

April 14, 2017 ... Maundy Thursday  
Matthew 26:17-31 ... "Contemplate the Cup"

Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

- as we gather on this Holy Thursday we want to spend time with Jesus in the upper room and in the Garden of Gethsemane
  - as we do, I invite you to “Contemplate the Cup”
  - what is this chalice around which we gather and from which we drink?
  - and what is the cup that Jesus prays his heavenly Father would take away that he might not have to drink it, and yet prays, “Not my will, but your will be done”
  
- at first glance we see two different cups
  - the cup of blessing
  - the cup of suffering
    - the cup of blessing will mean life for those who partake of it in faith
    - the cup of suffering will mean death to the one who drinks from it
  - are these two somehow related?
    - join me as we “Contemplate the Cup”
  
- as Jesus gathers with his disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane, he asks them, “Could you not watch with me for one hour?”
- they are there to witness the onset of the cup of suffering
  - they are there to behold the tidal wave of torment that Jesus will experience in the hours ahead
  - they will watch as Jesus drains the cup to the very bottom
  
- these three disciples, Peter, James and John had been witnesses of his glory at the transfiguration, and now they would be witnesses of his suffering, if only for an hour or so
  - but even then, the cup of suffering will be too much for them

- so we also need to watch what Jesus is doing throughout these hours
  - after all, it is our salvation that is unfolding
    - we need to witness it for ourselves
    - and we need to share it with our children
  - the cup of suffering Jesus drinks was originally meant for us
    - he takes what we deserve, and in exchange, we drink from another cup ... the cup of blessing ... the cup of forgiveness ... the cup of life
  
- as we contemplate this cup, we need to go back into the OT Passover
  - Passover was the remembrance and reliving of God's Old Testament deliverance from the angel of death
    - it was the tenth and final plague to fall upon Egypt
  
- Moses had been sent by God to Pharaoh to ask for the release of the Israelites
  - Pharaoh said no, no, no, no ...
  - nine plagues later, Pharaoh had hardened his heart and still said no
  
- now the final plague would come ... the cup of judgement would be poured out and it would mean the death of the firstborn throughout the whole land of Egypt
  - the angel of death would come and strike the firstborn in every household, except where the blood of the Passover Lamb was over the door
    - there the angel would "pass over" because those homes were already marked by death ... the death of a sacrifice
  - the people inside the house would drink from the cup of life, even as the blood of the lamb on the door was the mark of death

-Exodus tells us:

*-At midnight the LORD struck down all the firstborn in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner, who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.*

-there was not a house without someone dead ... except for the Israelites

-why were God's OT people saved?

-were they saved because of their good behaviour?

-did the angel of death pass over their homes because they were less sinful than the people of Egypt?

-Pharaoh and many of the Egyptians had hardened their hearts

-they had seen the evidence of who the true God was, but denied it and refused to repent and believe

-their continued refusal ultimately led to the cup of judgment and the death of their firstborn, from Pharaoh's palace on down

-in the midst of that, what saved the Israelites?

-it was not because they were sinless

-it was not because of their superior strength of faith

-they were saved by grace through the sacrifice

-they were saved because they were hiding under the blood of the lamb

-the outside of the house was marked by the cup of death

-inside the house was the cup of life

-that night in the garden as Jesus prayed, the disciples slept

-the cup of suffering is very hard to watch

- with all that was about to happen tonight and tomorrow, the disciples needed to be reminded of the cup of grace, so that having turned away, they might come back again with repentance and true faith
- they would witness the cup of suffering and hear Jesus pray,
  - “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass, yet not my will, but thy will be done”
- they would hear Jesus’ words from the cross, “I thirst” and see him take that last sip from the cup of suffering and announce, “It is finished”
- the cup of suffering had been emptied
  
- and all that remains for sinners who thirst for God is the other cup
  - the cup of salvation ... the cup of forgiveness ...
  
