

# Sermon

## Sunday, November 26, 2017

Charleston, SC

Year A ~ 8:00 am, 9:30 am, & 10:30 am Sermon ~ Isaiah 25:6-9, Luke 22:14-23

*The Meal Above All Meals: Part of the Come to the Table Fall Sermon Series*

The Rev. David Booman

A week ago I returned from mission in India. Now you should know that I'm a homebody at heart. I could live in my pajamas for months at a time. And so this was the first overseas trip I'd ever taken. But I thought 'why not jump in the deep end and start with Calcutta?'

And our team had a marvelous time. Under the wise leadership of Jean and Johnny Corbett and Bishop Dutta, we did the kind of ministry that can change lives and communities and nations. And it was humbling to be part of it.

And so I do want to thank you for your prayers. They were needed and they were felt. As I mentioned last week, India is not the safest place in the world. A lot of wild stuff goes on there. And so we had guys with AK-47s guarding us at several events.

However the greatest danger in India may actually be the driving. Driving in India is like driving on Bohicket Rd—if your wife is having a baby in the backseat, if you have to pass 50 semis to get to the hospital, and if every few miles there's a herd of cows on the road. And so again, thank you for your prayers!

I mentioned cows and I should note that it wasn't just cows. There are tons of animals in India. Dogs prowling on every street corner, goats foraging in trash heaps. Motorcycles driving around with live chickens hanging from the handlebars. Huge monkeys wandering downtown Calcutta, and mongooses exploring the courtyard of our hotel.

And for every animal it seems there is a human being. India is one of the most densely populated countries on earth. Over 1,000 people per square mile. To put that in perspective, China has less than half that density only 400 people a mile and the US less than a tenth with only 90.

I share all of this, because 21<sup>st</sup> century India is a lot like 1<sup>st</sup> century Jerusalem. Jerusalem then would have been a noisy, chaotic, dirty place, especially around the time of Passover. Historians suggest that every Passover hundreds of thousands, possibly millions of pilgrims descended on the city.

Just imagine a few hundred thousand tourists coming to Charleston—BUT with no running water, no indoor plumbing, and no Department of Transportation.

And so it's in the heart of this chaotic scene that Jesus hosts the Last Supper. And after he gathers the disciples, what are the first words out of His mouth? 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you.'

Imagine that. God himself, the king of the universe, dwelling in light inaccessible. 'I've been looking forward to eating this passover with you.' In this sweaty, stinky, chaotic city.

You know, sometimes we wonder, 'what is the heart of God?' But in scripture we don't have to wonder. The heart of God has always been to *be with his people*. Emanuel, God with us. And on the last night of his life, when Jesus could have been preoccupied with so many things. What does He say, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you.'

And then Jesus continues, 'I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.' And he says the same thing in verse 18, 'I won't drink the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.'

Now this is interesting, because the primary focus of the Passover was to remember the past, when God delivered His people from Egypt.

And yet here, Jesus is also looking to the future kingdom. Before he offers the bread or the wine, he tells his disciples, 'This is it boys. This is our last meal for a long time. BUT

God's kingdom is coming, and one day, we will feast together again.'

Very likely Jesus looks to the future both for himself and for his disciples. So that they may endure what is to come. 'For the joy set before him,' Hebrews tells us, 'Jesus endured the cross.' And Jesus knows that in a few short hours, his disciples are going to be the most strung out, grief-stricken people on the planet. They're going to feel like that the world has gone completely off the rails.

And so Jesus' emphasis on the kingdom of God means *there's still someone at the wheel*. In spite of appearances, God's plan and purposes will be accomplished.

Now it might not always feel this way. If your life is like mine it often feels like things are completely out of control.

It reminds me when you have a baby in a carseat. They're turned around backwards, they can't see out the window, is it any wonder they scream like banshees? Imagine how disorienting that must be?

And I think spiritually we go through life in a similar fashion. All we feel is a lot of disorienting movement. We can't see out the window. We can't see the destination. And we can't always see the one who is driving.

So Jesus prepares his disciples for disorientation by pointing them to the kingdom of God. Whatever tomorrow holds (and its going to be a day of darkness and doom) one day we're going to have another meal like this one in the kingdom of God.

And finally, having set the stage in these cosmic, kingdom terms, Jesus offers them bread. 'He took bread, and when he'd 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.'

What does the bread signify? Pretty much everything! Bread is basic to life itself. Bread is irreducible sustenance. This is why Jesus told his disciples to pray for 'daily bread' when asking God for their daily needs. 'I am the bread of life,' Jesus said. That is, I am *everything* you need. If you have me you have everything. If you don't have me, you have nothing.

