

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH

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SERMON: *The Passover Meal*

SERIES: *Resurrection*

SCRIPTURES: *Matthew 26*

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**Credit to Tim Mackie (Bible Project); NT Wright;*

Well good morning and welcome to Five Forks Church. It is so good to worship with you today, everybody here in the room and also to those of you tuning into the livestream. And before get into the message today we actually have a special occasion. I'd like to invite the Belella family up onto the stage...well, not the whole Belella family. But LB, Stacey, Lily (?) and Enzo.

Dedication for Enzo Belella.

Hey if you have your Bible please turn with me today to Matthew 26.

Throughout the month of March. We have been on this journey with Jesus, through his Easter week events. Preparing for **Resurrection (Series Graphic)** Sunday, now just two weeks away.

NT Wright, one of the great New Testament Biblical scholars of our day says, we tend to get the emphasis of our Christian calendar slightly mixed up. For us, Christmas has become the climax of the calendar. But truth is, in the Gospels if you remove the Christmas story you lose only a couple of chapters. But if you remove Easter week and the stories of the resurrection of Jesus, you eliminate almost all of the Gospels, all of Paul's writing, you lose most of the New Testament. The resurrection of Jesus is what we are hanging on our hats on.

And so in this series that's kind of what we are building towards, the Resurrection event. And we've been following the events as described by one of Jesus' disciples... Matthew.

Today we want to talk about the significance of a particular meal that takes place during Easter week. Often referred to as...

I. The Last Supper

During Easter week, Jesus takes the most significant Jewish meal and tweaks it in such a way as to reorient the meaning of the meal around himself and the nature of his Kingdom.

Matthew 26:17-19 - ¹⁷ On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

¹⁸ He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" ¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

So, if you remember Jesus has come to Jerusalem during Jewish Passover celebrations. This is the central event of the Jewish calendar. This is a 7-day festival. We talked about the tens of thousands of Jews that would migrate to Jerusalem for this special occasion. And one of the most important events during the week is a special meal called,

A. The Passover Meal.

Kind of like we think of Turkey and stuffing and mashed potatoes at Thanksgiving.

It is known by a couple of names. One is, **Passover**. Another name for it, is the **feast of unleavened bread** and we'll talk about why that is, in just a moment. Or some of you in here may have participated in something called a **Seder meal**. All referring to this particular meal held as the culmination of the Passover celebration.

The meal commemorates the central story, the turning point of the history, of the Jewish people. It is intended to help the Jews remember and reflect upon their history and identity as a people and God's faithfulness to them. Particularly recalling how they were slaves in Egypt for 400 years. And then God intervened, rescuing them from slavery. The 10 plagues and crossing the Red Sea and through the desert to the Promised Land.

And last of the 10 plagues is what gave rise to the Passover Meal. God gave the people of Israel instructions, telling them to pick out a lamb and kill it and then this is from...

Exodus 12 - ...Then brush some of the blood above the door and on the posts at each side of the door of your house. After this, everyone is to stay inside.

²³ During that night the LORD will go through the country of Egypt and kill the first-born son in every Egyptian family. He will see where you have put the blood, and he will not come into your house. His angel that brings death will pass over and not kill your first-born sons.

Now, I just want to acknowledge how gruesome this sounds. If you're a church person, it is easy to dismiss or overlook the violent nature of this story. *"Hey these were the evil Egyptians, enslaving God's favorite people and so somehow this is justifiable."* For me personally that explanation doesn't satisfy the mass killing of every first-born son in these Egyptian families. The Egyptian's are real human beings, with little babies just like the little babies we hold and cuddle and to whom belong the Kingdom of the heavens. And there are all kinds of theological explanations and

conversations in how you go about making sense of passages like this. Getting into all of that, is not our purpose today. But just to say, if this kind of story bothers you...I think that's ok and I resonate with you.

However, we go about making sense of this story, it was on this night that the Israelites escaped their bondage in Egypt and began their journey to the Promised Land. And so, since that time, Jews have celebrated this occasion every year by re-enacting the Passover meal. To this day, Jews still celebrate this meal. Which means, that the Passover has been taking place for about 3000 years.

