

The Last Supper

The incredibly beautiful melody of redemption is heard throughout the varied books of our Old Testament.



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As a young seminary student I remember a professor's lecture connecting the idea of redemption in the lives of Moses and Jesus. As I witnessed to Jewish friends through the years I used their Passover celebration as the beginning point in sharing Christ.

In my last church I had capable volunteers who cooked an authentic Passover meal and arranged beautiful family tables so we could observe Passover respectfully and reverently. We did this the week of Good Friday. At the conclusion, when I noted that the Jews leave the door to their home open to welcome Elijah who will signal God's restoration of the nation, I explained that the ultimate promise of deliverance has been fulfilled in the coming of Christ. We must open the door to our heart as we anticipate the Savior's return.

The conclusion of Jesus' earthly ministry did not come at Passover by accident. The celebration of "The Last Supper" in Jerusalem at Passover is a sign that God's redemptive purpose is fulfilled. Jesus used Passover to prepare the disciples for the passion and resurrection as he explained: "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. . . . I won't eat it until it is fulfilled in God's kingdom" (vv. 15-16). Perhaps Jesus was telling them they would not really understand what this meal symbolized until after the cross, his resurrection and his ascension to the Father.

Like Passover's expectation of God's ultimate deliverance for Israel, this "Last Supper" is focused on Messiah as both sacrifice and Savior: "This (bread) is my body, which is given for you," and "This cup is the new covenant by my blood, which is poured out for you" (vv. 19-20). The difference between Moses and Jesus

is Moses is the announcing voice but Jesus is God's answer to every heart's need for God.

The disciples struggled with Jesus' solemn words about suffering and the real deliverance (passion) that was yet to come (vv. 16 and 18). Jesus spoke often about God's kingdom (Luke 4:43; 6:20; 8:1; 9:11; 12:31), but his disciples were still thinking in terms of Jesus restoring a powerful Jewish nation on the world stage. They were further confused by his words about his "blood being poured out" (v. 20), his "betrayer's hand" being "on this table" (v. 22) and "The Human One (Jesus) goes just as it has been determined" (v. 22).

You would think the disciples would be overwhelmed by the idea of Jesus dying and his betrayal by one of his own. Instead, immediately an argument breaks out over who will be the most powerful in this coming kingdom! Jesus patiently repeats what he has said so many times, that the signs of greatness in God's kingdom involves servanthood instead of higher social status (vv. 26-27).

Remember, at the beginning of that Passover, Jesus began by taking on the role of the lowest household servant and washing the disciples' feet. Instead of scolding the disciples, Jesus refers to their faithfulness to him in his trials, compares his love for them to his Father's love for him, promises they will join him at the great banquet of eternity, and they will judge the 12 tribes of Israel. A majority of scholars see this last statement fulfilled in their ministry as the Jerusalem Church (Acts 1-6).

Our personal reaction to the behavior and words of the disciples on that Passover night is dismay and the thought that we would do better. Would we? The thought that one of his own arranged his arrest causes us to shudder. John 13:2 says the devil put the idea of betrayal into the heart of Judas. Matthew 27:5 reports that a distraught Judas

Formations

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Scripture: Luke 22:14-30

went back to the Jewish leaders at the Temple and threw the 30 pieces of silver in that holy place then went and hanged himself. We may struggle with the question of whether Judas was condemned to hell, or was he still within the reach of God's grace? Remember, Peter denied Jesus in the courtyard of the high priest and Jesus forgave him (Luke 22:34-62).

Each of us answers for himself or herself, not for Judas, Peter or anyone else. As we prepare for the great celebration of Easter, we must consider how well we live out the servant example of Jesus, confront our weaknesses and commit to renewed faithfulness to our Savior.

This year I am finding myself burdened by the shameful and cruel voices of our world and my angry or judgmental responses. Violent religious extremism and persecution make headlines daily. God is not the author of murder and religious violence. Political rhetoric feeds on fear and bigotry. Racism continues to divide our society and mock our words about freedom and opportunity for all. In this continuing agitation, how am I praying and acting to bring hope and help to others? Do I take Jesus' words and servanthood example seriously?

When you celebrate the Lord's Supper, consider that Passover in Jerusalem when Jesus was preparing to die for us. The disciples were not paying attention. They were thinking about themselves. Jesus did not condemn them or turn them away. Instead, he opened his heart to them again, loved and encouraged them and looked to the cross. May we find in our Savior the faith to keep on and make a difference in our broken world.

Retired after 45 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques.