



Weekly Study

Week 9: Thursday and Friday: Lord's Supper, Arrest, Trials, Denial, Crucifixion

Read Luke 22:7-23

This lesson is about two things:

1. A chronology of Jesus' last two days in Jerusalem
2. The Lord's Supper, and what it means

The events...

Based on the three synoptic gospels, we suggest the following chronology. Note that the Gospel of John has some additions and variations in the events.

Thursday:

The Lord's Supper: Jesus and the disciples celebrate the Passover meal, which becomes the Lord's Supper.

The predictions of betrayal by a disciple and Peter's denial: Jesus predicts that one of the disciples there at the table will betray him, and that Peter will deny him before the rooster crows for morning. Sandwiched in between these predictions is a teaching that the least are greatest in the Kingdom of God.

The agony in Gethsemane: Jesus goes to Gethsemane, outside of the city, on the Mount of Olives. Gethsemane means "the place of the olive press." It is at the bottom of the mountain, as it is easier to carry the olives down the mountain to be turned into olive oil than to take them up. While he is at Gethsemane, he takes Peter, James, and John aside and shares his anguish with them. He prays "Abba, Father..." that he not have to face the cross, and that "the cup be taken" from him. He prays three times, his sweat falling like drops of blood. The image of the olive press becomes even more profound. The disciples fall asleep as the night progresses.

Jesus is arrested. Judas comes to Gethsemane and kisses Jesus, a sign that he is the one to be arrested. Judas calls him "Rabbi," yet again demonstrating that he does not understand Jesus is the Christ. Peter draws his sword to defend Jesus, but Jesus chastises him – "put away your sword (live

by the sword, die by the sword).” Matthew and Mark both mention that all of the disciples “deserted him and fled.”

The trial before the Sanhedrin. Jesus goes before the Sanhedrin, which is led by Caiaphas, the High Priest. Caiaphas is a Sadducee. The Sanhedrin was the ruling council in Jerusalem, which was subject, of course, to Rome’s oversight. It included selected scribes, elders, and priests. Tradition says this would have taken place at Caiaphas’ house. Jesus is convicted of blasphemy, and those of the Sanhedrin strike him and spit on him.

Peter’s denial: Peter denies Jesus three times in the courtyard outside the home of Caiaphas. The people recognized that he was from Galilee, probably a zealot, and probably connected to this Jesus of Nazareth. As the rooster crows, Peter and Jesus make eye contact.

Friday:

The timeline for Friday is challenging. Much happens very fast...

The death of Judas: When morning comes and Judas sees that Jesus has been condemned to death, he repents, and tries to give back the thirty pieces of silver. When the chief priests will not accept it back, he hangs himself.

The trial before Pilate: Jesus goes before Pontius Pilate, probably at the Fortress Antonia, who asks him if he is King of the Jews. Judea, Samaria, and Idumea are not ruled by a vassal king, but directly by an appointed Roman governor. Pilate was the fifth governor since Rome removed Herod Archelaus as king. Jesus does not respond to any charge, except to say, “It is you who say that I am.” Pilate finds no fault in Jesus.

The visit to Herod: Pilate sends Jesus to King Herod, who is visiting Jerusalem. Herod asks him for a sign, and his soldiers mock Jesus and dress him up as a king. Note that neither Matthew nor Mark includes the visit to King Herod.

The release of Barabbas: One prisoner is released every year at Passover. Jesus is then offered to the crowd for release, but they instead choose to release the criminal Barabbas, who had both stirred up an insurrection and was accused of murder. Here is one place that a very interesting discrepancy takes place in the account of the gospels. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus is offered to the crowd for release, and the chief priests and scribes stir up the people to cry out for Jesus’ crucifixion. In Luke, Jesus is never taken before the crowd, but instead presented to the chief priests, scribes, and elders for possible release. Nonetheless, all of them call for the crucifixion of Jesus.

The scourging: Jesus is whipped with a scourge 39 times. It was believed that 40 lashes would be fatal, and he has already been sentenced to crucifixion. This would have been a public torture, taking place in the court of the pavements outside of the Fortress Antonia, beside the temple.

The mocking: Jesus is taken into the Fortress, and the soldiers put a purple cloak on him and a scepter in his hand and mock him as “King of the Jews.”

The way of sorrows: The Gospel of John states that Jesus carried his own cross, but none of the synoptic gospels state that Jesus carried a cross at all. Instead, all three tell of Simon of Cyrene, who was compelled to carry Jesus’ cross. Cyrene was a major city in modern day Libya. At the time of

Jesus, Cyrene had been ravaged by Jewish-Roman wars, and thousands of refugees had fled to Jerusalem and Judea. We don't know if Simon was a pilgrim or a refugee. No one really knows where Golgotha is, or how long this journey would have been, but it would have been outside the city walls. Golgotha means "skull."

