
Day 318 - November 14

Jesus the Christ (5 BCE-30 CE)

Upper Room

Readings: *Matthew 26:20-35; Mark 14:17-31; Luke 22:14-39; John 13:1-38; 14:1-31*

Reflections:

- The upper room represents one of the most significant events in the life of Jesus. It captures so much of the heart of Jesus. It is a party like so many parties in the past. Yet it is the Passover and the meaning of the sacrifice and Jesus' impending death casts a shadow over the entire meal.
- Importance of occasion: This passage in Luke leads right into the Lord's Supper. There is a question about what Jesus means about not eating the Passover until it finds its fulfillment in the kingdom of God. Jesus made it clear that the coming of the kingdom of God in power referred to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 CE. Having said that, here he is simply referring to the kingdom coming and the fulfillment of the Passover. This most likely refers to the symbolism of the Passover, the sacrificial lamb and the deliverance of all people, and his impending death. In Luke 24:28-32 after the resurrection of Jesus he follows the same pattern of taking bread, giving thanks and breaking it as he does at the Passover. Possibly this was Luke's way of connecting Jesus' prophecy within his biography of Jesus.
- Institution of memorial: It is hard for readers today to understand the shocking symbolism of Jesus' words. He collapsed symbolism of the Passover, which included an entire meal, down to two simple elements, bread and wine. He was placing himself at the center of their remembrance and replacing the story of Israel with his. On top of this, the image he employs is that of cannibalism. Drinking blood was strictly forbidden in the Law. Jesus calls people to remember him by intentionally replacing the story of Israel and symbolically breaking the Law. Again, we must remember that this is a party context and although the image is grave (blood and body), it will be remembered as a celebration within the early church. The death of Jesus brought complete spiritual freedom just as the Passover Lamb brought deliverance to the Israelites.
- Jesus hints of betrayer: Jesus informs the disciples of a betrayer in their midst. At first they are wondering who he is talking about but then the conversation returns to the question of who is the greatest.

- **Apostles' dispute:** The disciples are obviously still thinking that the kingdom Jesus is talking about is a political kingdom that he will establish by wiping out the Romans. Jesus again is explicit that to be great in his kingdom means you are great at serving others. He also makes it clear that his new kingdom will stand in judgment on the twelve tribes of Israel. Israel is not going to be the final expression of God's people on earth and in fact they will be judged as faulty and incomplete. The disciples will form the new community that will be the final expression of God's people on earth. We are called to be servants but must remember that we have been entrusted with incredible spiritual authority.
- **Jesus washes Apostles' feet:** John alone records Jesus washing his disciples' feet. He makes no mention of the Lord's Supper and it would appear that John decided to emphasize Jesus' humility and deep love as expressed in him washing the disciples' feet. Earlier in his biography John records Jesus' teaching on being the bread of life. In this account, Jesus washing the disciples' feet seems to foreshadow his own suffering and death. John describes it as showing his disciples the full extent of his love. Jesus is completely secure in his identity, where he came from and where he is going. Everything for Jesus was secured in his intimate relationship with his Father. In this culture, Jesus was doing something only a slave or household servant would do.
- **Peter is hesitant:** Peter is so consistent. He doesn't want Jesus to serve him. Then he realizes that it has symbolic meaning and he then wants to outdo all of the disciples by being washed from head to toe. Here we see again Peter's brashness and pride. Simple obedience is the fastest path to humility. Jesus wants to emphasize that his transforming work is simple and to the point. He is not about show or religious ritual. If you have sinned, you will be forgiven. That is enough.
- **Jesus explains foot washing:** It is simple. Just follow Jesus' example and serve those in need. Don't just talk about it. God's blessing comes on those who simply do what Jesus calls us to do.
- **Jesus predicts betrayal:** Jesus quotes Psalm 41:9 and again makes it clear that a betrayer is present.
- **Betrayer identified:** The disciples are wondering again. Jesus offers Judas bread to indicate that he is the betrayer. The offer of bread is normally one of friendship. Here Jesus is demonstrating symbolically his attitude of enemy love. Satan actually enters Judas and the battle that went back to the Garden of Eden takes on that deeper significance. Jesus makes it clear to Judas: he is the one. You would think that by Jesus making it so clear, Judas would think twice about betraying Jesus. Yet, he is motivated by Satan. Also, he may have rationalized that he was setting up a conflict that would result in the liberation of Israel. It is hard to know Judas' mindset although we have enough evidence to make a pretty good guess.
- **Jesus sends Judas out:** Judas slips out and the disciples are still a bit confused. John's statement is pregnant with meaning: "And it was night." Darkness has fallen.

