

Epworth Chapel on the Green  
March 28, 2013  
Maundy Thursday  
Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander

Exodus 12:1-14  
Psalm 78  
I Corinthians 11:23-26  
Luke 22:14-30

We gather tonight in the presence of the Lord, and we consider the last meal he shared with his disciples before his death. As the epistle narrative relates it, we share with Paul a basic connection: we are talking about an event we did not witness with our own eyes, but a tradition that has been passed down to us.

When Paul speaks of “receiving” and “handing on” this tradition, he is using technical terminology and language to describe the transmission of sacred teachings. This underscores the divine authority of those teachings. What Paul relays to us is not something he received in a flash of revelation at 2:00 o’clock in the morning after eating too much pizza. What Paul relays to us is authoritative teaching that goes back to the Lord himself.

The Lord’s Supper about which Paul speaks has its origins in the ancient feast of Passover.

Passover is, above all other things, a family festival, held in the home, with as much extended family gathered as possible. It is a celebration of the beginnings

of community, where all the members of the household are to be treated as family, including the servants and even travelers in need of a place to stay for the night.

Passover is also a celebration of the covenant that binds the community together. It is a commemoration of events that led to the understanding that the children of Israel were especially chosen by God, that they were to be free people. It recalls the confrontation of the children of Israel with earthly political powers, and the miracles that led to their freedom. Chief among those miracles was the night of death, when the angel of death passed over the homes of those who had marked their door posts with blood from the paschal lamb.

The Passover meal usually began with the breaking of unleavened bread, a reminder to the people that they had to leave Egypt with such speed that they could not wait for bread to rise.

But on this night, Jesus breaks with tradition. He *renames* the bread which he holds in his hand: “this bread is my body,” he says. “Do this in remembrance of me.”

And at other Passovers, a cup of wine stood on the table which was not consumed. It was known as the Elijah cup, reserved for that great prophet of old. It was believed that when the Messiah came, Elijah would come before him to announce his coming. And so, that cup of wine was positioned and ready for Elijah to join the others and announce who he was by drinking from it.

But at this last supper, Jesus takes up the Elijah cup at the end of the meal, and says, “this cup is the New Covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

As each disciple drank it, he became, in a way, Elijah -- ready to step forth and announce that the Day of the Lord had come. As each of them shared that cup, they became prepared to announce that the Messiah had come, that communion with God is not only possible, but available here and now.

Well, brothers and sisters, as we partake of the Lord’s Supper tonight we not only recall this event of so many years ago, but we encounter and share its meaning anew and afresh.

Each of us, in the sharing of this cup, takes our place alongside the disciples in announcing that God is here *right now*, in this place, and that in Jesus he is acting to save and heal the world.

One writer says it like this:

*When you read the accounts of the Last Supper, one incredible truth surfaces. Jesus is the person behind it all. It was Jesus who selected the place, designated the time, and set the meal in order.*

*And at the supper, Jesus is not a guest, but the host...Jesus is not the served, but the servant...Jesus is the most active one at the table. Jesus is not the one who reclines and receives, but the one who stands and gives.*

*He still does. The Lord’s Supper is a gift to you. The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament, not a sacrifice.*

*Often, we think of the Supper as a performance, a time when we are on stage and God is the audience. A ceremony in which we do the*

*work and he does the watching. That's not how it was intended. If it was, Jesus would have taken his seat at the table and relaxed.*

*That's not what he did...He fulfilled his role as a servant by washing his disciples' feet. He fulfilled his role as a Savior by granting them forgiveness of sins.*

*He was in charge. He was on center stage. He was the person behind and in the moment.*

*And he still is.*

*It is the Lord's table you sit at. It is the Lord's Supper you eat. Just as Jesus prayed for his disciples, Jesus begs God for us. When you are called to the table, it might be an emissary who gives the letter, but it is Jesus who wrote it.*

*It is a holy invitation. A sacred sacrament bidding you to leave the chores of life and enter his splendor.*

*He meets you at the table. And when the bread is broken, Christ breaks it. When the wine is poured, Christ pours it. And when your burdens are lifted, it is because the King in the apron has drawn near.*

*So the next time the messenger calls you to the table, drop what you are doing and go. Be blessed and be fed. Most importantly, be sure you are still eating at his table when he calls us home.*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.