And we do these kinds of commemorative things as well...does anyone know who **this is (PIC)?** An important figure from our US history.

On September 13th in 1814, British Naval ships launched a naval attack on **Fort McHenry (PIC)**. And for 24 hours, bombarded the fort with mortar shells and rockets. Hoping to break through the fort's defenses. But as many of you know the next morning the fort still stood, a massive US flag was raised above the fort as a symbol that the British troops would not break through.

And this gentleman by the name of Francis Scott Key was in the harbor hearing cannon fire and the explosions. After the hours of bombardment and the fear that the British would overtake the fort, Key awoke to the sight of the US flag still flying over the fort. That morning he wrote the beginnings of a poem about this event.

That would eventually be turned into a song, that we know today as "Star Spangled Banner." That song, that anthem, has become, for us, one way of commemorating that most significant event.

For the Jews, it wasn't an anthem, it was a meal.

That's what Jesus and his disciples are participating in the night before his crucifixion. And what Jesus does is **he takes this meal and the symbolism associated with it and gives it new meaning and reorients the meal around himself.**

And so, I just want to describe some of the symbolism taking place at the Last Supper and how Jesus begins to change it's meaning and why it's still part of our Easter celebrations to this day.

Three symbols in particular...first,

1. Dipping in the bowl...

Matthew 26 - ²⁰ When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹ And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." ²² They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"

Now there is a bit of irony here. Who is going to betray Jesus? Judas, yes. And in some ways, he get's a bad rap, much of it deserved. But actually, and here's a bit of the irony, if you think about it for a moment, think about this question again...who sitting around that table is going to betray Jesus? All of them are, every single one of them is going to abandon, betray, turn their back on Jesus! Just about 30 verses later when Jesus is arrested in the Garden, Matthew says...

Matthew 26:56 - Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

We'll come back to that in a few minutes.

But, in this case, Judas in particular is the one who collaborates to hand Jesus over.

23 Jesus replied, “The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me.

25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, “Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?” Jesus answered, “You have said so.”

So, what you need to know is that in the Jewish Passover meal, there are these different courses. And one of the first courses is called **the dipping of the Karpas (IMAGE)**. This is where a lettuce leaf, usually, or some other leafy green vegetable is dipped in vinegar or some kind of salt water solution.

Umm...as I was thinking about this whole dipping idea, I remember back many years ago when Jenny and I first started dating. I remember going to her house for a meal. And her Grandfather who they called, Pap. Had this, I’ll call it a weird tradition, of welcoming new people. I think this was his own thing, I’ve never heard of anyone else ever doing this. But he called “yole.” I had just grabbed a piece of chocolate cake with Peanut Butter icing. I was getting ready to dig in and Pap, took his finger, raised it high in the air above my caked and then dipped it right down into the center of my cake and he said “yole.” In this case, he was dipping his finger into my chocolate cake. But it made feel like I was part of the family. So we have tried to carry that tradition on in our home, and if you’re looking for a way to have some fun with your own family...there you go, Yole!

For the Jews the dipping of the karpas carries great symbolism.

This portion of the Passover meal is reenacting the story of Joseph and his brothers. Bill told us this story just a few weeks ago when we talked about the humility of Judah. **Jacob** who becomes **Israel** had **12 sons**. **Judah** is one of those sons and **Joseph** is one of those sons. And you remember how Joseph was not liked by his brothers because he was daddy’s favorite. And so the brother’s stripped Joseph of

his multi-color dream coat and sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt. But they didn't want to tell their father what they had done.

And so, what did they do with his coat? They took a young goat and slaughtered it and they dipped his coat in blood (Genesis 37). To fool his father, Jacob, into believing that he had been killed by a wild animal.

The event that began the story of the family of Israel, finding themselves enslaved in Egypt, was **the betrayal** of Joseph **by his 11 brothers** and symbolized by **the dipping of his coat in blood**, just as the event that will lead to the Messiah's death on a cross was **the betrayal** of Jesus by Judas and the abandonment of **his 11 closest followers** and remembered by **the dipping of the Karpas** at Passover.

Do you see how Jesus is taking this most familiar symbol and reorienting it around himself?