- Jesus calls for love: John's biography records much of the conversation of the upper room. These words of Jesus are some of his most profound thoughts on the essence of the kingdom. Jesus makes it clear that his suffering is not his shame, but his glory. Public failure is not shameful when it flows from humble obedience to God. All that matters is what God thinks and what he is accomplishing. When our obedience to God results in something painful or difficult or hard to explain, the glory of God shines through. As Jesus says goodbye to his disciples, he also calls them to live the same kind of love that he poured into their lives. We love not with our own love but as an overflow of the love God pours into us. Only then can it truly be self-sacrificial love because God's perfect love secures our hearts and enables us to give, to love and to serve freely without needing anything back. It is this kind of agape, self-sacrificial love that is the stamp of God in us. This is how we stand out in a crowd and people know that God is working in us and through us.
- Peter makes a request: Peter doesn't understand Jesus saying he is going away and so he declares his loyalty to death. Again Peter thinks that there is going to be a battle in declaring war against the Romans. Jesus states that Satan's design and plan includes picking apart the disciples. Sifting wheat is an image that suggests carefully going through the details of their life and looking for what is wrong. This type of detailed fault-finding is the work of Satan. Here we see the contrast from the grace of God that accepts us as we are and looks to build us up in our weakness, Satan's work is to look for places to pick at us, attack us, criticize us, and tear us down. When we evaluate ourselves and others, do we bask in lavish grace or do we fault-find? Jesus prays now for Peter and will continue to pray for all of his followers as he will be resurrected to the right hand of the Father. Peter's faith will stumble (through denial) but will not fail (reject Christ). When he turns around (gets back on track) Jesus calls him to strengthen the faith of the other disciples. Although Peter still doesn't accept his own over-confidence, Jesus gives him a clear sign to indicate that indeed when he fails Jesus saw it coming. It is reassuring to know that God can see our failures coming and wants us to know that even though it is less than best, he is still the Lord of our successes and failures.
- Jesus to prepare a place: This teaching of Jesus is very interesting. Jesus uses the term for "my Father's house" in other words the temple to describe a new reality he is preparing. Let me rewrite this section with this notion of Jesus creating permanent places for the disciples in his Father's house. "Don't be upset. You can trust God and ME! There is lots of room in the Temple. I going there to prepare a permanent place for you in the temple. I will then come back and take you into ME! You know how to get there." Jesus is using this image of the disciples making the temple the place they can hang out permanently. How does this happen? By them being intimately united with Jesus even as Jesus is intimately united with his Father.
- Thomas wants to know the way: Thomas is confused. Peter is the bold but not bright one. Thomas just doesn't get it. Jesus' reply is profound: "I am the way, even the truth and the life." Jesus is the way into this permanent residency with God. Jesus is the path and this path is the path of truth and life. If you see Jesus, you see the Father. We see here how Jesus is

intentionally blurring all the lines. Jesus is welcoming the disciples into permanent intimate communion with God through him alone. They will no longer have to go to the temple to draw near to God but now God will live within them as they are filled with the Spirit at Pentecost and become the new living, organic temple of God. Talk about clearly shutting down the religious system and laying off the professional priesthood.