The crucifixion: Jesus is crucified, beginning at "the third hour," or "three hours after sunrise" (Jewish law at the time divided every day, sunrise to sunset, into twelve equal parts, so an hour is shorter when the days are shorter, and longer when the days are longer). A lot has happened in three short hours. Two criminals are crucified with him. The scriptures tell of darkness from the sixth hour until the ninth hour, when Jesus dies. The curtain of the temple is torn in two.

The burial: Jesus is buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man, who was himself a member of the Sanhedrin that had condemned Jesus to death.

Saturday

The seal: Matthew records that the chief priests asked Pilate to seal the tomb and post a guard, for fear that the disciples would steal him away.

The Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a crucial part of the worship life of most churches. In Protestant churches, along with baptism, it is one of two sacraments, meaning "holy commands," taken from the words "do this in remembrance of me." The sacrament has a number of names:

- Eucharist – Greek for 'thank you' is *eucharisto*. Represents thanksgiving to God.
- Holy Communion – comes from *koinonia*, which translates as both communion and sharing. The act of taking communion reminds us that we share in the death and life of Christ.
- Lord's Supper – reminds us that Jesus is the host, and it recalls the meals that Jesus shared with his followers and disciples, as well as with outcasts, throughout his ministry.

Our study today isn't going to look so much at the tradition of the Christian church and how we understand sacraments. Rather, we want to look at what is packed into the Biblical account of that Thursday night meal, and some of the layers of meaning therein. When speaking of the Biblical account, it is often called "the Last Supper" (not to be confused with the painting by Da Vinci). There are some differences in each gospel account of the event, so we will use the Gospel of Luke's account of the Last Supper as our guide:

Luke 22:7 – The Last Supper as a Passover meal.

The Last Supper was the Passover meal. The three synoptic gospels make that clear. However, do not forget that the gospels were written decades after Jesus' death, and the early church had already begun celebrating the Lord's Supper as a worship experience. They were writing the events to match current practice, just as they had created their current practice to echo the events of that Passover meal.

The Passover represented two things for the people of Israel. First, it represented their *deliverance from oppression and bondage* in Egypt, in which Moses confronted the Pharaoh and led them out of bondage. Second, it represented *deliverance from death* itself. The word "Passover" is a reflection of death passing over all the homes marked with the blood of the sacrificed lamb, when God sent the final plague of death upon Egypt. Death visited the firstborn of all the other homes.

Luke 22:8-13 – Preparations for the Passover

Preparing for the Passover would include:

- Locating a place within the city walls (Passover had to be celebrated in Jerusalem) for the meal. 2 Chronicles 30 tells of people coming to celebrate Passover in Jerusalem instead of in their own homes. This would have begun occurring after the temple was built – Passover became a pilgrimage festival, for which the Israelites were expected to travel to Jerusalem. This was one of the tensions between the Pharisees and the Sadducees.
- Removing any traces of leaven or bread crumbs from the room. The Jewish tradition was that the Israelites had no time to let the bread rise when they hurried out of Egypt – so the Passover always uses unleavened bread.
- Purchasing a lamb and having it presented and slaughtered by the priests at the Temple. As a part of that Passover celebration in Jerusalem, each family would bring a lamb to be sacrificed, and the blood of that lamb would be poured on the altar. The priest would then return the meat of the lamb to the family for their Passover meal.

The disciples find a “guest room,” which is the Greek word “katalyma.” This is the same word that is used for the inn in which Mary and Joseph find no room. It is a different Greek word from *hyperōon*, which is the word used in Acts 1:12-13, where Luke writes “*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey away. When they had entered the city, they went to the room upstairs where they were staying ...*” However, because they are both upstairs rooms, the tradition has been that these are the same “upper rooms.”

Luke 22:14, 21-23 – The family meal

Jesus and his disciples would have gathered at a triclinium table – a three-sided reclining table (in Latin *tri*=three, *clinium*=recline). They would lie on their left side (supported by their left elbow) with their feet stretched out towards the outer walls. The food, then, would be served from the center of the table. Free (and wealthy) men were able to eat while reclining, whereas slaves ate while standing. So during the Passover meal, it would be especially important for people to eat while reclining – to symbolize the freedom that the meal recalls for the Israelites. Seating around the triclinium was according to importance – the most important places were on the left wing of the table. Those on the right wing were least important. Additionally, those to the left-hand and right-hand side of the host were the most important.

