

Part 77: New Feast, New Sign, Full Hope

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I was thinking this week about the differences between traditions and habits. Habits, or rituals, are things we often do on our own. But traditions generally involve a broader group or culture. It roots season, identities, and stories not only to what is traditional, but to the group of people with which we celebrate.

A growing tradition in my house is the “Daddy Daughter Dance” with my three daughters. As we get dressed up, dolled up, and move on to dancing and dinner—I’m reminded of the beautiful joy and privilege of being their father—and my prayer is that the care and celebration they have with me reveals the love of their heavenly Father for them, and fits their eyes with a lens that rejects any man who treats them as objects or instruments.

You can ask the Leders about how their traditional “Buchenschlagen” reorients their home on Black Friday after the bustle of Thanksgiving. From wood chopping, to book reading, it reinforces the idea that we are not the sum of what we buy, but instead we learn to enjoy what God alone can give.

Whether it’s how you and your friends prepare for the first hunt, or your annual trip home for the holidays—traditions are powerful because it provides a group of diverse individuals a shared experience that makes sense of their reality and brings them a unique moment in an otherwise topsy-turvy world.

That’s why it’s often so painful when traditions change, when family members move away, or when seasons pass. The filmmaker Woody Allen once quipped: “Tradition is the illusion of permanence.” They feel permanent because of their power, but they never are—instead what’s permanent is the reality behind the symbol.

Today, in Luke 22, Jesus brings a long standing tradition to an end as he institutes a new tradition for God’s people. Yet even with this new celebration, Jesus reminds us that there is still a greater reality yet to come—a substance behind the symbol. As the Passover is fulfilled by the Lord’s Supper, so too, the Lord’s Supper will one day be overshadowed by the full reality of God’s kingdom.

If you’ve attended church before and wondered what is happening when Christians take the Lord’s Supper, today you will see why this is so important. Just as the Passover celebration made sense of Israel’s history, present moment and future hope—so too does the Lord’s Supper as it unites God’s people with the story of reality they share in Jesus Christ.

This is our main point today: **The Lord’s Supper reminds us of past promises, present realities and a future hope.** We are going to look at this in three ways today. First we are going to examine **The Old Sign** of the Passover, then we will see **The New Sign of the Lord’s Supper** and lastly we will remind ourselves of the **Present Realities** wrapped up in this act.

First, let's examine **The Old Sign: The Passover** feast.

When God instituted this feast in Exodus 12, he declared that the whole Jewish calendar would revolve around it. It was the first month of the year, and just as might countdown our year to Christmas and New Year's, the Jews did the same with the Passover.

Luke has been highlighting the centrality of the Passover in the timeline of Jesus' last days. If you have your Bible's open you'll notice that in chapter 22 verse one he says, "The Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near," then in verse 7 he says, "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread, on which the Passover Lamb had to be sacrificed." And now we pick up in verse 14: "And when the hour came." The hour of the Passover was here.

The actual feast of the Passover was a memorial meal. It walked the participants through the events of that dark but magnificent night where God delivered his people out of Egypt, from death, through the sacrifice of a substitute lamb.

A typical Jewish Passover Meal involved 15 different steps, and through tasting, touching and teaching it invited people into a participation of the Exodus story. They didn't merely hear of what God did to save their forefathers—through the wine, the bitter herbs, the unleavened bread they experienced God's grace. Like the best of all our traditions, it engaged all their senses.

And notice how Jesus himself talks about this Passover: **(Luke 22:15)**, "And he said to them, 'I have earnestly 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.'"

When you read the gospels, pay close attention to the emotional life of Jesus. Here we see something rather profound. He speaks of his emotional life in an emphatic way. In Greek it's actually the same word as both a descriptor and a verb. He's literally saying: "I have desirously desired."

We are often excited about traditions, but here is Jesus who is dripping with excitement for two reasons. The first is that he gets to eat it with his disciples. The second is that he knows he's eating before he suffers.

This will be, Jesus' final Passover meal. He will not eat of it again, not until he is gathered with all his people in the Kingdom of God. And it's here where Jesus begins to connect the dots between the Passover and his coming death on the cross.

We can't pick it up in English but there's a profound play on words here that underscores Jesus' sense of what is going on. He was excited to eat the **Passover (*pascha*) before he suffers (*pascho*)**. The true Passover lamb, the true *pascha* was giving way to the true passion (*pascho*) of the Lamb of God. The Passover and the Passion are connected.

But the cross and the Passover are not merely similar words—Jesus ties them to promise and fulfillment. Why will he not eat it again here? Because it is going to be fulfilled. Remember it was John the Baptist who introduced Jesus saying, **John 1:29** "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."

Jesus was going to lead a new Exodus by becoming the new lamb. The Passover, was being passed over. What God did on a small scale to bring Israel out of slavery through the lamb was the dress rehearsal for the opening night where God delivered all his people out of sin through Jesus.

Jesus reaffirms the passing nature of this feast when he takes the first ceremonial cup of the Passover meal: **(Luke 22:17-18)** "And he took the cup, and when he had given 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."

Though Jesus' commentary would have been unique, so far the Passover Meal has happened pretty traditionally. But at some point, Jesus seems to restart the feast anew—having given thanks for an old covenant he now moves on and gives thanks for a new covenant and new sign.

This is our second point: **The New Sign: The Lord's Supper.**

Hear the similarities and the dissimilarities in this new tradition: **(Luke 22:19-20)**, "And he took 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 likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.'"

There's an old wives tale that in order to secure a good marriage a bride is to wear on her wedding day, "something old, something new, something borrowed and something blue."

I'm not sure if we can glean anything borrowed or blue from this text, but Jesus is certainly setting up a new feast with something borrowed and something new. The new identity of God's people is built on the old pattern of the Passover, but it has a new source and therefore a new sign: the person and work of Jesus Christ.

If you've been with us on the first Sunday of any month, you've seen us take this meal together. It's gone by various names in church history. In the book of Acts it was called, "the breaking of the bread," taken from Jesus' actions in verse 19. By the time Paul wrote the letter of 1 Corinthians it was already being called, "The Lord's Supper" (1 Cor. 11:20), the early church in the decades following the New Testament began to call it "the eucharist" from the Greek verb "giving thanks" in verse 19. And later on, beginning in the Middle Ages, it began to be called "communion."

What it's called is less important than what it is. And here Jesus draws us to consider two aspects of it: its material and its memorial.

Its material is bread and wine. Over the years there has been no small amount of controversy about the elements themselves, but for the most part it's always been some type of bread and something red (whether wine, wine mixed with water, or grape juice). These two elements would have been the staple supplies of Middle Eastern life. It was in this sense, an ordinary meal.

But what the materials stood in memorial of is anything but ordinary. Though they are to eat and to drink the imperative Jesus gives is to do this in remembrance of him. The mind, not the mouth is prioritized.

Jesus gives us these connections: the bread is representative of Christ's body being given for you, the cup is new covenant poured out for you, in his blood. At this last supper, Jesus is so aware of the significance of this moment that he uses the present tense: the body is being broken for them, the blood is being poured out for them. This new covenant Jesus spoke of was happening live as they ate and drank.

Right now, across Jerusalem the Passover lambs were being presented for confirmation of their purity before they would be sacrificed. But no one asked the lambs. The lambs had their life taken from them. But here, the true Passover lamb, spotless and without blemish, is having his life taken by no one. He is giving his body, he is pouring out his blood.

Why? For you. Just as the Jews needed the body of and blood of the lamb, we need the body and blood of Jesus. Why? Because we need a new covenant before God. We need a new tradition, a new set of assurance and belonging.

Because God is the creator—every aspect of his interaction with us began with his will and desire. That's why the Bible shows us that the primary way in which he relates to his people is through a covenant. It's how he grants access of those who are not God into a relationship with God. But because of Adam and Eve's sin—the majority of God's covenants with his people had to account for the sin of humanity.¹

Because our sin demanded our death, God's covenants had to deal with the reality of death. In the Old Covenant this was the role of the Passover Lamb and the continual priestly sacrifices. God says in **Leviticus 17:11**, "For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life." Moses called this blood, "the blood of the covenant" (Ex. 24:8).

But because bulls and goats didn't sin—humans did—this covenant was a place holder for a New Covenant, a new tradition, a new badge of belonging. He speaks of it this way in **Jeremiah 31:31-34**.

It is through this new covenant that God says in **Zechariah 9:11**, "... because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit."

If you were to attend a Jewish Passover feast today, you'd see a cup in the middle that reserved for Elijah. They are still waiting on the return of the prophet-messiah. Many times they will have an egg instead of a lamb's leg to symbolize that they are still waiting on the final Passover sacrifice.

But when Jesus says, "this is the new covenant in my blood," he's showing us with certainty that the lamb has come. For those who have faith in the blood of this Passover lamb—we know our problem of sin has been paid in full. There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, for as Paul says in 1 Corinthians, "Christ, our Passover Lamb has been sacrificed."

And now we can return in staggering wonder at Jesus' affections. Despite all of this—despite what this covenant will cost him, despite the piercing of his body, and the spilling of his blood, he was desirously desiring this feast. Why? For the cross was his joy.

B.B. Warfield says it best: **"Joy he had: but it was not the shallow joy of mere pagan delight in living, nor the delusive joy of a hope destined to failure; but the deep exultation of a conqueror setting captives free. This joy underlay all his sufferings and shed its light along the whole thorn-beset path which was trodden by his torn feet...If our Lord was 'The Man of Sorrows,' he was more profoundly still, 'The Man of Joy.'"**

¹ The covenant structure of the Bible is generally agreed upon to be six-fold: Creation (Gen. 1-3), Noahic (Gen. 6-9), Abrahamic (Gen. 12, 15, 17, 22), Mosaic (Ex. 19-24), Davidic (2 Sam. 7), New (Jer. 31-34, Ezk. 33-36)

Now, as beautiful and poignant as this moment was it takes an abrupt turn here doesn't it. Like many of our family gatherings, things can get awkward really quick: **(Luke 22:21-23)**, "'But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed.' And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this."

Here we begin to examine the continual realities behind this supper. While the event of the Passover and the Passion lay in our review mirror, there are still present realities that need to be worked out. This is our third point this morning: **Present Realities**.

Even for the disciples, life at Jesus' table was still contested. At that table there were three types of people: a sinner dishonest about his faith, faithful disciples honest about their potential sinfulness, and the True Lamb who will sort out everything in the end.

The Lord's Supper reminds us that this world is filled with realities we do not know, but it also reminds us of the certainty and determined plan of God in Jesus Christ. That's what any good tradition does, it orients us and brings us peace in a world that often feels chaotic. That's the beauty of a covenant.

So what are the present realities we are reminding ourselves of when we take the Lord's Supper together? I want to touch on five basic assumptions we ought to bear in mind as we take the Lord's Supper.

First, it reminds us of **One Sacrifice**. When we take the bread and the cup, we remember Jesus' wonderful affirmation: "It is finished."

This is one way in which faithful Protestants break fellowship with the Roman Catholic Church. If you grew up in a Catholic Church you may have heard the significance of communion talked about in different ways. The Catholic Church does not believe that Christ's sacrifice is alone sufficient to make sinners righteous. Instead, it teaches that you must continue to take the elements as a means of adding more righteousness and more grace to your life. They believe that the elements become in a real way, Christ's body and blood, as a perpetual mass or sacrifice.

But when we take it, we do not think it magically or mysteriously changes us because Christ has already changed us. The author of Hebrews says it this way: **Hebrews 10:10**, "And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

If you're someone who wrestles with assurance, when you take this bread and cup, you are taking assurance. Jesus did it. He paid it all. And we worship at his divine power to atone for our sins.

