

**‘AT THE TABLE WITH JESUS’
LUKE 22:7-30**

[St Mark’s, Sunday September 13, 2020 – All Services]

This Story . . .

On Thursday when I was taking Bible Time with the Preschool children I was reminding them about the time Jesus was on the boat on the lake when the big storm blew up and his friends were very afraid. And I asked the kids- “what did Jesus do”? And one little boy put up his hand and said that God sent a huge flood to wipe out all the people who were ignoring God. I gently pointed out that whilst he had correctly remembered Noah’s story, the time when Jesus was on the boat was a different occasion. Four year olds are still finding their way when it comes to familiarity with the Bible’s stories.

But not so with most of us. I suspect that everyone watching our live-stream today could distinguish between the story of Noah’s ark and the story of Jesus calming the storm. In fact, I suspect most of us could probably tell both of those stories without looking them up- at least the basic plot line. There are plenty of stories we read in the Bible which many of us would feel very familiar with. Possibly too familiar.

What I mean by that is that there are stories we know so well that we barely feel the need to read them again. We’ve reached a point where we’re not sure there’s much to be gained by going over it again. The expression “familiarity breeds contempt” overstates what I’m talking about here. But perhaps “familiarity breeds boredom” gets closer? Or “familiarity breeds a lack of further interest”?

The story in front of us today/tonight from Luke 22 is one of those stories which most Christians are very familiar with. And I suspect we run the risk with a passage like this of glazing over a little, or of hitting the cruise control button as we read it. But I’ve enjoyed revisiting this passage this week as I’ve prepared for today, and I hope you’ll enjoy thinking about it with me now too. And to that end, I want to encourage you now to engage your brain and prepare your heart. I want to urge you to come to this reflection with real curiosity and spiritual thirst. And I want to share with you four things I think this familiar story does.

1) . . . provides an insight into Christ’s kingship.

The first thing to say is that this story provides an insight into Christ’s kingship. Have you stopped to wonder why the story begins with verses 7-13? The story could easily have begun at verse 14 and still made perfect sense. But Luke chooses to tell us about all the arrangements that were made by Jesus’ disciples under Jesus’ direction.

He sends Peter and John off to the city to get the meal ready, and he tells them what to look for and what to expect when they get there. And, amazingly, things happened to them in exactly the way Jesus said they would. As we read at the start of verse 13: they 'found things just as Jesus had told them'.

Luke is showing us that Jesus seems to know the future before it happens. And this is further underlined by what follows. Jesus keeps talking about the future like he knows how it will go¹. He talks about his betrayal by one of his friends. He talks about his heavenly kingdom and what part his disciples will play in it. And straight after this he even talks about how Peter will deny him, but then later repent.

This is the kind of king Jesus is. He's a king like God is king. He's the king who rules the world, whose own circumstances are not outside his control. Here is a man operating in a world whilst at the same time being sovereign over it. And, as a result, we have to draw the eye-watering conclusion that nothing is happening here by accident. Nothing.

2) . . . helps us to understand what follows.

But the second thing we should say about his story this morning/evening is that it helps us to understand what follows. This meal Jesus shares with his disciples is offered to us as commentary on what's about to take place- especially in Jesus' death. Jesus is explaining to his disciples, and to us, not only what will happen, but why. I have four quick sub-points here.

- Passover

Number 1- this was a Passover meal, and that was very significant. The Jews celebrated the Passover to remember what God did when the Israelites were rescued from slavery in Egypt. And on the night of their escape the angel delivering God's judgement to the Egyptian homes "passed over" the homes of the Israelites. So they were spared God's wrath. And the Jews celebrated this salvation with the annual meal- cooking a lamb to recall the lamb's blood on the doorframes of their ancestors' houses.

So the Passover meal was a gathering designed to look backwards together. But Jesus takes it and turns it on its head here. He gathers with his friends to look not backwards but forwards. He asks them to look forward to a moment in the very near future when he would be a sacrificial lamb, and when his blood would become the means by which his people would be safe. His blood would ensure that God's wrath would pass over his friends- then, and now.

¹ See verse 16, verse 18, verses 21-22, and verses 29-30. See also verses 31-34- immediately after our passage for today.

- new covenant

Then number 2- Jesus is not just talking about a new Passover, but a whole new covenant- a whole new way for God to relate to his people. This is the language of verse 20 here.

