

There is a lot of getting ready going on. First the inviting, then menu deciding, grocery purchasing, cleaning, baking. Many of you are filled with anticipation and excitement as you plan for the people you most love to gather, to eat and talk and laugh. The meal on Sunday is on your mind, for it is more than food, it is the expression of your love.

Though we are not told of Jesus planning, it is clear he had been doing some ^{planning} for that passover meal. A man carrying a jar of water was to be followed, the house he entered would be the place. There an upper room was furnished, there the meal would be prepared. And as they sat at table, Jesus first words were these: I have eagerly desired to eat the Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.

Suffering was coming for Jesus. He was sure of that. But before the suffering he wanted a special time of being together.

He was gathered with the ones who knew him best. His followers, his friends. Again and again he had told them what would happen to him. Maybe he wanted them to ask what his suffering would mean. Maybe he wanted them to say what he meant to them. But before any conversation he took a cup and after giving thanks he said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Then he took a loaf of bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them saying, "This is my body which is given for you. But see, the one who betrays me is with me and his hand is on the table."

What might have happened next? They might have said one after another, Jesus, I am sure that I will not betray you. Or even, Jesus help me not to be the one who will betray you.

But instead, they started accusing. Not out in public, but in their whispering. We read they began to ask one another which of them it could be who would do this. "I'm thinking it may be Andrew." No, James, he's never been very reliable." ^{John 13} Mark my words, Thomas, that skeptic, he'll be the one. The dividing began.

And next we read: A dispute arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. Like little boys on the playground puffing themselves up. Of all times, at this meal, moments before JESUS was to ~~be crucified~~ ^{begin his suffering,}

And later, Jesus words from this meal that we know so well: I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.

Have you ever waited and planned and anticipated a special meal, and wondered when it was all over why? Have you ever felt the emptiness when a family that was gathered for drawing closer was split apart? Yet Jesus who knew who would betray him, who would deny him, eagerly desired to share the meal that night.

Just as he eagerly desired to share the same meal with you tonight.

What do you bring to him?

Do you rush here to tell him of your care and concern for others? Do you come to this table to speak to Jesus of how you were gentle in your judgements, full of mercy and forgiveness toward those who offended you? Do you bring your joy in sharing ^{to} that the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the poor made rich?

Or are you like me, dragging a whole load of betrayals and denials, thoughtless words, harsh judgements, failing people who counted on me? Does your heart leap with ^{joy} as you gather in this family, or are you like me, weighed down with old resentments, and envies?

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If you are like me, then this meal that Jesus has been waiting for
with us, is not so very different that the one that night so long ago.

But Jesus, knowing who he served, passed the loaf, giving them his own
body that would be nailed to the cross, he passed his cup and invited them
to ^{take} ~~use~~ his own blood, dripping down from hands nailed to the cross.
Jesus knew then, and knows tonight just who gathers at his table. And he
gives to you ^{himself, and only} ~~himself~~.

To deniers and betrayers he gives himself. His whole self, Jesus is
yours, this night, and tomorrow too. He lives in you. You do not leave
this table with the same self that came here. With Christ you leave all
your sins and failings, all your guilt and shame. The self to whom those
belong is put to death with Christ.

And Christ gives to you all his love, all his holiness, all his life.
So that you can confess with Paul: It is no longer I who live but Christ
who lives in me.

Christ lives in you.

And where he lives there is love.