You can be certain that these young Jewish men, eating with Jesus this night, would never dip the karpas in the same way ever again.

Jesus is like the master teacher. He's taking this symbol that his disciples are all familiar with and engrained in their society and lifestyle and he's giving it new significance for them.

Ok, let's continue...what about

2. The Bread

Matthew 26 - ²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples,

So, another one of the courses of the traditional Passover meal is **unleavened bread**. Remember this is called the Festival of Unleavened Bread.

Now, what ingredient is missing that makes bread unleavened? That's right, **yeast**. Unleavened means **bread (PIC)** that didn't rise, bread that is flat because it doesn't have any yeast in it.

Why do the Israelites eat unleavened bread to commemorate the night they fled from Egypt?

Well, think about it, if you put yeast in dough...does it just immediately blow up like a balloon? No, it can take a couple of hours for the dough to rise.

So the point of the unleavened bread is that the Israelites ate the very first Passover meal hurriedly, as they were preparing to flee from captivity Egypt. This is again from Exodus 12...the killing angel is killing the first born in Egypt and look at verse 31...

³¹ During the night Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said, “Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go...³³ The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country...³⁴ So the people took their dough before the yeast was added, and carried it on their shoulders in kneading troughs wrapped in clothing.

There was no time to sit around and allow the dough to rise. And so again there is great symbolism tied up in the unleavened bread at Passover. Jesus takes that familiar symbol and once again he re-defines it for his disciples at the Last Supper.

Jesus takes bread and breaks it and he says, “You are eating my body!”

And again, pay attention to the symbolism.

What do you do with dough in order to make bread? You mash it, you knead it, you roll it out...and then when it is ready, you put it in the fire, in an oven. Then once it is baked you take it out and eat! And eating that baked bread, give you sustenance...it is life-giving to you.

Jesus is saying that his own body is going to be whipped, beaten, mashed, broken. And he'll be thrown into his own furnace. But that somehow his broken body is going to become a source of life and sustenance for those who choose to follow him.

You can be certain that these young Jewish men, eating with Jesus this night, would never eat the unleavened bread of the Passover meal the same way ever again.

Ok, one more important symbol from the Passover meal. Near the end of the Passover meal, the main entrée would be served and what's the main entrée?

3. The Lamb.

(PIC of Lamb)

And, if you were thinking ahead, you've probably been wondering, since we started the message today...you know, don't you, that there is no Lamb at the Last supper that Jesus shares with his disciples. After the bread...we read...

Matthew 26 - ²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the^[b] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

So there's this **cup (PIC)**. And in the traditional Jewish Passover, there would actually be four cups. Each filled with wine. Which is why some church traditions, use wine during communion, we use grape juice here at Five Forks. But four cups of wine, which are drunk before each of the courses of the meal. And so when Jesus refers to the cup, he's referring to these cups of wine.

But, it's like, "*Jesus...you forgot the most important part of the meal. Where's the lamb (pic of lamb)?*"

Remember the last act of judgement on Egypt, on the night of Passover was that every first born in Egypt would die. But God provided a way out...the Passover Lamb. And so anybody, Israelite or not, could take the blood of that lamb and sprinkle it on the door frame of their house. And then anybody in the house who has blood on the doorposts, is spared. The people were saved by the blood of the lamb.

But the Last Supper has no Lamb. Did Jesus forget the most important part of the meal? Not likely. Instead Jesus, raises a cup to bless this next part of the meal and then in a sense leaves the meal incomplete...unfinished...on purpose, why?

Well, because in less than 24 hours Jesus himself is going to become the Passover Lamb, whose blood will be shed, in order to save all of humanity.

Jesus is taking a familiar symbol, the blood of the lamb, and he is reorienting that symbol around himself.

You can be certain that these young Jewish men, eating with Jesus this night, would never eat the lamb of the Passover meal the same way ever again.

B. Why a meal?

Gathering around a table to share a meal is one of those things that distinguishes human beings from all other creatures. Did you know that?

