

A family that loses a close relative on a holiday can appreciate the emotional crosscurrents that swirled around on the night Jesus gathered his disciples to observe the festival of Passover. From all accounts, the atmosphere of Passover was to be joyful and inspiring. It was to be an opportunity to remember how the mighty right arm of the Lord had delivered the children of Abraham from slavery. It was to be a time to celebrate with thanksgiving how God brought low the pharaoh and his proud armies. The hustle and bustle of preparation, the squeezing through the crowded streets to purchase the necessary ingredients for the meal, the hope that this year Messiah would liberate them from Rome created an air of anticipation not unlike our Christmastime preparations. But the words that Jesus spoke to his disciples during the meal intruded into this festive spirit and changed their focus.

First, He says: “One of you will betray me.” The traitor was not a servant eavesdropping on the conversation. Not an anonymous member of the larger crowds that followed Jesus, but one of their core. “One who is eating with me.” A meal meant to ‘call together as one’ is spoiled by the presence of a traitor, who thought about it and conspired beforehand. This betrayal was premeditated. With these words, Jesus interjects into this joyous celebration a strong note of darkness. The ‘band of brothers’ is not so solid after all.

More follows. “Take, this is my body; This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” A deeper sadness intrudes as Jesus once again announces his impending death: his body and blood, poured out. By what follows in the next few days, it’s clear the disciples do not pick up on the phrases “of the covenant” and “for many.” They don’t yet understand that Jesus’ blood will be *the means through which* God and his people will be joined in a new covenant. They cannot see that Jesus’ death is not a tragic accident but has a glorious purpose: it is “for many.” There’s a reason. It is redemptive; it’s a substitute sacrifice. Their minds have yet to be opened, so all they hear are words that insert a note of death into what was supposed to be a song of life.

Finally, Jesus says, “I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” All the disciples can hear is talk of separation. He’s been talking about it all night. “In a little while you will see me no more.” The death they will soon witness will shatter any hope of a continued life with Jesus. And so, with these statements, Jesus has dampened the customary feast, in sharp contrast to the raucous excitement of Palm Sunday.

Now let me ask, what crosscurrents and contrasts are swirling through your life today/tonight as we come together at the table of the Lord? A newly discovered medical issue? An unexpected change of employment? A loved one announcing an abrupt change in the path of their life? Did you exchange sharp words with someone before coming here? Is there something in your life that feels like it’s close to a collapse?

Whatever threatens to rob you of full attention to the words of Jesus; whatever is trying to blind you from the presence of Jesus at His Supper; exchange it for what Jesus has come to give. He is

with you **right now** to attend to those disruptive crosscurrents you're facing. Receive his body and outpoured blood, confident that it is for you. God has established a new covenant with you. You are joined to it by taking and eating and drinking the precious blood and body, given and shed for you. And because the blood of Jesus was offered instead of the blood of an animal, this covenant stands firm. Moreover, this is a NEW covenant. This is not the type of covenant which says, "You do your part, and I'll do mine." In Jesus' NEW covenant, He's the one who "does it." He's the one who "keeps it." You are treated as if you did everything right, even though Jesus is the only one who could and did. If that sounds one-sided to you, that's because it is. That is the wonder of the gospel: faith receives the perfection of Jesus as a gift. This is what is poured into you at the table of the Lord.

Whatever crosscurrents are pulling at you today/tonight, hear the words of Jesus, as He declares that his broken body and shed blood were for the many. You are one of the many. His body and blood paid for the debt of your sin. And as Jesus preached from his cross, this is not a partial payment. "It is finished" quite literally means "paid in full." Come, confess your sin; be radically honest with God; admit your faults and failures, and be refreshed with the truth. Jesus paid all you owe. It cost Him His life. He offers you this forgiveness in a concrete way, a way in which you can participate, by eating and drinking in faith.

In this meal, Jesus promises a future for you that extends beyond your boldest hopes. He holds before you the promise of sitting with him at the banquet table with all the faithful, gathered not just from east to west, but from every time, including those loved ones whom you miss most, who have departed in this same faith. Even now, this is our spiritual reality, for when we feast with the Lord Jesus, we receive His love and praise Him, which is, in fact, the activity of heaven. Again and again, the Word of God describes eternal life with God as a Feast. He permits us a sneak preview of this festival joy every time we take our place at his table. It's as if the party has already started, even as we receive Christ's body and blood at the altar in a church in a community, nation and world which is broken by sin and darkness. The light of this feast shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not and will not overcome it.

We all bear burdens. There are crosscurrents, contrasts, criticisms. There is tragedy and turmoil that comes to us without our asking. Whatever you face, don't let it keep you from the family table. There's a place always set, just for you. Feast with Jesus today/tonight.