



April 17, 2014  
Maundy Thursday  
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Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *The Anticipated Feast*

Luke 22: 14-20

*[Song: In Evil Long I Took Delight]*

That song is, in many ways, about our appetite. Too often, we hunger for the wrong things. The things that are not good for us. Empty things that do not fill. Too often, we hunger for evil. Tonight I want to talk about our appetite. What do we hunger for?

About a month ago my wonderful wife preached a sermon from Galatians and she shared a little bit about our personal life. Particularly she shared about my appetite. And I have had so many conversations with people about frozen burritos since then. If you weren't here, Pastor Megan shared this story about how she had worked really hard to prepare a meal in the crockpot for me, and I came home and dug around in the fridge for a frozen burrito. I had my reasons for skipping out on that delicious crockpot meal that Megan had prepared, but the cold fact is that I flagrantly ignored the gift of food that my wife had prepared for me.

But you must know something about me. I grew up believing that my highest value as it concerns food is actually convenience. I think I've already shared once that I grew up eating peanut-butter and jelly sandwiches. I don't necessarily care how good it tastes, how healthy it is, though those are nice factors. What I need to know is how quickly can I eat this and move onto something more interesting. So, when I got married I had some learning to do. Still do. Very early in our marriage I remember how upset Megan got at me that I slurped down some delicious meal that she had slaved over and said not... a... word about how good it was, or how much work she had put into it.

I learned, that day and many more after it, that a meal was not just for sustenance. A meal... is about people. My value for convenience had overlooked the fact that my wife had cared for me, had taken delight in creating something. It also overlooked the fact that sitting down and eating is one of the few times in a day when I got to sit down, uninterrupted, and simply be with my wife. We didn't even have to talk, because we were too busy shoveling food in our mouths. But at a meal, I am present with someone.

I think in our culture we can underestimate how meaningful a meal together is. The average family spends about 40% of their food budget on eating out, and not usually together. Some families eat around a TV, or not together at all. But, statistics show that families who eat together at least five times a week produce kids with higher academic scores, feel more secure, are less prone to risky behaviors, and are even less prone to eating disorders and obesity. Now, I recognize that there are other factors in that than simply eating together, but... eating food together carries great significance, great meaning, and great importance.

Tonight, we are going to read about the greatest, most important family meal in the history of the world. And then we're going to have a chance to celebrate that meal ourselves.

[Read Luke 22: 7-8,14-20]

This is the Word of the Lord. [Pray]

If you can, for a minute, imagine yourself as one of the disciples who reclined around that table with Jesus that night. You've followed this man around for years, seen the miracles, seen the wisdom, seen the love of this man. And you have hopes that he will turn the fortune of your nation around. Rome has oppressed your people for decades, and before that Greece. Your people, the nation of Israel groan under the oppression, they cry out. As Jesus has said, they are like sheep without a shepherd. But this man, your master, your rabbi, surely he is the one who will redeem Israel, who will lead them out from the oppression of the Romans and into the prosperity they had once had under the old kings David and Solomon. A king has come, and he will save us. Hosanna!

And this night, you feel this more keenly than ever before. You know what this Passover meal means. 1400 years ago, your people escaped from the clutches of Egypt by the powerful hand of God. Many plagues had befallen the Egyptians, with the final one being the worst of all: the death of every firstborn. But God would preserve the Israelites. Every home of an Israelite would have the blood of a lamb over their door posts, and God would pass over that home and withhold his judgment. That night, the people of Israel had a meal together... of lamb and bitter herbs, and unleavened bread. And every year, they would celebrate that meal and remember that night. And in the remembering, they would know that God loved them, that he saved them and delivered them from their captives.

So this night, (remember, you're still imagining you're one of the disciples reclining at the table), this night Passover is infused with new meaning. No longer are you just remembering what God has done, you're wondering if he will do it again. Will Jesus be the new Moses? Will Jesus break the rod of oppression and set the Israelites free? Will Jesus begin a revolution?

Your hopes are confirmed when Jesus begins the meal by telling them in the most emphatic language possible, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you." Earnestly desired! Longed for, yearned to eat this meal with his disciples. I cannot understate the passion behind this statement, that from the deepest levels of Christ's soul he wanted to eat this meal with his apostles. Jesus, too, has greatly anticipated this meal. Earnest desire.

But you can sense that his desire is different from yours. Because he says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you... before I suffer." And then Jesus speaks of his body being broken, his blood poured out, and you realize, as one of Jesus' disciples, that this isn't going to be an easy revolution; this will be a bloody revolution. And if Jesus is going to die, as he keeps saying, then he will die a martyr's death, betrayed by one of your own and maybe that will be the start of this revolution.

So you and the other disciples begin to wonder if you're ready for this bloody revolution. You wonder, who's next in line? Who will take the place of the master? Who is the greatest among us? Let's figure that out. And Jesus says, "No, no you guys. That's not what this is about."

Then Peter steps up and says, "Jesus, I'm in this to the end. I'm ready to die right by your side. Let's do this." And Jesus says, "Uh huh. Not gonna happen."

Okay, so you've got succession nailed down, and you know you're all ready to die with Jesus. What about weapons? You scrounge around with a couple of disciples and find two swords. "Look Jesus, we've got two swords." And by this point Jesus sounds like an exasperated parent. "That's enough!" The Gospel of John recounts him saying to one of his disciples that night, "Have I been with you so long and you do not know me?"

And maybe, just maybe, if you were one of Jesus' disciples that night, you might begin to wonder, "Maybe I'm not getting something."

