

Lectionary Gospel Commentaries

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Based on the Lectionary Pericope Covering:

Luke 22:7-20

SOLA-LSB (Lutheran Service Book): Year C - Maun Th., Text: Lk. 22:7-20 (or Jn. 13:1-17, 31b-35)
RCL (Revised Common Lectionary): Year C - Maundy Thursday, Text: (John 13:1-17, 31b-35)

***Editor's Note:** Dr. Wendt did not write a commentary on this text. The following 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 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.

Commentary on the Text

Verses 22:7-13: Jesus sends Peter and John into the city to find a large upper room for the Passover meal. Jesus says, “Behold, when you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him into the house that he enters and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples? (22:11, 12)’” Peter and John do as Jesus directs. They find the room, and prepare the Passover there.

These instructions are quite convoluted and call upon Peter and John to exercise great faith in finding the location. Perhaps this is to keep Judas from giving the location of the house to his co-conspirators. Or perhaps it also prepares Peter and John to exercise faith in the hours ahead when Jesus will be arrested, tried, and crucified.

Verses 22:14-18: Jesus tells His disciples that He has earnestly desired to eat this Passover with them before He suffers. But He says that He will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. Moreover, He also says that He will not drink wine again until the kingdom of God comes. But when will the kingdom come?

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 since He intends to suffer.

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 Communion. 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. Thus, Jesus will drink wine with His disciples again when He returns in glory. As this point, His transformation of the Passover into Holy Communion will itself be transformed into the Marriage Supper of the Lamb!

Verses 22:19-20: 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. And 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 both to forgive their sins and to sustain their faith.

Observations on Early Church Worship Practice

Quoted from pp. 134–135 of "Living the Story" by Paul Stevens and Michael Green.

Most early Communion did not take place in a church at all, but in a home. People began to appear in the early evening with materials for a potluck supper. They are happy and relaxed; work is over. All are on a level here, men and women. Roman citizens and commoners, slaves and free. Oil lamps are lit. Couches are set. Feet are washed. They have a meal, reclining around a courtyard, or squashed into a room. They share news. Someone produces a musical instrument and they begin to sing. Indeed, they create new songs, snatches of which are to be found in the New Testament, like 'Awake, sleeper, and arise from the dead: Christ shall give you life,' or 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God almighty, who was and is and is to come.'

Meanwhile, someone has brought out the church box that contains their most Christian belongings: some sayings of Jesus, perhaps a letter from an apostle, or communion vessels. Praise is heartfelt. Speaking in tongues might well follow. There could be a prayer for a healing or a specific need of one of the members. Certainly prayer, the reading of an Old Testament scripture, the recitation of a story about Jesus, and some words of encouragement from members of the community, along with joyful singing, would all feature.

And as the evening comes to an end, they would tell again the story of Jesus' passion, and break bread and drink wine in remembrance of Him. Every scrap is finished. The prayer that Jesus taught them is recited.

They move around and embrace one another with a holy kiss, and then go home. All very simple. No service books. No priests. No altars. Every eye is on the unseen Lord, the bread, the wine, and each other. And then — out into the night, spiritually refueled for the journey of the coming week.