

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Matthew 26:17-30

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book):
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary):

Year A - Maundy Thursday, Text: Matthew 26:17-30
Year A - Maundy Thursday, Text: Jn. 13:1-17, 31b-35

Editor's Note: Dr. Wendt did not write a commentary on this text. This commentary has been written by John B. King, Jr.

Before examining the details of the text, we should consider the Passover symbolism that informs the occasion of the Last Supper.

Passover Symbolism

At the Last Supper, Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with His disciples. During this meal, He instituted the sacrament of Holy Communion in anticipation of His coming death. As the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Jesus was the one to whom the Passover Lamb had always pointed. And so, His death on the cross was the event which the first Passover signified. In instituting the sacrament of Holy Communion, therefore, Jesus both fulfilled and transformed the Passover celebration. Accordingly, the symbolism of the Passover provides a framework for understanding the work of Christ which fulfills it.

In this regard, the Passover was the central redemptive event and thus the “gospel” of the old covenant. In the first Passover, the Israelites sacrificed and ate a lamb. They also spread the blood of this lamb on their doorposts to save them from the Angel of Death. When the Angel of Death saw the blood on their doorposts, he “passed over” their houses, sparing the lives of their first born sons and killing the first born sons of the Egyptians instead.

In a similar way, Jesus is Himself the Passover Lamb whose sacrificial blood covers our sins to save us from the wrath of God. Just as the Passover Lamb was sacrificed and eaten prior to the original Exodus, so Jesus presents Himself as the New Passover Lamb to be sacrificed on the cross and then eaten through the bread and wine of Holy Communion. And Jesus does this to both to signify and to affect a new exodus from the bondage of sin, which is made possible by His death.

And so, Holy Communion is related to the Passover both historically and symbolically. It is historically related since the Passover meal was the occasion for instituting the sacrament of Holy Communion. Moreover, since Holy Communion is the New Covenant fulfillment of the Passover, it incorporates its symbolism while also giving us the saving reality to which the Passover points. Thus, just as the Passover celebration recalled the original Passover in Egypt, so weekly celebrations of Holy Communion recall the work of Christ and make Him present to us.

Jesus Christ is the true Passover Lamb whom we consume during Holy Communion. And it is His blood that saves us from the wrath of God.

The Text

Verses 26:17-19: Jesus sends His disciples to the home of a “certain man” where they are to prepare the Passover meal. They are to tell him, “The Teacher says, ‘My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” The disciples depart, find the man’s house, and prepare the Passover there.

The instructions to the disciples are a bit vague and call upon the disciples to exercise faith in finding the house. Perhaps this is to keep Judas from giving the location of the house to his co-conspirators. Or perhaps it also prepares them to exercise faith in the hours ahead when Jesus will be arrested, tried, and crucified.

Verses 26:20-25: As Jesus reclines at the table with His disciples, He informs them that one of them is about to betray Him. This causes them to lose confidence in their own faith and loyalty to Jesus as each one asks, “Is it I, Lord?” When Judas hypocritically asks the same question, Jesus responds, “You have said so.” This indicates that Judas is the betrayer.

In this dialog Jesus also says, “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 never been born.” Jesus touches

the mystery of election and predestination.

However, it also relates to the emerging self-doubt of His disciples, albeit implicitly. It does so by showing that our faith is created and sustained by God, not ourselves. Thus, there is nothing within us that can keep us from falling out of faith unless we are held fast by the hand of God in accordance with His eternal decree of election.

Verses 26:26-28: Jesus then does something that may well shock His disciples. He reveals both the heights of His covenant making power and the depths of His imminent suffering. He transforms the Passover meal into the sacrament of Holy Communion. To this end, He introduces the words of institution which have been used over the centuries. In these words, Jesus identifies the bread and wine with His body and blood as a sign and an embodiment of the New Covenant.

Thus, Jesus is both the true Moses and the true Passover Lamb who leads a new exodus by sacrificing Himself. As the true Moses, Jesus inaugurates a New Covenant. As the true Passover Lamb, He is about to be sacrificed to take away the sins of the world. Indeed, through the weekly celebration of Holy Communion, He will offer Himself to His followers throughout their lives to forgive their sins and sustain their faith.

Over time this will counter the disciples' emerging self-doubt, both theologically and experientially. However, since the disciples are still expecting Jesus to set up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem, it is unclear how much of this they understand.

Verse 26:29: Jesus tells His disciples that He will not drink wine again until He drinks it with them in a new (and fulfilled) way in His Father's kingdom. The question is when this occurs. The disciples still think that Jesus is on the verge of setting up an earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Clearly, this is not what Jesus means.

From the broader context of Scripture, we know that Jesus' kingdom began with His ascension to the Father's right hand. It came in power on the Day of Pentecost when His church was born through His Spirit. And we also know that His kingdom will be consummated when He returns in glory to judge the living and the dead and to usher in the New Creation.

So, where in these various stages of Christ's kingdom did or will Jesus drink wine with His disciples? Is this a reference to the weekly celebration of Holy Com-

munion. Or is it a reference to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9), the great eschatological feast toward which Holy Communion points?

Since Jesus doesn't drink the wine of Holy Communion (He indwells the wine!), the reference is to the consummated kingdom of the New Heavens and the New Earth. Consequently, Jesus' transformation of the Passover into Holy Communion will itself be transformed into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb when Christ returns in glory!

Verse 26:30: This verse simply announces the change of scene. It says that they sang a hymn and then departed from the Passover celebration to the Mount of Olives.