

“Table Talk”

Mark 14:17-31

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Communion Devotion

Sometime after six o'clock in the evening, Jesus and the disciples assembled in the Upper Room to observe Passover. All over Jerusalem, pilgrims were gathering with family and friends to commemorate the night the Jewish people quickly left Egypt in search of freedom and a homeland.

“What makes this night different from all other nights?” the youngest child around the table usually asked, and the ancient story was told, using words and symbols. Each year during Passover this re-enactment occurs, much like we remember the birth and resurrection of Jesus.

I suspect the mood in the Upper Room that evening was rather somber due to the tension in the room. Jesus' enemies were closing in on him, and every disciple was aware of it. After confronting the scribes and Pharisees by overturning the moneychangers' tables and running them out of the temple, Jesus was a marked man. Getting out of Jerusalem alive was less likely with each passing day.

When Judas abruptly left the table that night in the Upper Room, the disciples had to feel uneasy. Where was he going and what did he have to do which could not wait until the next morning?

Jesus knew the answer to their questions. Judas was on his way to tell the authorities where the Lord could be found in order to arrest him, a decision he would soon regret.

Jesus did not immediately leave the Upper Room as you might expect, seeking safety in an undisclosed location. Instead, he continued as the host of the Passover meal. He took a loaf of bread off of the table and gave God thanks for it. After breaking it open, he passed it to his disciples. “Take, eat, this is my body,” he said.

He repeated this with the cup, which symbolized the blood he would shed the next day on their behalf. “This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many,” he told them

as he passed the cup to each of them. Like all other pilgrims gathered that evening, he concluded this portion of their time together by having them sing a hymn.

Evidently, the table talk continued before they left the room, perhaps while they were cleaning up. Listen to what Jesus told them.

“You will all fall away from me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.’ But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee” Mark 14:27-28.

Peter took offense at what Jesus said and assured Jesus he would never abandon him, especially in his darkest hour. I am sure Jesus appreciated Peter’s passion, but insisted on telling Peter what he could not see.

“I tell you the truth, today-yes, tonight-before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me.” This time all the disciples echoed Peter’s promise to be loyal to Jesus under the most difficult circumstances.

What do you think Jesus wanted his disciples to know that evening before they left that room and went to Gethsemane? I pondered this question for some time last week.

I think Jesus wanted the disciples to know his public ministry was coming to an abrupt end and their lives were going to change radically. That night Jesus would be arrested and the next day he would be crucified. The religious authorities Jesus had exposed as hypocrites and called upon to repent would finally succeed in silencing his voice, or so they thought.

To make matters worse, every one of the disciples gathered around that table would abandon him in pursuit of their own safety. Even Peter, their outspoken leader, would openly declare he never knew Jesus.

However, Jesus wanted the disciples to know two things before all this occurred. By God’s grace, death would not have the final word in his life, and their worst mistake would not end their relationship.

“You will all fall away from me,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered.’ **But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee**” Mark 14:27-28.

Do you recall what the angel said to the women when they discovered the tomb was empty on Easter morning? “Don’t be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him just as he told you.’” (Mark 16:6-7)

Everything Jesus told the disciples in the Upper Room was true. The grave could not hold him and their broken promises to be faithful would not be held against them. By the mercy and power of God, Jesus would live again and their relationship with him would be resurrected, too.

As we gather around this table this morning, is this the message Jesus wants you to hear? Are you facing your own mortality and wondering if there is more on the other side of the grave? Let the words Jesus spoke to his disciples as he faced his own mortality put your mind at ease.

“After I have risen...” Jesus said to the disciples. Jesus knew death would not have the final word in his life. God would and it would be a good one.

Jesus knows death will not have the final word in our lives either. The same God who loved him also loves us. We, too, shall live again because of God’s mercy and grace.

Have you disappointed God and hurt those you love the most because of mistakes you have made? Must you forever be known by the worst thing you did? Is it possible to write more chapters to your life’s story, pages filled with recovery and reconciliation?

Ask Peter and the disciples who deserted Jesus. They would quickly tell you about the God who specializes in helping people rebuild their lives after they have failed.

“After I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee...” Jesus said to the disciples. The same Jesus they denied and abandoned would be waiting for them at the very place where they were initially called to be his disciples. Once again, Jesus would call them to follow him and put them back into service.

As you draw near this table this morning, listen carefully. You may hear Jesus calling your name, encouraging you to start writing the next chapters to your story.