I'm reminded of a story the missionary Simon Guillebaud shared with us last year. He was in a refugee camp in Burundi, and he met a man who'd seen his wife and children hacked to death with machetes. And yet still he had joy. And this is what the man said: 'I never realized that Jesus is all I need, until Jesus was all I had.'

I saw this in India. I saw it at St. Michael's Safe House, where 21 girls under the age of 11 have been rescued from human trafficking. These girls have nothing. Not only are many of them orphans, but they've suffered in one of the darkest pits of hell on this planet. And yet in their smiles, I saw radiant evidence that Jesus really is all we need. And that Jesus brings healing we wouldn't think possible.

What is it that keeps us in America from knowing this too? I think in many ways our modern world insulates us from our mortality. We don't have to see it. We don't have to think about it. It's no longer a part of everyday life. Today, when someone dies we don't lay them out on the kitchen table. We whisk them off to the funeral home as quickly as possible. Out of sight, out of mind.

And so we don't think a lot about our own weakness, and vulnerability. We don't allow ourselves to experience how needy we are. But the truth is you and I are just as needy as those girls in the safe house. Our lives are just as fragile. All it takes is one drunk driver, one grim diagnosis, to realize how little control we really have.

And so Jesus is saying, rather than fighting the fear and insecurity, allow yourself to feel it. Your neediness. And then allow me to be everything. Because my grace is sufficient. My grace is the only thing in this world you can bank on. And this bread represents the abundance of my life, given for you.

Next Jesus offers the cup. Verse 22. 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.' You know, we've become so accustomed to this language, what does it really mean? What is the New Covenant in His blood?

Well first, it may be worth looking at the Old Covenant. In Exodus 24 the people of Israel have made it out of Egypt. God rescued them in the first Passover. He's led them through the Red Sea. He's provided bread from heaven for them to eat. And finally they come to Mount Sinai.

And here God makes a covenant with His people. He promises to protect them and bless them and to be their God. And the people promise to keep God's commandments.

And in verse 6 the covenant is sealed with blood. Oxen are slaughtered and their blood is gathered up in two large golden basins. Moses throws one basin of blood on the altar and he throws the other basin of blood on the people. And he says, 'Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you.' Imagine that, coming to church and getting a bucket of warm blood in the face.

But the really amazing thing is what happens next. After the covenant is sealed. Verse 9: 'Then Moses and Aaron and seventy of the elders of Israel went up [the mountain] and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness...they beheld God, and ate and drank.'

Without question this is the most astonishing meal in the OT. Flowing from a covenant relationship, the leaders of Israel actually see God and share a meal with him.

So do you get a sense of what this is all about? In the Bible from beginning to end, God's desire is to be with his people. But a relationship with God requires two things: it requires commitment and it requires cleansing.

So any real relationship requires commitment. You ever dated someone who wasn't into commitment? Not a whole lot of fun.

But secondly, to be in the presence of God requires cleansing. If we're not purified and we try to enter God's Holy presence, we'll be consumed like dross in a blast furnace. We need to be cleansed of our sin.

And so in Exodus 24 the people commit themselves to God. They are then cleansed with the blood of the oxen, and God thus welcomes them to a feast in His visible presence.

The problem of course, is that this covenant is not enough. Because right after this, the people go back *down* the mountain and sin with the golden calf. We human beings are simply not able to uphold our end of the covenant.

And so throughout the OT there's a promise and a longing for a New Covenant. One that will enable God's people to truly dwell with him.

And so we come to the Last Supper. When Jesus says, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you,' He's not only expressing his love for his friends, but he's also expressing the heart of God the Father. Who for thousands of years has been longing to be in relationship with His people.

But how will this new covenant be any different from the old one? Because *this* time the human side of the covenant will be upheld. Not because *we* suddenly become moral, but because Jesus will keep the human side of the covenant for us. He will live the perfect human life, and He will represent us before the Father.

And then secondly, on the cross Jesus will provide a better sacrifice than oxen. Once and for all, his shed blood will cleanse a world of sin. Tearing apart the curtain which divided God from man, and leading us—his brothers and sisters—into the presence of Father.

Yes, Jesus here provides a meal unlike all others. The Last Supper is a *fulfillment* of that amazing fellowship on Mt. Sinai, and it is a *foretaste* of an even greater meal yet to come, the Supper of the Lamb, when God's kingdom comes in glory. When in the new heavens and the new earth, 'The dwelling place of God will be with man. God will dwell with them, and they will be his people.'

In Revelation 3 Jesus says, 'Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.' My friends, Jesus is still standing at the door and knocking, wanting to sup with us.

And when we come to the Lord's Supper, and *remember* what He has done for us, in a mysterious but profound way, He abides in us and we in him.

And so today as we come to the table, may we throw open wide the doors of our hearts, may we welcome Jesus in, and may we may taste and see that the Lord is good.

For Jesus' sake. Amen.