

## 02-16-2025 Worship Service

### **Anabaptism at 500 – part 4**

### **Matthew 26:17-30 – Finding Jesus in the ordinary**

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Like many stories about Jesus, the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke, tell this one nearly identically. Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem for the Passover celebration, along with hundreds of other people. These were some of the Jewish High Holy days when the ancient traditions were remembered and kept religiously. To travel with your family and gather in Jerusalem to celebrate Passover was a bucket list item – something many Jews *still* try to do at least once in their lifetime.

But Jesus and his followers weren't with their families. They were there in Jerusalem with one another. They had become family to one another, with Jesus as the head of their household. So the disciples asked what sort of accommodations Jesus had in mind for them; everyone was looking for a place to stay, a place to prepare their seder meal. Just a few chapters before, in chapter 21, Jesus had given them similar instructions when he told them to "Go into the village ahead of you and... you'll find a donkey tied, and a colt with her; untie them and bring them to me. If anyone says anything to you, just say, 'The Lord needs them.'" And that, of course, was the donkey and/or the colt on which Jesus made his "triumphal entry" into Jerusalem with the people cheering him. Now, in this part of the story, Jesus tells them, "Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is near; I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" And apparently, that's the way it happened.

The disciples had come to understand that when Jesus was among them seemingly ordinary things could be extraordinary. It was an ordinary village with an ordinary donkey and then an ordinary man with an ordinary house where they ate a traditional, ordinary Passover meal together. They spoke the familiar words of the Passover service, remembering God's faithfulness that led their forebears out of enslavement in Egypt. They ate the meal that they always ate – each part of it, helping them to remember the story. The flat, unleavened bread because they'd had to leave in a hurry and didn't have time to wait for the leaven to make the bread rise. The sweet apple paste to remind them of the mortar that their people had been forced to make and use in slavery. The bitter herbs, reminding them of the bitterness of being enslaved. The shank bone, representing the sacrificial lamb whose blood on the doorsill signaled the angel of death to pass over. The hard-boiled egg that reminded them of the offering brought to the Temple. The vegetables dipped in salt water, symbolizing their salty tears. And the wine that cradled the meal, separating each section with prayers of thanksgiving for God's bounty and faithfulness.

Jesus and his people had a long and wonderful tradition of using ordinary things to symbolize and remember God's extraordinary presence with them. And Jesus was following faithfully in the long line of prophets that called people to stay awake and recognize God and God's Spirit acting and moving all around them and within them all the time!

So when Jesus took an ordinary loaf of bread, at the Passover meal, blessed it, broke it and gave it to his disciples telling them to take it and eat it, that it was his body and then took an ordinary cup of wine, gave thanks, and said to them, “All of you, drink from this. This is my blood. It’s the new covenant that God is making with His people,” he was, again, asking them to SEE God’s extraordinary activity and salvation in these ordinary symbols.

The early church carried on these traditions, repeating the examples Jesus gave. But as Christendom took over and the church became one with the state, the bread and the juice were given supernatural qualities, somehow magically “becoming” Christ’s literal body and blood. And that’s how it was for centuries.

As the 16<sup>th</sup> century reformers began to read the scriptures for themselves allowing the Holy Spirit to guide their reading and understanding, they grasped the significance of ordinary bread and wine symbolizing God’s extraordinary presence. You may remember these folks were called radical reformers because of their desire to get to the root of scripture’s meaning for their lives. The word radical comes from the Latin meaning “root”. They were determined to try to understand the root, the basis of their faith in Jesus. And so, as they read these Gospel stories of Jesus revealing God’s presence in the most ordinary things in life – bread and wine – they understood that there’s no magic, but only awareness.

We’re called to be attentive to The Spirit in the most ordinary, the most essential and simple acts and events in life – eating a common meal together, and in gratitude, realizing and remembering God’s Saving Love for every person, for all of creation. We’re called to be a family of believers with Jesus as the head of our household.

In one of the classes I took in Seminary, we talked about the sacraments and rituals that we do in the church and about how there can be different occasions and different ways to celebrate them. Communion – being fed and nourished together – could be celebrated as often as we eat together. And it doesn’t always have to be just a somber and sad event. We remember Jesus! We remember his sacrificial love and the new covenant made in his blood! We can remember those somber things with joy and gratitude for God’s bounty and faithfulness to us in our lifetimes and throughout our history - our forebears and across the generations.

As we bring our series on 500 years of Anabaptism to a close today, I pray that our faith might be renewed, strengthened and inspired as we remember the vital and rooted faith of those early Anabaptists. In spite of the troubled and chaotic times they lived in – or maybe partly because of them – they dug down to the root of their faith and it sustained them and gave them joy. May we find the same. Amen.

### **Song of Response**

#### **Words of Invitation –**

As Jenny and Tina have set this beautiful worship table FULL of abundant fruits and vegetables, grains and breads, our communion this morning will include bounty and beauty as well.

You'll notice there are four tables set up – two in each corner here in the front and two on either side of the back of the sanctuary. Anyone who knows and loves Jesus and wants to follow him in life is invited to the table.

The bread and the juice is for those who've made a decision to commit their lives to Jesus, to repent and be baptized in the community of believers.

The Swiss chocolates (dark or milk), and the grapes and strawberries are for everyone who would like to celebrate God's bounteous love. You can let the deacons know which chocolate and which fruit you'd like and they'll serve them to you.

I encourage you to go to whichever table you're situated in within the sanctuary, so if each "quadrant" would go to the table nearest them, we'll see if that works out!

I also encourage you to go in groups of, say, 4-6 or 7 people to receive this meal together. The deacons at each table will join the first group who comes – and then they'll serve the others.

As you come in small groups, those who've been baptized will first receive the bread and juice and then everyone in the group will be served the other parts of the meal.

So, if you could form a line, but then come to the table in small groups rather than one-by-one as we usually do it, I hope that will give us more of a sense that we're in this together.

And I don't have a traffic pattern to suggest for this way of doing it – you'll just have to say "excuse me" as you get back to your seats.

Let's come to the tables as we remember and celebrate.

### **Sharing God's Bounty**

#### **Prayer of Thanksgiving**

I invite you to join in the prayer of thanksgiving found at number 945 in the VT

Leader: In peace, let us pray, together...

*O God, we give you thanks for uniting us as the body of Christ and for filling us with joy at this table.*

*Lead us toward the unity of your church, and help us treasure signs of reconciliation.*

*Now that we have tasted the banquet you have prepared for us, may we one day feast together in your heavenly city.*

*Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen.*

#### **Song of Sending – VT 812**

#### **Benediction –**

In deep gratitude for this moment, this meal, these people, we give ourselves to you, O God. Send us to live as changed people because we have shared the Living Bread and cannot remain the same.

As much of us, expect much from us, enable much by us, encourage many through us.

So, God, may we glorify you as inhabitants of earth and citizens of heaven. Amen