



SERMON OF THE WEEK

First Presbyterian Church of Honolulu at Ko'olau

February 3, 2019

"The Last Supper" - Hope Restored Sermon Series

Pastor Dan Chun

Mark 14:12-17, 22-25 *On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked Him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"*

So He sent two of His disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him.

Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'

He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there."

The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve...

...While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."

Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," He said to them.

"Truly I tell you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

Today's message is on the sacrament of communion, which as you saw, was next up as we are walking through the Gospel of Mark in our Hope Restored series.

Now to some that might sound boring, but you will hopefully see in the end that it culminates thousands of years of history all into one ceremony that can give you so much hope for everyday living, especially those who are going through a tough time right now.

For it's about our friend and Lord Jesus.

To fully understand communion and how it applies to us, we begin with an important historical, biblical context that you may not know:

All of the Old Testament points to the life of Jesus Christ.

It's not two separate stories of the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's all intertwined and the Old Testament continually points to the coming of the Messiah in ways that might surprise people. In Andy Croft and Mike Pilavachi's book, *StoryLines*, one gets a map to understand how the Bible is really one big story of Jesus' story.

His Story, the story of Jesus, is seen in all of the biblical HISTORY. History is HIS Story.

Let me show several examples of how the Old Testament repeatedly points to Jesus of the New Testament.

Take the story of Noah, about one righteous man who builds an ark. Only Noah's family believes Noah and his warnings about an impending flood that would kill off all of humanity unless they heed the word of God.

So they get on the ark with "plenny" animals, including unfortunately mosquitos and scorpions. Why? Why, Lord? You wanted two of every kind of creature?

The flood comes and all are killed except Noah's family. The family is saved not because they were righteous, but because they were attached to Noah, who was righteous.

Hence, we get our first signpost to Jesus.

Jesus is the only real righteous man on earth, and whoever chooses to follow Him will be saved and sheltered in the safety of His salvation, as symbolized by the ark that Noah built.

Then there's the Old Testament story of Abraham who, in a most disturbing episode, is told by God to take his son Isaac to a region called Moriah and there he is to kill his son.

I have never liked this story. Why would a loving God tell Abraham to do such a terrible act? But hang in there. Spoiler alert: it all ends up okay.

Let me tell you the fuller meaning, which will help us understand the deeper purpose of this passage, and hopefully we'll be a bit more comforted.

Here's the story:

Abraham gets on a donkey and takes his son Isaac and some cut wood to be used for a burnt sacrificial offering to God. God tells them to go to the Land of Moriah.

On the third day, they get to Moriah and Abraham takes the wood for the burnt offering and puts it on his son Isaac to carry as they walk away leaving the servants with the donkey.

His innocent young son says to his dad, "The fire and wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7) And Abraham says, "God Himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering, my son."

Then they came to a special place in Moriah where God told Abraham to go. Abraham builds an altar and lays the wood on it and then he binds his son and lays him on the wood on the altar. Then Abraham gets a knife ready to kill his son.

And for years I have thought this is the most hideous, and most horrible story. What kind of God would ask Abraham to do this? I hate this story.

But then the story takes a twist and it points to a deep, unexpected theological meaning.

Before Abraham does anything with that knife, God sends an angel to Abraham to immediately stop him.

It was never God's intention to have Isaac killed. God is playing out a scene that points to Jesus. How so?

Abraham looked up and saw a ram caught in a nearby thicket. He took the ram—a male sheep—and made the ram the burnt offering instead of Isaac.

Abraham called that place in Moriah "The Lord will provide." He said, "On this mount of the Lord it shall be provided."

Pretty horrible story, until you realize it is another signpost towards Jesus.

Where is Moriah? Surprise. Surprise. It's what we know today as....Jerusalem!

Thousands of years after this incident, the Bible tells of Jesus entering Jerusalem on a donkey. Same place. Hence, it is déjà vu.

