

The Lamb in the Upper Room

In Jesus' day, when thousands flocked to Jerusalem for the Passover, the city was packed full of people. Lambs raised just for the feast were herded into the city, sold to the travelers, and prepared for the feast. One of those lambs was singled out for a Passover celebration being held in an Upper Room by a teacher from Nazareth. Jesus had an urgent desire to be with his beloved friends and followers and to eat the Passover with them. There was so much to do and say—Jesus wanted them to know how much He loved them; how concerned He was for them as he prepared to step into his suffering.

You see, a lamb had been prepared as part of this meal, in memory of all the lambs whose shed blood caused the destroying angel to *pass over* Israelite homes. But now the pattern and the preview of the Passover gave way to the main feature--the fulfillment. In other words, John the Baptist had called it correctly: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." Every Passover lamb ever served on a Jewish table had pointed to this moment in time. And in this moment, the Lamb of God washed his disciples' feet. He talked to them about the necessity of faithfulness. He prayed for them. He moved to the table and sang the Passover hymns with them. He moved into the ancient ritual of questions and answers, of herbs and wine.

And then, the Passover Lamb, prepared and roasted, is brought into the banquet hall. Dishes are moved aside to make room for the platter. Memories are stirred. Memories of Moses, slavery, deliverance. Memories of wilderness struggle, a promised land. Memories of Messianic promises. That Messiah reclines with them at the table!

Jesus' eyes also followed the lamb as it was carried in. His heart pounds as it is set before him. Even as this lamb was led to the slaughter, so must he be led to the cross in just a few short hours. He reaches for his portion of the lamb and eats.

Soon he will walk down the steps; steps that will take him to heavy prayers in the garden; to betrayal; to false accusation and a criminal's death. He will be rejected by the religious; humiliated by humanity; and forsaken by his Father. And in this moment, the Lamb of God takes away the sin of the world. He takes away your sin and mine. All of it. Absorbed, removed, and taken away.

For a thousand years the Passover lamb had been a living and dying preview. Its function ended there in the Upper Room. The Reality—the Lamb of all lambs-- had come. The shadow indicating that "someone was coming" gave way to the Someone.

The Lamb of God, Jesus, took bread and blessed it. "This is my body broken for you," he said. He took wine and gave it to them saying, "This is my blood, given and shed for you. Do this in remembrance of me. This is the new covenant in my blood." Jesus announces—and not just announces, but provides—a new covenant promise that depends entirely upon Himself. He agrees to be the Lamb of God, whose broken body and shed blood will cause death and damnation to pass over those who believe.

We come together tonight to remember lambs and the Lamb. We come together to marvel at this new covenant, announced and made possible by Jesus so long ago. We come together to remember his suffering and death, lest our

eating and drinking become dead ceremony and dry ritual, just some “thing” you do when you come to church.

But we come not only to remember. We come together because we have the deepest need to be with Jesus, who, under the bread and wine, enters us and fills us with forgiveness; faith; peace. Jesus is here in bread and wine to tell you how much he loves you; how concerned he is about you; to show how far he would go to make you his own. We come together, because we need each other. We, who make up the body of Christ on Earth bring Christ to each other, in compassion, friendship, and the common bond of faith.

But we are not bound to the here and now. We come together because we share a destiny as sons and daughters of God, as brothers and sisters of the Messiah. The tables in the Kingdom are set. The Great Feast is ready. One by one we slip from this life to find our seats at the Banquet of the Lamb. We come together to look up and beyond this life to the place where we will all reunite—the awesome supper table of the Lord.

As Passover gives way to Holy Communion; as the old covenant gives way to the new; as the Passover Lamb gives way to the Lamb of God; so your sins give way to the forgiveness and perfect righteousness of Christ, your Lord. God’s love and concern for you has been fulfilled. His life is yours. Take and eat. Take and drink.

Welcome to the Lamb’s Table. Amen.