Second, it reminds us of **One Faith**. How do we gain access to the sacrificial power of Jesus? Not by eating, but by believing. Paul calls the Lord's Supper, "participation in Christ." And there is only one way we participate with Christ and that is by faith.

This is a meal for believers. If you're not a believer, you don't need a snack, you need a savior. We are not saved by what our mouth consumes but by what our mouth confesses. Take Christ by faith.

Writing in the early 100's B.C. Justin Martyr reminds us that this has always been the practice of the church. He says, **"No one is allowed to partake but the man who believes that the things we teach are true, [who is baptized], and who is living as Christ has enjoined him."**

So here we see another reality of the Lord's Supper. It reminds us of **One Life**. Martyr said the supper is for those who wish to live as Christ has enjoined him. It is after all, a covenant meal. God fed the people the Passover meal so that they might follow him to the Promise Land. God feeds us the Lord's Supper so that we might follow Jesus in our own life.

When we eat it we are reminded that the gospel gives us spiritual calories to live as Christians. Zwingli, a Swiss reformer called the Lord's Supper, **"...a demonstration of allegiance...by which someone proves to the church that he either intends to be or already is a soldier of Christ, and which informs the whole church, rather than himself, of his faith."**

We live for Jesus, but we also don't live alone. This is fourth reality: The Lord's Supper reminds us that we are **One Body**.

I remember when Sarah and I got married we had communion at our wedding. However, as grew in my understanding of scripture, I realized that communion is not a private act—it's a church act. It's not a "me" and Jesus thing, it's a "we" and Jesus thing.

Paul says that the Lord's Supper is to be taken when the Corinthian church gathers. Why? He tells us in **1 Corinthians 10:17**, "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

There are two ongoing signs Jesus gives to the church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. It's been said that in baptism the one is joined to the many, and in the Lord's Supper the many are made one.

If you look at the language Jesus is using here in Luke 22, he's giving this meal to his disciples because he's not going to be there with them. This is what his disciples are supposed to do together while they wait for Jesus to return. Jesus designed this to be a reminder of what makes and sustains his church.

This is why we typically say that the Lord's Supper is for those who have been baptized. In the book of Acts the breaking of bread follows those who were baptized and joined the church, and throughout church history baptism was how one joined the membership of the church and it was only baptized individuals who would be allowed to take the Lord's Supper.

When we eat this we are reminded of how the gospel brings us together. Actually, in the early church the services where the Lord's Supper was taken was often called, "A love feast." It was a wonderful display of Jesus' love for the church, the church's love for Jesus, and the church's love for one another. The Corinthian church is rebuked by Paul not only because they forgot what the Lord's Supper was, but they forgot who they were to take it with: the whole church.

Augustine encourages us with this, **"Remember that bread is not made from one grain but from many...So too with the wine. Brothers and sisters, just remind yourselves what wine is made from; many grapes hang in the bunch, but the juice of the grapes is poured together into one vessel. That too is how the Lord Christ signified us, how he wished us to belong to him, how he consecrated the sacrament of our peace and unity on his table."**

But as Judas reminds us, though the table is for those who have publically identified with Christ, it's not yet a perfect table. We have believers who sin, and sinners who falsely claim to be believers.

But in this we are reminded of our last reality: ***One Hope***.

Remember, Jesus said he would not drink of the fruit of the vine until he returns again. Paul encourages the Corinthian church by saying, that **(1 Corinthians 11:26)**, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Jesus is coming back. What's interesting is that Jesus does return in resurrected glory and he visits the disciples. We see he eats bread with some on the road to Emmaus. We also see him eat fish in John. But he never drinks wine.

Wine was the drink of celebration, and there remains for Jesus, a final celebration. As he desirously desired to eat this meal with his disciples, he is desirously desiring to eat another with us in glory.

One day, the table is fixed. One day, even this tradition will be swallowed up. It may seem that this life will go on forever. But remember, tradition is only the illusion of permanence.

One day, we get a better feast. Read with me **Revelation 19:6-9**.