A different father, the Heavenly Father leads His son Jesus to ride a donkey into the exact same area that Abraham was told to go with his son Isaac.

This son Jesus also had to carry wood on His shoulders, but *this wood* was a cross that He would die on.

As it took Abraham three days to get to Moriah, so it took three days for Jesus to be arrested, killed, and rise from the dead.

Two thousand years later as Abraham said, "On the mount of the Lord, it shall be provided," God provided His innocent Son Jesus, the ram, the male lamb of God, for the offering that would be sacrificed for all of the sin of humankind. God had planned this from the beginning of humankind.

Abraham and Isaac's story was a foretelling of the Messiah to come and it laid the foundation for that story to be told again and again throughout the Old Testament. Signposts.

Andy Croft and Mike Pilavachi wrote, "God knew what was going to happen, and He knew what it was going to cost Him. He knew what you were going to cost and then He went ahead anyway." (*StoryLines*, Croft and Pilavachi, 2010, pg 18)

Take the story of Noah, the story of Abraham, and then there is the story of Joseph in the Old Testament. Joseph was a righteous man. But he was falsely accused of a crime and put in prison.

Two criminals came to join him, just as thousands of years later Jesus, also falsely accused, served His sentence on a cross with two criminals on either side of Him, all three of them crucified.

In Joseph's story one of the criminals was saved and one was condemned.

In Jesus' story, one criminal was saved because of his faith, while the other one was not.

After Joseph got out of prison he became the right-hand man of Pharaoh. Joseph ended up saving his family, which eventually became the holy nation of Israel.

After spending time in prison, Jesus went to the cross, died, and then ascended to the right hand of the Father in Heaven. Jesus saved the true holy nation—the followers of Christ.

There are more than 300 prophecies in the Old Testament of a Messiah that were fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

We can spend all day looking at other signposts from the Old Testament that all point to Jesus, but let us focus now on Moses, who gets us directly to the Last Supper, our topic for today and to what we know today as communion.

In the story of Moses, God hears the cries of the Israelites who are enslaved and are suffering under Pharaoh.

God decides to save them, hence begins another parallel to how God wants to save a suffering people through one righteous man.

God sends Moses and appears to him in a burning bush that doesn't really burn. Moses ask "Who shall I say has sent me?" And God replies, "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you" (Ex. 3:14) Call me I AM.

Moses is thinking, "say I Am sent me? That really doesn't help me."

Many centuries later God hears the cry of humanity, who are slaves to sin, and through one man, Jesus, God again decides to save a people.

When Jesus' main detractors in the Bible, the Pharisees, say to Him in a sarcastic tone, "Who do you say you are?" Jesus replies, "Before Abraham was born, I AM!" (John 8:53-58)

In hearing this, the Pharisees then pick up stones to kill Him because He used a sacred title they use only for God—I AM.

Indeed, Jesus was saying I AM that I AM. I AM GOD, fully human, fully divine, the one and only Christ. I AM the same God who talked to Noah, to Abraham, to Joseph, to Moses and to us.

In the story of Moses - God saves the Israelites from Pharaoh specifically by sending an angel of death to kill off all the first-born sons of the Egyptians as the tenth plague to convince the stiff-necked Pharaoh to let my people go.

But in order to save the Israelites, God instituted through Moses a ceremonial dinner what is known today as the Passover Meal.

God told Moses to have each family kill a lamb for Passover, take the blood of the lamb, and paint it on the top and on the side of the door frames of their homes.

God told Moses that when the angel of the Lord passes through the town to strike down the Egyptians, He will *pass over* the houses with blood on the doorposts. Hence the name of Passover.

And while the Israelites were inside having this special dinner, the children may ask, "Why is this night different from other nights? Why is it so special?"

God told Moses to tell the children and the adults to give this answer: "It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites and spared our homes. (Exodus 12:27)

Now flash forward some 1600 years to the last Supper in the upper room in the last week of Jesus' life. They are having what? Yes, a Passover Meal.

