

Maundy Thursday; March 28, 2024
+ Mark 14:12-26 +
“Jesus Gives the Best Inheritance”

On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?” He sent two of his disciples and said to them, “Go into the city, and there a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Wherever he enters, tell the owner of the house that the Teacher says, “Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?” He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

His disciples left and went into the city and found things just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he arrived with the Twelve.

While they were reclining and eating, Jesus said, “Amen I tell you: One of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.”

They began to be sorrowful and said to him one by one, “Surely not I?”

He said to them, “It is one of the Twelve, one who is dipping bread with me in the dish. Indeed, the Son of Man is going to go just as it is written about him, but woe to the man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.”

While they were eating, Jesus took bread. When he had blessed it, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “Take it. This is my body.”

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them. They all drank from it. He said to them, “This is my blood of the new testament, which is poured out for many. Amen I tell you: I will certainly not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” After they sang a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

When the time comes for people to draw up a will, they will naturally ask themselves some questions. The most basic and important questions to ask are: 1. What do I have to leave? 2. What people – or what organizations – do I love? 3. What is the best vehicle for me to deliver what I have to the people or groups I love? Is it a trust or a lump sum or whatever else?

Jesus knows. It’s clear he knows everything. His omniscience is on full display as he gives directions to his disciples for exactly where and how to prepare the Passover. It’s on display again when he prophesies his betrayal. Jesus knows exactly what will happen, including his own death. He will be betrayed. That must happen, along with everything else that the Old Testament said would happen to the Messiah: **“Indeed, the Son of Man is going to go just as it has been written about him.”** His betrayal had been written, along with his arrest, his suffering, and his death. So it is time for Jesus to leave what he has to the people he loves, and also determine the best way to do it.

So, what does Jesus have to give? He is materially poor, after all. He has no farm or house or bags of gold. What he has to give is himself. He has his body that is about to die and his blood that is about to be shed. And while he is celebrating the Passover, this is what he leaves. He gives his body with the

bread that he hands to his disciples, and his blood with the wine. He does not explain the logistics, only the reality: **“This is my body...this is my blood.”** This is what Jesus leaves. And it is so much better than a farm or house or every bar of gold. His body and blood – himself – is the price of the forgiveness of sins. Jesus’ body dies and his blood is shed because God made a promise and repeated it – a covenant of grace. He promised a Messiah who was to come and take the punishment of sin on himself in order to take that punishment away from sinners. And on the next day, Good Friday, Jesus’ sacrifice of his own body and blood will make that gracious covenant the eternal reality.

And what Jesus leaves is not just a reminder of that sacrifice. It’s the actual body and blood of the sacrifice. It’s not that we repeat the sacrifice of Christ when we commune – that was done once for all eternity, once for the eternal covenant of grace – but we do receive his body and blood, broken and shed. And that is the forgiveness of our sins. In that forgiveness is life eternal, which no amount of money or land could pay for, but Jesus did with his body and blood.

How can this be? How can Jesus’ body and blood still be here, every time we commune? **“Amen I tell you: I will certainly not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”** Jesus gave his body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. But then he rose, and still lives in the kingdom of God, celebrating his victory over sin. He still lives, the all-powerful and eternal Son of God, humbled and suffering no more. As God, he is everywhere. As God, he can do anything. He is still a human being, too, though now glorified; he is still flesh and blood. So Jesus can – and does – leave to this day and to the end of time, the inheritance of his own body and blood.

That answers the first question that everyone must answer when making out a will: What do I have to leave? Now for the second: Whom or what do I love? To whom should I leave my good things? Other Gospels include the detail of Jesus telling his disciples: “for you.” Mark records only, “for many.” Both are true. Jesus’ inheritance is for his people, for all who trust in him. Judas was gone for that very first Communion; the believers remained to receive Jesus’ gift.

But it wasn’t just for the eleven disciples in that room. “You” are a believer in Jesus, too. The New Testament tells of many groups of believers celebrating Communion after Jesus’ ascension, because he commanded his followers: “Do this in remembrance of me,” using a verb of ongoing, unending action.

Jesus’ inheritance of forgiveness in his body and blood is for each believer. Each individual believer receives his gifts in the hand and mouth, an unmistakable divine declaration that you personally are forgiven. It is for each individual Christian.

But it’s also for his whole Church. A person like you or me making out a will might ask, “What organizations or groups do I love and want to bless after I’m gone?” But to call Jesus’ Church a group or an institution doesn’t capture the love he has for his Church. The Bible calls Jesus the groom, and his Church is his bride. It also says his Church is the body of which he is the head. His Church is everything to him, his be-all and end-all. His Church is on the top of his mind always as he now reigns in the kingdom of God. What he leaves in love – his own body and blood – keeps his whole Church in faith, forgiven in his body and blood.

The love of our Savior for his disciples, for you and me, and for his whole Church is marvelous. With bitter tears, betrayal, arrest, trial, and crucifixion right in front of him, Jesus’ loving eyes look past it all to

those elven friends at the table with him. His eyes look past his own passion, all the way down to you and me at this table tonight. And his inheritance endures, for you, for me, for us, his dear Church.

And this last thing is not the most important, but it is important too: what vehicle does Jesus use to deliver this inheritance? You and I might use a trust or an annuity or whatever (I'm not a financial planner, clearly). Jesus uses unleavened bread and wine. Why? Because it's what he has on hand, you might say. True enough. But it's what everyone in the world has on hand, or can have on hand very easily. I've drunk wine and eaten bread in ten countries at least; it's everywhere. Why does Jesus deliver his inheritance this way? Because he knows his gospel will be preached in all nations until the end comes. If he hid his body and blood for our forgiveness under truffles and Chardonnay, only a few could have it. But it's under bread; and you don't even need yeast. It's under wine, and there doesn't have to be anything special about it. It's his Word, his promise that makes it special, and more than special: it makes himself, the best inheritance possible, the price of our forgiveness, for our forgiveness.

After they sang a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. There's no reason to believe that Jesus and his disciples sang any other hymn than the tradition Passover closer, the 118th Psalm. We did not read it earlier in this service, so I will read a few verses of it now. When we consider our Jesus' great love when for us when answering, "What do I have to leave?" "Who do I love and want to leave it to?" and "How should I deliver it?" – when we consider how he answered those questions in his last will and testament, our hearts join him and his disciples in singing: **Praise the LORD, all you nations. Worship him, every race of people. For his mercy overwhelms us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever...My strength and song is the LORD, and he has become salvation for me. Loud shouts of victory are heard from the tents of the righteous: "The right hand of the LORD has done a mighty deed! I will not die. No, I will live, and I will proclaim the works of the LORD. The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. This is from the LORD. It is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day the LORD has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it. Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good, for his mercy endures forever. Amen.**