Sharing tables is one of the most uniquely human things we do. No other creature consumes its food at a table. And sharing tables with other people reminds us that there's more to food than fuel. (Jones)

He could explain this logically. You would think for what he is about to do, he would have spoken more about it or even written it down. But, you could fit on one page, the words Jesus spoke to explain the significance and meaning of his death.

But instead what he does is take this practice, a meal, eating something we humans have to do every single day in order to survive and a particular commemorative meal, that has been taking place for 1000 years already, that woven into the fabric of Jewish culture and worldview and he reshapes it around himself and his own death and resurrection.

N. T. Wright says, **“When Jesus himself wanted to explain to his disciples what his forthcoming death was all about, he didn’t give them a theory, he gave them a meal.”**

Why a meal? Two reasons.

1. Meals helps us to remember.

The Passover meal was instituted as a way for the Jews to remember their history and identity as a people.

Exodus 12 - ¹⁴ “This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as...a lasting ordinance.

And the Apostle Paul says communion becomes a way of remembering for us...

1 Corinthians 11 - “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”... “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.

Every day, more than once a day, you will sit and eat a meal. There is no other way to sustain yourself. And so every meal becomes a reminder of your dependence on the life of Jesus whose body was broken and blood shed to give you life.

We need this reminder because we humans are a forgetful bunch. The temptations and frustrations and busy-ness of our lives leads us to forget which Kingdom we belong to. And because we forget, we betray and abandon Jesus and his way of life. It's like, we also dip the karpas with Judas.

Whenever we lose our temper in anger, it's because we have forgotten we belong to Jesus Kingdom.

Whenever we consume more than our fair share of resources we have forgotten that we belong to Jesus Kingdom.

Every time we harbor bitterness about another person, every time we lust, every time we put our sense of security in material items or the powers of this world, every time we choose violence over peace...the list goes on...it's because we have forgotten.

And so meals in general, and more specifically the communion meal, we are to remember who Jesus was, what his Kingdom is like and who he is calling us to be.

And then second... The meal allows us not only to remember what Jesus did, that's like the intellectual part, but to participate by reenacting what Jesus did.

2. Meals allow us to participate.

See following Jesus is not simply an intellectual exercise. Following Jesus isn't just about believing and remembering the right things. **Following Jesus is about participating in the life of Jesus and the Kingdom that he established.** And so the meal becomes a tangible way of participating in the life of Jesus. Just a chapter before this, Jesus talked about this very concept...

Matthew 25 - ³¹ "When the Son of Man comes... ³² All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you...³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’

Notice the separation taking place between sheep and goats is not about believing the right things, but about actively participating in the Kingdom of Jesus.

And so in practicing communion, we participate. And it becomes a reminder about participating in bringing the Kingdom on earth as it is in heaven!

3. Love Feast

And so next week, we are going to share in this most significant meal. Today we call this communion. Next Sunday we will share in the communion meal together.

And more than that. In a week and a half, on **Wednesday, March 27**...we will hold what we call our Love Feast. It's our version of the Passover Meal. We'll meet down in the gymnasium and eat a simple meal. Soup and bread. It won't be fancy. Then we'll share our story of Last Supper and take communion together.

And there is one other symbolic act that we will also practice at our Love Feast, that we didn't talk about as part of Passover this morning, but that we believe is a central aspect of the Kingdom of Jesus. Foot-washing.

If you are familiar with our **denominational logo**, this is it. And one of the symbols you see there is a basin and a towel. One of the other things that Jesus did on the night of the last supper, is that he got down on his hands and knees and washed the feet of his disciples.

It is a reminder to us that the Kingdom of Jesus is the upside down Kingdom. Where the supreme and rightful King of the throne in Jerusalem, puts on the garments of the household slaves and washes feet.

And so after that meal and communion we will divide into two groups. Men in a one room, women will go to another room and we will participate in the act of washing feet. And I know, it sounds strange in our culture. It is. But once you've done it once, it will be a little less strange. And if you do it twice it will be even less strange. Just like communion sounds strange, when you talk about eating the body and blood of Jesus at first. But as you come understand the symbolic significance the same is true of foot washing.

So this Easter as you participate in the celebratory events and rituals of the season, may they become a reminder to you of the Kingdom you belong to.