Essentially, Jesus will be telling them that God's judgement will pass over any family who believes in Him and therefore has the blood of Jesus in them. It's a transfusion of Jesus blood into us.

Hang on to hear how this works.

Typically, Passover for the Jews is an 8-day observance but it begins on a Monday night with a Passover or seder meal.

Typically, a Passover meal, even today in an observing Jewish home, would have 15-elements to it, but I am just going to talk about four main elements as I don't have time to talk about each of the 15-elements in detail.

First, unleavened bread or **Matzah**. Why? Because when Pharaoh let the Israelites go from Egypt, they had to hurry in case Pharaoh changed his mind and decided not to let them go after all. They had zero time to bake their bread. There was no time to wait for the yeast to rise.

So they left with just the dough that had no yeast or leaven in it, which is why it is called unleavened bread. The Jews call it "matzah," which they use for Passover meals today, and which I, and the other pastors, use at the table when we lead communion every month.

In the New Testament Jesus would warn His disciples of the leaven in bread, which represented the sin that the law-making Pharisees would promote through their legalism.

So, the unleavened bread would remind us to live in the Spirit of God and not in the religiosity of rules and regulations.

Then there are **bitter herbs** served in a Passover meal to remind Jews of today that the ancient Israelites were slaves in Egypt and their lives were made very bitter. God saved them from that.

During a Passover meal the herbs are dipped twice, first parsley is dipped once in salt water to remind them of the green of springtime.

And then people dip the bitter herbs in **sweet charoseth**, a sweet paste made of nuts and fruit to remind them that their forefathers and mothers were able to withstand bitter suffering because it was sweetened by the hope of freedom.

Then comes the drinking of four cups of **wine** throughout the hours-long seder meal. These are cups of *tremendous* symbolism and significance.

Four Cups representing:

- ◆ Sanctification
- ◆ Judgment
- ◆ Redemption (Atonement)
- ◆ Praise

Normally during a Passover meal, these four cups of wine are consumed at different times, each cup symbolizing an important act of faith:

The Cup of Sanctification stands for how God brought the Jews out from the enslavement of the Egyptians.

The Cup of Judgment stands for how God freed them from bondage.

The Cup of Redemption stands for how God redeemed them and forgave their sins.

And then finally the Cup of Praise stands for how they are to celebrate God.

So how did the Passover meal during the Last Supper foretell the coming of Jesus? What did it mean that Jesus Himself was leading the Passover Meal during what is called The Last Supper? Here is where it all converged.

Jesus was, in essence, saying to the disciples during the Last Supper that all those elements come together and coincide with Him. Jesus is the fulfillment of it all.

In the Bible, leaven is often equated with sin. And so unleavened bread represents Jesus, who is without sin. He said, "I am the bread of Life; he who comes to me will never be hungry and whoever believes in me will never thirst." (John 6:35)

Parsley. Jesus suffered greatly to save us from our sins. He also knows our pain even before we cry out to Him.

Sweet Charoseth reminded them of the sweet hope in Christ in the midst of suffering.

As for the cups of wine, when Jesus spoke about the cup during the Last Supper, He was probably holding the third cup, the cup of redemption, that Jesus is the one who redeems us.

It made it even more powerful when He said, “whenever you drink *this* cup, yes *this third cup*, do so in remembrance of Me. The wine is symbolic of My blood shed for you.” And yes, with My sacrificial blood and the life I offer, you will never thirst.

It’s interesting how none of the four gospels mention lamb in the descriptions of the Passover meal, which is such an essential part. As Tim Keller would say, there was no lamb *on* the table because The Lamb Jesus Christ was *at* the table.

Jesus was the one who would be killed to take away the sin of the world. All our sin.

Jesus was saying during the Last Supper before He died, “I am the Lamb of God who will give My life for you, tortured, bound, blindfolded and punched, whipped and then finally crucified. I will give My life for you.”

