that person is now forgotten. No one will know who that person is, just a stranger in the picture.

Then it occurred to me that one day that'll happen to me. I'll die and my kids and my grandchildren will remember me, and my great grandchildren, I hope, will at least know who I was. But it doesn't take many generations before you're just a name on a genealogy table.

Jesus longed to not be forgotten. He said, "I came to teach people a way of life that's about sacrifice, about giving yourself away, about reaching people in the margins. It's about forgiving those who seek to hurt you, about a life of service to others, and of being a servant. And I didn't just do it for these twelve, I did it forever, for all of the generations for now and forever. And I want them to remember it."

Now remember that most of the people could not read in many villages. The rabbi would be the only one who could read. You couldn't just give them a book and say, "Pass this down," so they would have these rituals - like the Passover. This was so that the people of Israel would remember how God *passed over* them with the angel of death, how he set them free from bondage in Egypt. And Jesus takes that same ritual of remembrance and says, "But it also means

something else, too. It also means whenever you eat or drink this meal you remember what I taught you and how we're supposed to live." It's a meal of remembrance. He eagerly desired to eat it with us.

Here's the third thing. He says, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." Jesus came with a purpose and it isn't just to teach us. It was to redeem us, to buy the cross that is coming, his suffering that this meal points to, that by that cross to redeem us from sin and death. He came to give us a new promise, a way of saying, "You're going to live not by law but by grace, by the Holy Spirit at work within you. You have been redeemed." To be redeemed means to be bought back.

He talks about it as a new covenant. A covenant is a specific term; it's like a promise between two parties. All covenants were sealed with some sort of symbol. Some irrevocable covenants were sealed with blood and they're called blood covenants. So they would often cut an animal in half and the parties, or at least one of the parties, sometimes the weaker of the two parties, would walk between the two pieces of the animal as a way of promising an irrevocable covenant to do what they say they're going to do. So blood came to be the sign of that covenant. In fact the sign of the covenant with Abraham was circumcision and so if you go to a *bris* where they do circumcision on a small Jewish child, the third component of that ritual is called the *Metzizah* and they would smear the blood from the circumcision as a way of saying "This is the blood of a new covenant and God will never give up on this child."

When he says "This is the blood of a new covenant..." What happens is we think to ourselves, "Do we have to talk about blood in the service? Really? Isn't that kind of gruesome?"

Friends, our redemption came with a price. It isn't like we can just say that it's not a big deal. It was a big deal. Jesus died that this new covenant would come to pass and it's his blood that is the blood of the covenant.

There's a great story about King Christian X who was the king of Denmark during the time of the Nazi occupation. Denmark was so small it could put up almost no military resistance, but they agreed to put up a moral resistance. One-time King Christian saw a Nazi flag flying over one of their public buildings. He said to the Nazi general, "You have to take that Nazi flag down and put up the Danish flag." They said that the Nazi general replied, "We're not taking it down." Then the King said, "Well, if you don't take it down by noon, I'll send a soldier to take it down." The general said, "Well, you need to know that that soldier will be shot." The King replied,

"Well, you need to know that that soldier will be me. That I'm going to go, and I'll do that and I'm willing to die for it."

God didn't send a soldier to die for us, God said, "I'll come do that." And the blood that was shed is real. So when we participate in this service, it is a recognition it is our participation in the suffering of Christ for us. He eagerly desired for us to know why he'd come to die as a way of showing us his love.

Here's the last thing. The Scripture says, "I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." He wants to give his followers hope. He wants to say, "You have a hope and a future. Look, it's going to get bad. I'm going to be crucified; some of you will be crucified. All of you will be persecuted. You're going to be left alone. You won't have me as your leader anymore. It's going to be bad, but, friends, this isn't how it ends."

When we receive Holy Communion, when we participate in this, we look forward to that time when we meet again, and we celebrate the Supper in the Kingdom of God. Now I was looking for a word for hope that started with the letter *R* and I couldn't find one. So I just had to put Revelation to John because it's in the Revelation to John that we get this picture of the marriage supper of the Lamb.

He says it this way in Revelation 19:9: "The angel said to me, 'write this - blessed are those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" Jesus desired to eat with them to give them hope.

Now here's what I know. There are people who come into this room every Sunday who are dealing with hard stuff, who are in that valley in their lives. And the joy of receiving the Sacrament is because it says to you in that valley, "That's not all there is. That's not the end of the story. God has a future and a hope for you, and you can look forward to that. To that experience to be with him."

Friends, this meal's a special meal that Jesus is eagerly desiring to eat with you. I wonder if you've eagerly desired to be with him. Paul says in Philippians, "I want to know the power of his resurrection and to know his suffering that I might receive a resurrection as well."

So most of the time when I talk about our relationship with Christ, I say, "Look, Jesus wants to be with you. Jesus will be with you no matter what." I want to flip it around during this Lenten season. What would it take for you to go be with him? To walk the journey through Gethsemane, starting with this meal today with him, this holy meal? And walk with him all the way through

the agony of Gethsemane to the cross, to the tomb and ultimately go with him to that empty tomb, that you, too, might experience that power of resurrection.

Let's pray. *Gracious God, we thank you that you gave us this meal to draw us even closer in relationship with you and to help us remember the way of life that you taught us. To help us participate and experience the redemption that you offer through your blood. God, make this meal real for us today. We pray in the name of Christ. Amen.*