So you are obviously not an apostle at Jesus' table, but thank you for imagining that night with me. But if you come here tonight as a follower of Jesus, then you are indeed coming to the Passover table to eat the same meal those apostles ate thousands of years ago. And just like those apostles, you may be coming with your own desires, your own anticipations.

When we read this account of the apostles, they can just seem so obtuse. But they're actually pretty consistent. They had this bloody revolution in mind, and they were preparing for that. They clearly had a plan and they were acting on it—succession, solidarity, and swords—but they weren't on the same page as Jesus, and ultimately their desires led them nowhere.

The ironic thing about Passover is that for the Jews, this was a feast of remembrance. But for Jesus this was a feast of anticipation. Everything about Passover was really about Jesus—a feast about salvation, a lamb that was slain whose blood saves people from judgment, the unleavened bread, unmarred by yeast, broken and distributed for everyone, and the wine, poured out for many. For 1400 years, Jews had been looking backwards at the Exodus, remembering how God had saved them. But Jesus was looking forwards to the day he could sit with his close friends and celebrate what God was going to do, how God would truly save them body and soul. And this time, Jesus would be the sacrificial lamb whose blood is shed.

And yet, this still isn't the end of the story for Jesus because he tells us that "I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." He tells us this twice, "For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." Each time he uses as emphatic language as he can. "I will certainly not eat this again, no way, not at all, until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." Just as emphatically as he had desired to eat this meal with his apostles, he promises to... what? He promises to wait for us.

You see, when Jesus eats this meal with his apostles he gives them a taste of eternity. He gives them a glimpse into his eternal plan. Do you know what his plan is? It's real simple. It might blow your mind. Jesus' plan, the reason why he shed his blood, was to have a feast with us. It's right there in vs. 29-30.

"And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

In other words, Jesus' desire was for fellowship with us. His end game was to be with you and me. And when he sits down with his apostles at this table and reinterprets the Passover dinner to be about himself, he simultaneously points their hearts to the culmination of history at the end of time, the fulfillment of all things, when all of creation is redeemed and we find ourselves with Jesus forever, eating at his table. Now, that doesn't mean I believe we're just going to be stuffing our mouths for eternity, that's a bit simplistic. But remember what I said earlier, a meal is about people. A meal is about being together. There really is no better metaphor for what it will mean to be on the other side of eternity.

So when we come together to celebrate the Eucharist, we are not just remembering, we are anticipating. It is a feast of anticipation.

And the worst part about this is that the disciples blow it. They miss this completely. They've got thoughts of martyrdom and bloodshed in their heads, their own little agenda, and they miss that this is just... about... being with Jesus. Jesus says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover... with YOU..." I wonder tonight, do you earnestly desire to be with him?

This little bit of bread and this little sip of grape juice should really make you hungry. It should make you hungry for a meal with Jesus. But our appetites are weak. We hunger for things that do not fill. C.S. Lewis once said that:

“We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.”

When Megan and I were in seminary, there were some incredible pressures to complete the academic work. We did about four classes a semester, which doesn't seem like a lot. But when we were trying to learn an ancient language, have 2,000 pages of reading for each class, and have to write research papers on top of that, we were easily working seven days a week on our degree. It was exhausting at times. And I'm sure you can identify with this; when you're exhausted and you need a break, you just want to veg out, right? Most of the time that means sitting in front of a TV and not thinking. We have all done that.

But I wonder if you have ever had the experience of doing that... and not really feeling refreshed. Maybe the chaos in your life has paused. But when you hit the play button again, you are just as tired, soul, spirit, and body, as you were before you sat down. Do you know what I mean? Well, I felt that almost my entire first year of seminary. I would work and work, and even when I took a break it did not feel restful.

With the help of some friends I began to realize that what I had hoped would fill me up and refresh could not do that. TV was not going to refresh me. What was really going to refresh me was the ways that I meet God. You see, I had thought my appetite was for junk food. I thought I needed light, inconsequential things to fill me up. But really I needed the milk and meat of God's presence. So, instead of TV I would go for a walk in the woods. Or I would find a tree to sit by and journal and talk with God. Maybe I would play the piano, or work on a drawing. These were ways I experienced God's presence and pleasure too.

Nowadays, we assume that entertainment is what refreshes us. We have a huge multi-billion dollar entertainment industry to this end. And of course, we may enjoy it for a time, but then we walk away feeling just as empty as before. Really, the thing that refreshes us the most is a meal with Jesus... fellowship with Jesus. And that's not just prayer and reading your Bible, by the way, though it does include those things. I know a friend who meets with Jesus by mowing his lawn. In that simple act of manicuring his lawn he feels God's pleasure and meets with him there. It was not those things in themselves that were refreshing, it was how they led me to God.

Thank God I had friends who could walk with me and help me think about my appetite. They helped me see what was junk food and what was filling. And what was filling, ultimately, had to do with being closer to God.

C.S. Lewis is right. We really are like children playing in a mud puddle in the slums when we could be building sand castles by the beach. We may think we have desires, we may fool around with things like sex and power, the American Dream, entertainment... but we have not known fulfillment until we find Jesus.

At the Last Supper, the disciples desired power. They thought that was the answer. But Jesus desired simply to be with them... with us.

And that is what this meal is about. When we eat this bread and wine, we realize the cost that Jesus paid to be with us and we remember. But... this little bit of bread and wine should make us hunger for more. Should make us hunger to be with the only one who can truly fill us. And in that hunger we anticipate the day when we shall eat this meal with him again.

[Pray]

Tonight, as we prepare ourselves for this Feast of Anticipation, I want you to ask yourselves about your desires. Where do they lead you? Do they lead, ultimately, to emptiness? Or do they lead you to the table where Jesus sits, waiting for you?

"The Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'"