The Passover meal was a wonderful celebration, a feast of joy. Stories would be told. Wine would be consumed. Laughter would be shared. It was a family meal, and Jesus gathered those he loved the most around him. In the time of Jesus, one did not eat with people one did not love, but only with those with whom one had a fairly intimate relationship. That is why the Pharisees and others were so critical of him eating with sinners and tax collectors – because it implied a relationship of love and acceptance. It is important to understand the sense of community that tied the disciples, and those who followed Jesus with them, together.

Perhaps the most powerful sign of that love is the presence of Judas at the table, seen in verses 21-23. Jesus already knows that Judas will betray him. Matthew and Mark indicate that Jesus dipped his bread in the same bowl as the betrayer, perhaps indicating that Judas is sitting next to him, in a place of honor. Jesus pronouncement of “woe” for Judas is an indication of two things: First, it is a recognition of what is ahead

for Judas, and the anguish he will bring upon himself. One can read a hurt and sadness in his voice. Both he and Judas will face suffering and death by the action of this betrayal, even though it part of the ultimate purpose of God. But perhaps more significantly, it is a recognition that while there is love and grace and the family table, our actions still have consequences. No grace will take away the personal anguish that Judas, or you, or I will face when we betray or deny the Jesus we love so much.

Luke 22:15-18 – A foretaste, and participation in the cup

One of the important images in the Lord's Supper is the idea that the Sacrament looks forward with anticipation and hope to a feast that will be "fulfilled in the Kingdom of God" when the Kingdom of God finally is completed. It is a foretaste of the marriage supper of the Lamb that will take place when all is accomplished. Revelation 19:9 reads *"And the angel said to me, 'Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'"* We are celebrating in the here and now that which is already determined and accomplished on the cross, but is not yet fulfilled.

A cup is an important image in Biblical language. It represents the events, both positive and negative, of life – the experiences God provides for us. When we "drink a cup," it is a metaphor for experiencing an event, whether good or bad. In Psalm 23, the Psalmist says *"my cup runneth over,"* as a way of expressing all the good blessings God pours upon him. After supper, in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus says *"Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done."* (Luke 22:42). He asks the disciples if they *"can drink the cup I will drink?"* (Mark 10:38). So when Jesus distributes his cup among the disciples, it is an invitation to share in his whole life, his suffering, death, and finally resurrection. When Jesus finishes the meal, he reminds the disciples that he came as "one who serves," and that they must turn away from their striving for power and prestige. They, too, are to be servants. They too, are to drink from the cup of suffering.

Luke 22:19-20 – The bread, the wine and a new covenant

Jesus shares the bread with the disciples, surely reminding them of the feeding of the 5,000, and of his blessing, breaking, and giving the loaves. But in doing so, he reinterprets the meal so that the bread becomes his body, which will be broken. This is powerful enough, but the disciples, as Jews who celebrate the Passover every year, would also be reminded of the blessing over the bread at the festival meal, which refers not to the breaking of the bread but the raising of it. Dr. James Fleming writes: "But what is not fully understood, unless one knows the blessing spoken over the bread, is the fact that in it God was going to raise him up. The blessing is as follows: 'Blessed art thou, Lord our God, ruler of the universe, he brings forth bread from the earth.' Thus Christ in the blessing may already be anticipating his belief that God was able to raise him up." Jesus is the bread of life, brought forth from the earth.

Every covenant in Israel, every significant promise that was made at that time, was sealed with some sort of symbol, and the most significant were sealed with the shedding of blood. This goes back to the promise made to Abraham, when God promised him the land of Israel, descendants as many as the stars in the sky, and a name that would be a blessing. Covenants were sealed when the two parties cut an animal or animals in half, walking between the pieces. In the covenant with Abraham, only God walked between the animals, indicating the promise was unilateral. The Hebrew word to make a covenant is literally "to cut" a covenant. Hence, even today, we use the term "cut a deal." Circumcision and the resultant blood were an ongoing sign of the "cutting" of that covenant. At the time of the Exodus, the blood of the lamb on the doorposts was a

sign that you were protected by God's covenant. By the time of Jesus, this was remembered at the Passover feast, with the shedding of the blood of the Passover lamb.

The blood of the new covenant is the new promise Jesus has made to the disciples. His reinterpretation of this cup reflects promises:

- Just as Moses delivered the people from bondage and slavery, so Jesus delivers us from bondage and slavery to sin. In a way we don't quite understand, the Christ event – the death and resurrection – frees us from the guilt of sin (justification by faith in Christ) and the power of Sin (resurrection – “if anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation.”)
- Just as the blood of the lamb delivered the people of Israel from the death that passed over them, so does the Christ event – the death and resurrection of Jesus – deliver us from death to abundant life.