[Read 22:20]

This covenant is not characterised by two stone tablets with laws written on them. Rather this covenant is characterised by a man's blood. Incredibly, it would be blood poured out for the cleansing of all who trust him. In the events of the weekend that follows this meal, God was changing everything. He was completely reconfiguring how he would relate to people going forward.

- 'for you'

And unmistakably, number 3, Jesus' message for his disciples was that this was 'for them'. And Jesus' message for us today/tonight is the same. This new Passover is for you. This whole new way of God relating to people is for you. This blood poured out is for you. Why? Because God is for you. Jesus says, I am 'for you'. Verse 19: 'This is my body given for you'. Verse 20: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you'.

- worth remembering

Which is why, number 4, that what Jesus says in this meal, and what Jesus then goes on to do, is worth remembering. Verse 19 again- 'do this in remembrance of me'. It would seem, in fact, that Jesus expected his disciples to keep doing this². To keep breaking bread together, to keep drinking together, and by so doing to remember what the bread and the wine signified- his broken body and his shed blood. By remembering like this, Jesus' disciples would proclaim his death until he comes.

To say it's 'worth remembering' is to be in the realm of massive understatement. We might say it's worth remembering to buy milk next time you got the shops. But this is of an entirely different order, isn't it? This is worth remembering like it's worth remembering to breathe, like it's worth remembering your parents love you, like it's worth remembering your own name. This remembering is about life, and love, and identity. This remembering is the grounds of our salvation. And it is the garden bed in which the Christian life grows and flowers and bears fruit. This is worth remembering in the sense that it must not ever be forgotten- not now, not tomorrow, and not any day between now and the end.

² See 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

3) . . . catapults us into service.

So, this story provides an insight into Christ's kingship, and it helps us understand what follows. But thirdly, it also catapults us into service. I'm thinking here of the paragraph which begins with verse 24.

[Read 22:24]

The juxtaposition of this with the section that comes before is remarkable, is it not? It's staggering, isn't it, that their Lord Jesus has just spoken about his willingness to suffer unimaginably for them and their next conversation is about which of them is greatest. It'd be like me turning up to NSW Cricket training in my role as chaplain, and bending the ears of some of Australia's test cricketers about my outstanding recent performance in 6th Grade for Northbridge Cricket Club. It'd be ridiculous and embarrassing. And that's what we have here. And so Jesus has to remind them again of who he is and why he's come.

He tells them that this way of thinking owes more to the world than the kingdom. And instead, the greatest amongst the disciples should be as humble as a dependent child. And the one who rules others, should be the one who serves. Like him. Verse 27.

[Read 22:27]

Jesus reminds us here that his life, and his death, is the pattern for our lives. So when we're tempted to prefer our own interests to the interests of others we listen to his words in our ears: 'I am among you as one who serves'. When we're tempted to do the bare minimum because we're tired and lazy, we listen to his words in our ears: 'I am among you as one who serves'. When we're tempted to make a comfortable life our chief ambition, we listen to his words in our ears: 'I am among you as one who serves'. When we're tempted to focus on how others have let us down, we listen to his words in our ears: 'I am among you as one who serves'.

The Christian life is a life of service- a life radically and utterly devoted to the good of others. And it starts here, with this. We are propelled into the life of service by listening to these words. We are catapulted into love by the love Jesus himself has shown us.

4) . . . anticipates fulfillment in the kingdom of God.

And then, fourthly and finally, this story anticipates fulfillment in the kingdom of God. When we say that Jesus turns the Passover meal on its head to make it more about the future than the past, we don't just mean his death in the following 24 hours. We also mean the longer term future. The eternal future. In verse 16 here, and again in verse 18, and again in verses 29-30 we find Jesus talking about his heavenly kingdom. And on each occasion he talks about eating and drinking there. And he's foreshadowing a day when all his disciples from every age will be gathered around his table, enjoying him

and each other, and remembering together- remembering what he did all those years ago- remembering humbly, remembering with heart-swelling gratitude, remembering worshipfully.

On the occasion that we read about here, 12 men had the enormous privilege of being at a table with Jesus sharing a very special meal. It was a meal pulsing with meaning, and rich in joy. But there's a day to come when many, many more will be at the table with Jesus- me included, and I hope you. And between now and then we eat and drink together to not only remember what has gone before, but to anticipate what wonderfully lies ahead. And I don't know about you, but more than anything else in the world, this is what I'm looking forward to. As Jesus says here: 'I confer on you a kingdom, just as my father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table'.