

Sermon – October 3, 2021
“I will keep Passover at your house”
The Rev. John C. Wright



Text: Matthew 26:17-30

Pray with me: Father, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Come, Holy Spirit, come. Visit, fill us all anew this day, and anoint the sharing of these words. Let them be a blessing for your people, a blessing that leads to life eternal and fruitful labor as we tarry here on this mission field. Lord, come and astonish us with your word this day. Amen

Good morning! It is good to be back in the Northern Neck after a week in the flatlands of Tennessee. We had a blessed time gathering with several thousand believers and were refreshed and renewed in our commitment to serve our Lord Jesus. I highly recommend that any of you who are weary and are seeking renewed strength to serve Jesus consider attending New Room 2022. I also want to thank Kevin for bringing the message last Sunday and for all whose help and support allowed Kay and me to attend New Room 2021.

I wanted to celebrate several items that occurred on the Charge this past week as we prepare for this morning's message. First, thanks to Brant, we had a United Methodist Men's meeting last Tuesday. Let me thank all of the men who attended, and I hope that more of you will plan to attend the next meeting. This past Wednesday we were able to hold the first session of the 2021-22 Good News Club in person at the Northumberland Elementary School. We were blessed with an amazing group of elementary school kids! Some we knew before COVID, but

many of the children are new to us and all are hungry to learn about Jesus. I ask you to keep the volunteers and children in your prayers throughout the semester. I also want to celebrate that our development of church leadership for 2022 is progressing and remind us that if there is a desire on our heart to serve Jesus through a ministry or committee in the coming year, to let me know or any of the nominations committee members know, and we will seek to incorporate your desire into the leadership needs of the church. I was contacted this past week by a friend in Fredericksburg about joining a team of people who will be heading to coastal Louisiana in late October or early November to help with hurricane clean up. Prayers are appreciated for the planning and for the trip. Finally, let me remind us that today is World Communion Sunday. On the first Sunday in October, our church recognizes World Communion Sunday. In the United Methodist Church, this Sunday is a special Sunday where an offering is received that helps students from around the world reach their full potential through scholarships, training, and mentoring. We join with other churches in Communion on this day and to support the dreams of young leaders who are building up God's kingdom. This day is also a reminder that our church family includes people from around the globe. If you would like to contribute to that offering, mark your contributions with the words "World Communion Sunday" in the memo line.

Let me provide some background for context to this morning's scripture reading. We need to recall that Mary has anointed Jesus with expensive perfume in preparation for his burial. Judas has gone to the Jewish leadership and agreed to betray Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. We have looked at the Communion accounts found in Luke and Mark, but this morning, let's begin to look at the Communion account from Matthew.

Jesus' disciples come to him while he is resting, most likely on Wednesday of Holy Week in Bethany, and ask him a key question, "Where do you want to celebrate the Passover?" In response to their question, Jesus has given them instructions where to go and sent them to prepare the meal in an upper room at the house of a certain man in Jerusalem. The disciples go, find the place, prepare for the meal, and then wait for Jesus. We should not miss the connection here to the Exodus of Israel from Egypt when Israel carefully obeyed God's instructions and built the tabernacle, or tent of meeting, and then waited for the coming of the LORD's presence into that structure. Here the disciples wait for Jesus' coming to an upper room having obeyed his instructions. The disciples think they are waiting to celebrate another Passover, the central defining event in the life of an Israelite and a time when Israel remembers God's actions through

His mighty hand that redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt. Jesus' disciples wait for him expecting to celebrate this same event in Jerusalem on this night. Jesus comes with another plan as the hour is at hand for Jesus to fully carry out God's will and to redeem many for the Kingdom of the Father.

Jesus comes to this waiting group in the evening and they begin to celebrate the Passover with the meal they have prepared. But while they are eating this familiar meal with all of its references to the redemption of Israel by God, Jesus drops a bombshell that is not part of the meal's celebration. He tells the disciples, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." This unexpected statement turns the familiar celebration into something new, and those with Jesus are filled with anxiety that they might be the one to do such a thing. This thought is disturbing to those who have walked with their friend for the last three years. "Could I do such a thing?" is the thought in their minds, and one by one they ask Jesus, "Surely not I, Lord? There is no indication that Jesus responds to any of their replies, but tells them that the one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with him is the betrayer. This action only tells those at the table that one of those eating with them and using pieces of bread to dip the herbs and sauce out of a common bowl is the betrayer as they are all using this common bowl. Jesus cautions them that "The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born." Jesus will respond to the will of the Father, but one of them will not, and it would have been better for him not to have been born. Notice the balance in this statement: God is in control, what God has promised through His word, He will bring about through one who submits fully to God's will. One of them in the freedom of his will to choose to cooperate with God or not is going to, or has, chosen not to cooperate with God and will betray Jesus to the authorities. God will work to bring redemption out of this act and Jesus will humbly fully follow God's plan.

At this point Judas responds as the others have to Jesus' statement, and says, "Surely not I, Rabbi?" Jesus' reply to Judas seems to affirm that the betrayer is not Judas, but notice that Judas does not call Jesus "Lord" as the others have, but "Rabbi." Judas does not honor Jesus as Lord. Judas has already betrayed Jesus into the hands of the authorities and is now waiting for the opportunity to complete that betrayal. Jesus' response is enough to let us know that Jesus is aware of Judas' betrayal and that Jesus will not stop Judas' plan. Judas' and Jesus' exchange also

does not tip off the other disciples to Judas' betrayal as they take no action to stop Judas from carrying out his planned betrayal.