The Lord's Supper – a summary

- 1) The Lord's Supper looks back at the Passover event of the people Israel, and celebrates God's saving action in that place.
- 2) The Lord's Supper is a community meal. It is characterized by laughter and love in the community, and is celebrated with people we love. Jesus is the one who invites us into that community, and Jesus is present in our community in the here and now.
- 3) The Lord's Supper reminds us of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb that frees us from slavery and bondage to Sin.
- 4) The Lord's Supper reminds us of Jesus as the one who sets us free from death itself.
- 5) The Lord's Supper invites us to share in the cup of Jesus' sacrifice, death, and resurrection. We are to give our lives away as he does.
- 6) The Lord's Supper looks forward with hope to the fulfillment of the Kingdom of God on earth, and joining in the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Questions for reflection and discussion

1. Imagine you are one of the apostles. What would you have thought when Jesus said the bread and wine were his body and blood, transforming the meaning of the traditional Passover meal?
2. How does sharing bread and wine (or grape juice) connect you with current past and future Christians?
3. In what way is the Eucharist a meal of hope, or foretaste, for Christians?
4. Confession was not a part of the Passover meal, yet it has become a compulsory part of Christian communion. Why do you think it is important to confess sins before partaking in the Eucharist?
5. Why was breaking bread with others, especially outcasts, so important in Jesus' ministry? How does this relate to Judas being included in the Passover meal?



Daily Readings

Week 9: Thursday and Friday: Lord's Supper, Arrest, Trials, Denial, Crucifixion

Week 9, Day 1 - Last Supper

Luke 22:14-23

Commentary:

In the Jewish Passover liturgy (haggadah) that is used during seder meals, the youngest son in the family asks the father, "Why is this night different from other nights?" This question recalls the night that the Israelites left Egypt, but the question could just as well be asked by Christians when discussing the Last Supper. It was that night, at that meal, that Jesus changed the meaning of the bread and wine that were consumed at the seder so that they would be, for his followers, a sacrament recalling his sacrifice on the cross and looking ahead to a time when the Kingdom of God is fulfilled. In Methodist tradition, the Lord's Supper is considered a means of grace, that is, an extension of God's grace through which the Holy Spirit works to hasten, strengthen and confirm our faith.

Reflection Question:

How does the Lord's Supper compel you to act differently?

Week 9, Day 2 - Garden of Gethsemane

Matthew 26:36-46

Commentary:

Jesus is both fully divine and fully human, and this passage offers us a glimpse of the human side of Jesus. He is distressed and anxious in the face of his impending death. He prostrates himself before God, offering his most honest prayer – that he wants the cup to pass from him. Even still, he knows what God's will is and will submit to it.

Reflection Question:

Have you ever tempered your prayers to God because you were embarrassed about your fear, doubts, or anxiety? Take a few minutes to write an honest prayer to God.

Week 9, Day 3 - Betrayal & Arrest

Matthew 26:47-56

Commentary:

Judas addresses Jesus as “Rabbi” rather than “Lord.” In fact, though the other disciples call Jesus “Lord,” the Gospel of Matthew never records Judas using that term. Judas’ inability to acknowledge Jesus in his full divinity may have played into his willingness to betray Jesus. While the gospels tell of the other disciples making pronouncements about who Jesus was, Judas never did that. Judas was spiritually distant from Jesus.

Reflection Question:

Have you ever found yourself denying that you are a Christian or playing it down? Why?

Week 9, Day 4 - Predicting Peter's denial, Peter denying Jesus

Matthew 26:31-35

Luke 22:54-62

Commentary:

Peter was one of the first disciples that Jesus recruited, and the Biblical texts show that he was a part of Jesus’ inner circle as he was often with Jesus for events at which only a small number of disciples were present, such as the Transfiguration. Peter is the only disciple that correctly answers Jesus when Jesus asked, “Who do you say that I am?” After that, Jesus tells Peter he will be the rock upon which Jesus will build the church. Peter is the last person we would expect to deny Jesus, and yet he does so three times. His fear and cowardice got the best of him.

Reflection Question:

When have you let fear direct you away from God rather than closer to God?

Week 9, Day 5 - Luke's crucifixion

Luke 23:26-49

Commentary:

Luke depicts Jesus dying in a way that parallels the beginning Jesus’ ministry. The cry, “into your hands I commit my spirit,” is faithful even in spite of the temptation in Gethsemane to let the cup pass from him. This reflects Jesus’ temptation and faithfulness in the wilderness after his baptism.

Reflection Question:

Have you struggled this week to remain faithful to God? What are the temptations that are challenging your faithfulness?