- Philip wants to see the Father: Jesus is the Father and the Father is Jesus. Again this would have been blasphemous but Jesus will not budge on this truth. His words are God speaking. His power is God's power. He and the Father are one. He is God with us. The divine with skin. This complete unity and oneness with the Father means that anyone who is friends with Jesus can ask him anything and he can then get the Father to respond. We are called to unity with Christ, loving obedience to his commands with the knowledge that he is partnering with us and will actually respond to anything we ask. Will he always say yes? No. He will not say yes to something that is destructive or second best. He will hear us and respond. When we align ourselves with his love and purposes, we then know we can ask boldly and he will pour his power and life into and through us.
- Jesus promises the Holy Spirit: How will we live in intimate communion with Jesus and the Father? The Holy Spirit will fill our lives and change us from the inside out. The Holy Spirit unites us with God permanently and transforms our lives into walking, talking, mobile temple units that go around and take God's sacred space to people. Rather than people going to God, God is going to people through us. We are the physical manifestation of God running to hug the prodigal son or heading out to the field to plead with the older brother. We not only share in his mission, we carry his presence wherever we go. What is the key? Living his commands of love. Again we see the connection between being changed inside out and fulfilling God's heart for our lives.
- Judas is puzzled: This brief exchange simply restates what has already been said. "Follow Jesus teaching (reject religion and embrace his Lordship and love), experience the Father's love, God's presence (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) will make their home in your heart."
- Jesus predicts his return: Jesus calls the Holy Spirit a counselor. This title again affirms the relational nature of God as the role of the Spirit is to talk to us or to help us receive the coaching, guidance and wisdom we need to make wise decisions. When you don't have a long list of rules to follow, you need a wise counselor to help you discern the right decisions case by case. The Spirit's role is to also teach us and remind us of everything Jesus taught. Remember nobody really had any copy of the Scriptures. They needed the Spirit to keep the truth fresh in their minds. We have the Scriptures but we often don't take time to read them. The Spirit is there to help keep us centered. Jesus then again reminds them that he is leaving, the devil is coming (or making his move), but God is in control and Jesus will return. The key for Jesus was doing exactly what the Father told him.
- Fulfillment of prophecy: Jesus now changes their marching orders. Previously when times were good they could carry the message and rely on people's good will and generosity to

care for their needs. They could travel light because of the popularity of Jesus' movement. Now they would be severely persecuted and they needed to be well prepared to handle being on the run. They now need to take money with them, a backpack with their basic needs, an extra cloak, and a small dagger to fight off the wild animals when they would have to travel alone or sleep outside at night. Jesus quotes Isaiah 53 and points out that the Messiah would be labeled a criminal. The disciples again don't get it. They think Jesus is asking how many daggers they have. His response? "Enough of this!" He is frustrated with their inability to understand the most basic things. Imagine facing your own torturous death and your closest friends not understanding anything you say. Jesus must have felt so alone.

- **The Mount of Olives:** This is the only time in Scripture it mentions Jesus singing a song, one of the hymns of the Psalms. Music played no real role in any of Jesus ministry. The focus of his life and teaching was not centered on musical prayer or worship. It's complete thrust was towards people living lives of love as worship to God.
- **Warning about forsaking:** Jesus quotes Zechariah 13:7 and again makes it plain about his death, resurrection and return to Galilee to meet the disciples. We see throughout the narrative Jesus is getting more and more specific. The disciples continue to translate what Jesus says through their own paradigm and as result don't get what he is saying. Christians can't be critical because the church has done this same thing for millennia. Christians read Jesus through our own religious mindsets and as a result don't actually grasp his most basic teachings.
- **Peter boasts loyalty:** Peter again declares his willingness to die for Jesus and Jesus again predicts his denial. Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves and he still loves us deeply, even when he knows we will blow it. The failure of the disciples and particularly Peter is captured for us so that we can understand the depth of God's understanding, love and grace for us. We don't earn his love but surprisingly we find ourselves embraced by his love even in all our short-comings, foolishness and failure. This is God's love and we see it most clearly in Jesus.