In Matthew's account of the Lord's Supper, it is not clear when Judas leaves the disciples and Jesus to carry out his plan. From reading the account, we are left with the likely possibility that Judas is present for the remainder of the Passover meal. The disciples may expect Jesus to return to the Passover celebration script, but Jesus has more to do this night during this meal. Notice the words Matthew uses as he describes what Jesus does next. Jesus takes a loaf of bread (unleavened bread) blesses it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples for them to eat. This is the same sequence we see in both of the feeding miracles Jesus has done. Except here Jesus adds, "Take, eat; this is my body." Jesus connects what he will do on the cross as his body is broken and he dies to the Passover event, making it a new celebration. Jesus will give his body that there may be a new freedom for humanity, not freedom from slavery, but from sin and death. We can also contrast Jesus' words here with those in Genesis when Adam and Eve disobey God. We might remember that Eve sees the fruit, sends her hand, takes the apple and eats, and gives some to Adam who also eats. There is no blessing or thanksgiving to God over the fruit. Their actions are done without including God, and with their actions, sin enters into humanity. Jesus' actions at the Last Supper, by contrast, tells us he will remain in God's will and fully carry out God's plan. Jesus will go to the cross, suffer, and die so that we may be freed from our sins and reconciled to God. Jesus will break the bonds of sin and death with his obedience to God and God's plan, obedience even to death on a cross.

Jesus also takes a cup, one of four used in the Passover meal, gives thanks to God, and gives it to the disciples, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." In the midst of this traditional Passover service, Jesus again does something new and speaks to the establishment of a new covenant put in place through his shed blood. Jesus' words here point to a violent death that will result in the shedding of his blood, an act that will bring about the long expected new covenant that is written on the hearts of Jesus' followers and not on stone tablets. I am not sure that we hear these words as the disciples heard them. For a Jew keeping the law, blood was not consumed; it was always poured out. Yet Jesus has told them to drink this cup as if it is Jesus' shed blood. They would have been shocked beyond words, yet they obey Jesus and drink the fruit of the vine from this common cup. Jesus is telling them in essence that what was done in the

Garden that separated humanity from God he will undo on the cross, and through his suffering and death, pay the cost to reconcile humanity to God. Jesus will pay the price for the sins of all. Jesus will suffer in their place paying the price in full, that all who believe in him may through faith be reconciled to God.

Finally, Jesus tells the disciples, as they drink from this last cup, that he will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the day when he drinks it new with them in his Father's kingdom. These words tell us that there will be a time when Jesus drinks with disciples again, a time after his death and resurrection. Jesus' words point to a time that is yet to fully come, when all believers will celebrate in the Kingdom of God. As best I can tell from my reading of this scripture, Jesus does not drink this cup. Instead, his actions point to a future time when he will drink the fruit of the vine with his disciples in the Father's kingdom. Jesus leaves this dinner after the singing of the hymns (some of the psalms) to go to Gethsemane to struggle with God's will, a will he fully surrenders to, submitting to God's plan for salvation for God's people. From the garden, Jesus will go to the cross where his body is broken, his blood shed, and great unimaginable suffering is endured that we might be reconciled to God. Jesus is the Messiah who dies for the people and by doing so, reconciles them to God. This morning we also have come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper. The bread and the juice of the vine are present. We need to ask ourselves, "Will we follow Jesus' commands as the disciples did and prepare not only a table, but our hearts?" Will we set aside any differences we have with those in our congregations or with any who take Communion this day in any place in God's creation and be reconciled through Jesus Christ to each other? Will we confess our sins and accept the grace of Jesus' new covenant sealed with his blood, the blood of the perfect Lamb? Will we wait expectantly for Jesus to come and be with us as we gather to celebrate Communion in his Father's kingdom? Will we set aside our will and bow to the Father's will that we might celebrate with Jesus new in this in-breaking kingdom of God?

As we move into the Great Thanksgiving service this morning, let us prepare our hearts by seeking to reconcile with anyone in our congregation or in our lives by setting aside all offense and seeking to love them as we are loved by Jesus. Let us seek a new openness to be led by the Holy Spirit that we might be changed into one who loves others as Jesus loves us. Let us prepare our hearts by confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus. And let us come to the Lord's table expecting to meet Jesus here in this place through the

power of the Holy Spirit and feast upon the bread of life and drink the fruit of the vine with Jesus in his Father's kingdom.

Pray with me:

Almighty God, we give thanks that you sent your Son, your only beloved Son who died on the cross in our place; who suffered, bled and died that we might be reconciled to you through the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus Christ. Jesus, as we come to this table this morning, make us aware of any discord in our lives with other believers, and let us sow seeds of peace and find a new openness to being changed by you to truly be your people. Lord, bring to mind our sins that we might confess them and receive forgiveness, and Lord, help us to remember your sacrifice as we receive the bread and fruit of the vine this day and look forward to the coming celebration with you new in the Father's kingdom. Amen