- did you come thirsty tonight?
  - there are two Psalms from the OT that speak about our thirsty souls and about the refreshing that comes from God’s grace
  - Psalm 42:1 speaks about thirsty seasons of life
    - my soul pants and thirsts for God
      - in the midst of his present sufferings, the writer of the Psalm is reminded of God’s past faithfulness and in that faithfulness he finds renewed hope and strength
    - “Why are you downcast, O my soul ... why so distressed within me?”
    - put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Saviour and my God
      - when we are faced with the reality of drinking from the cup we deserve, from bearing the consequences of our own sins, God’s grace removes that one and offers in its place a cup of blessing

- Psalm 116:12 describes much the same situation
  - the snares of death encompassed me
  - I suffered distress and anguish
    - then I called on the name of the Lord ... deliver me
    - and the psalm writer remembered ...
      - the Lord is gracious
      - the Lord preserves
      - the Lord delivers
    - it's as if the writer of this Psalm just realized that the cup God has for him is the cup of blessing
  - and so he says, "I will trade the cup of suffering for the cup of salvation"
  - and I will call on him ...and I will give thanks to him
    - ... and I will praise his name forever

- what do we learn from this?
  - we are like the disciples
    - we make big boasts
    - we promise faithfulness
  - we fail time and again as our strength wanes and fear takes over
- we deny Jesus in front of other people because we are afraid to be counted with him
- we doubt his promise of forgiveness and love and come to despair over the problems in our lives
  - we are convinced that the cup we must drink from is the cup of suffering, as if Jesus did not already drain that cup for us
- in those hours, do not abandon God or run from him, but run to him
  - hear his words, "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst"

- you see, we, like the disciples before us, also need strength and encouragement for the journey to Calvary, and for our faith each day
  
- where can they get it from? ... and where can we get it from?
  - look and see what is there in the midst of our text as Jesus invites his followers to take and eat ... this is my body ... take and drink ... this cup is the new covenant in my blood ... given ... shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins
  
- in the midst of this night Jesus institutes his Holy Supper
  - it is the new Passover meal, marking the New Covenant
    - it is the cup of suffering for Jesus now become the cup of blessing for us
  - the original OT Passover meal was meant to strengthen the Israelites for the journey to the Promised Land,
  - now this meal strengthens us for the journey of life this side of heaven
  
- the wonder and beauty of God's Word for us today is that our God, through Word and Sacrament, comes again with his grace to embrace us and remind us of his love, that we might be strengthened to stay near him, and to trust in him
- Jesus' love for sinners is most perplexing
  - he knows what's in a person's heart
  - he knows your secret sins and mine
  - he knew what Judas was planning
  - he knew what Peter was about to do
  - he knew all the disciples would forsake him and run away
- he could have done any number of things
  - he could have chased them all way from his presence in disgrace
  - but he didn't

- though all the disciples ended up being unfaithful, the Lord still desired to draw them back in repentance and faith
  - the only thing that can do that is the good news of the forgiveness of sins
  
- we might feel shock at what Judas did
- we might feel disappointment at what Peter and the others did
  - and we are tempted to ask, “Surely not I, Lord?”
  - you don’t mean that I’m going to fail you too?
  
- even at the best of times we can fail to be true to Jesus
  - we deny him and betray him in many ways
  
- but what a comfort it is to know that Jesus does not at once cast us aside and replace us with someone more faithful
  - again and again he comes to us with his Word to call us to repentance
  
- repentance is godly sorrow for sin
  - sorrow that our lives, our words and our actions have offended God
- what follows this godly sorrow trust that God, for the sake of the blood of the Lamb, causes his wrath and punishment to pass over us
  
- God calls you to own up to your sin and accept its consequences
  - if you want to be clean, you have to come clean
  - and we all need to come clean somewhere or another
- in Psalm 51 David says, “behold I was brought forth in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me”
  - David knew his sin and confessed it ... and was willing to bear its consequences



-and we want to say, “Surely not I, Lord”  
 -you don’t mean me, do you?

-in Romans 3 Paul writes, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

-and we want to say, “Surely not I, Lord”

-in Ecclesiastes 7, the teacher tells us, “There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins.”

-and we want to say, “Surely not I, Lord”

-you don’t mean me, do you?

-God would bring us face to face with the reality of our sin tonight

-sin so completely and utterly stains us and corrupts us that we cannot escape its grasp, no matter how hard we might try

-he does it so that he might lead us to Christ and the cross

-to show us God’s great and undeserved love for us despite our sin and wickedness

-it was Jesus’ intent on that Holy Thursday to draw his disciples near to him

-to pray for them

-to wash them clean

-to nourish their faith by Word and Sacrament

-he would take the cup of suffering that they might partake from the cup of blessing

-so here is the Lord’s Supper ... contemplate the cup

-but more ... drink from the cup ... eat from the bread

-it is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and to

drink ... for the forgiveness of sins