

## **Maundy Thursday 2006 Luke 22:14-30**

### **Pastor Brad Smith**

Tonight we remember, and in a way we reenact the Last Supper. The Last Supper is so important that it appears in all four of the Gospels. Although each Gospel writer includes the event, each has a slightly different emphasis. Let us hear the story of the Last Supper from the Gospel of Luke. I will read it from the J.B. Phillips translation. We will pick up after the preparations have been made, and Jesus is seated in the Upper Room, together with his disciples. [Read Luke 22:14-30.]

If you think of the Last Supper as a tapestry or an embroidery, then you can say that it is created from two very different types of thread. The first thread is dull and gray. It adds nothing to the loveliness of the tapestry. That first thread is the disciples and their response to Jesus at this critical moment in his life and ministry.

Jesus knew that only a few hours remained of his earthly life. For three years he had loved his disciples, served them, taught them, and modeled for them what it meant to be citizens of the Kingdom of God. It seemed that they had learned nothing. Jesus needed encouragement at this moment. He needed to know that his teaching had taken root, and that his disciples would be able to convey it and live it faithfully as his representatives in the world. But all they could do was to argue about who was the greatest. John in his Gospel recounts their stubborn refusal to serve one another, and even to serve their Lord Jesus, through the simple act of washing feet.

It gets worse in the following verses and chapters. Judas betrays Jesus, and Peter denies him. Almost the whole apostolic band deserts him. When he rises from the dead, exactly as he had promised, his disciples don't believe the women who bring the wonderful news.

So that is the first thread. A dull, worn thread. It has no loveliness in itself, but it does serve to highlight the other thread that makes up the tapestry. It is a golden thread, a shining thread. It is the thread that overshadows the gray thread and makes the whole tapestry a beautiful, desirable work of art. That second thread is Jesus, and his response to the disciples.

Did you notice Jesus' amazing words at the beginning and at the end of this passage? He starts by saying, "With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you before the time comes for me to suffer." Why was that? I don't think the answer is anything particularly mysterious. He liked them. It gave him pleasure to be around his friends. Passover was normally a joyous celebration, and his joy increased when he was around his friends.

This particular Passover was a difficult one for Jesus, because he knew what would soon happen to him. Grief and pain are more bearable when you are around friends.

Most of you know that I just came back from Venezuela, where we lived from the late 80s to the mid 90s. This trip was not for touring, but to see people that I knew. I had every imaginable kind of conversation. Some of my friends were doing well. They were growing and enthusiastic in their faith. Others were disillusioned with their experience with the church, or in a couple of cases with their divorces, and were still processing what had happened. One lady was flat out angry and needed to vent. Another man had ugly areas of sin in his life that needed to be dealt with. Some conversations were long. Some were just a brief time of getting caught up.

I was grateful for each one of those interactions; long or short, joyous or sad. My trip would have been diminished if I had missed even one of them. And in fact I did miss out on seeing a couple of people whom I had hoped to get together with. It was a bit of a disappointment. Why? Because they were my friends.

I think that Jesus' experience of the Last Supper would have been diminished if even one of the disciples had not been present. We often think of Jesus as our friend. We think of the hymn, "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear." We think of him as the one who is interested in us, who cares for us, who has time for us. And of course Jesus is our friend, and all those things are true about him. But as far as I know, Jesus never directly says in the Gospels that he is our friend. Instead, he says that we are his friends.

Do you catch the difference? It is not just that we can go to him, but that he can come to us. It is not just that we would miss him if he were not with us, but that he would miss us! What an amazing thought that the Lord and

Creator of the universe would miss us if we weren't around to spend time with him.

Listen to the wonderful affirmation Jesus gives to his frail, foolish disciples of the first century, and by implication to his frail, foolish disciples of the twenty-first century.

“But you are those who have stood by me in all that I have gone through, and as surely as my Father has given me my kingdom, so I give you the right to eat and drink at my table in that kingdom. Yes, you will sit on thrones and judge the twelve tribes of Israel!”

He does not say that they have been perfect, or wise, or mature, or that they even had much understanding of him and of his message. But they had hung around, and that was enough. You often hear about the ministry of presence, by which we mean that it is worth a lot simply to be with a person, even if you do not have anything much you can say to him or to her.

But have you ever thought that we can actually minister to Jesus by our presence? Sometimes our prayer time seems fragmented and unfocused. We don't feel like we accomplished much. But maybe Jesus simply liked having us around. I sometimes take communion to hospitalized and to homebound people. In one case a woman cried for joy, but generally it is a fairly routine experience for me and for those who receive the Supper. But maybe Jesus is really glad to have us around.

We will soon partake of the Lord's Supper with each other and with Jesus. Let's not worry if it does anything for us, but trust by faith that Jesus is actually pleased to have us around as his friends, as guests at his table.