Now there may be some here who are thinking, “I don’t get it.” Why did Jesus have to sacrifice His life for us? I mean what kind of gory God is this? Why does there have to be blood shed? Why have Someone killed?

It would make more sense if God just loved us. Don’t need then all that gore unless God is some primitive savage who has some kind of weird, ancient, sick desire where He needs to be appeased with blood.

We might even come to the conclusion of who needs a violent God who sacrifices his life, his blood for my sake?

But please, let’s all really think through this. When you talk about love—real, genuine, authentic, enduring, unconditional love—you cannot talk about love without talking about a sacrifice.

Jesus sacrificed His life for us.

You don’t really love a person unless you have suffered for them and maybe even through a substitutionary sacrifice for them.

If you only love nice people, well, anyone can do that. There is no cost for that. No sacrifice. Anyone can love a nice person. You could lead a sheltered life and find and hang out only with nice people. Try and do that.

But if you try to love someone who is not lovable, who is prickly, who has needs, who has challenges and issues then you *know* you will have to love them sacrificially.

If your friend is already super-nice, there is really no sacrifice to love the already-lovable.

But if there is someone in your family, or a group of friends, who is wounded emotionally or has scars from past relationships, and who at times does *not* act in a loving way, or who is *sinful*, then you know you will have to sacrifice to love them.

And you will be wiped out. You will feel that you have lost blood.

Good parents would die for their children. The essence of real love is sacrifice and blood, sweat, and tears.

Speaking of blood, in ancient Israel, get this! If you made a covenant with another person, you were to cut an animal in half and then you were to walk between the two split animals and, in essence, be saying, “If I break this promise, may what happened to this animal, cut in half, happen to me.”

Oh wow, laulau! Super serious!

Knowing this, look what happens in Genesis 15, when Abraham wonders out loud to God “if You are going to bless me, how will I know that is really going to happen?”

The Great Holy God does a strange thing just to show a puny human He never breaks a promise when He says “I will stand with you always.” He says to Abraham, “You kill a couple of animals and set the pieces of animals out.”

Moses does just that. He kills animals and splits them in two like you do when you make a covenant.

But then, get this! A smoking torch comes flying in midair. I know it sounds like Harry Potter, but it’s not. It’s real. And that is God. It’s like the pillar of fire and the pillar of smoke that led the Israelites.

Robert Alter, a Jewish scholar, says that this passage is saying that God Himself, the Holy God who doesn’t have to prove anything to a puny human, is taking an oath—a blood oath—and saying “I will love you and stand by you even if it kills Me.”

Basically, in the Last Supper/Passover meal God was saying, "I am the bread, which is My Body. I am the cup and the wine is My blood and I am willing to die for you to keep My promise that I will bless you. And lo, I am with you always."

At the Last Supper, Jesus was making a covenant with us that He will be with us. And I will not eat or drink again until I get as many of you as possible into the Father's kingdom.

If you are going through a painful time today, know that God is saying, "I am all in for you. Trust me, fall on me, have faith." It's God making a promise to us.

I love what Tim Keller says: "The gospel is that you depend on *His* commitment to you, not *your* commitment to Him."

We sing to God, Great is *Thy* faithfulness, not great is *my* faithfulness.

We follow Jesus because He is *faithful* to keep His covenant that He is for us, even unto death.

The sacrament of communion is about a Best Friend giving His life for us. It is about God our Lord dying for us to give us a chance for a great life here on earth and eternally.

Now you can see that this communion is no small thing. It is rich in meaning, starting in the Old Testament and all the way to here.

The final thing I want to say about communion is that we believe, that whenever we celebrate the sacrament of communion, somehow Jesus is actually here participating with us, at the table, and that something supernatural happens and that Jesus is more here in this room than at other times. And hence we need to take this seriously.

How seriously? The Bible says we could get sick or die if we mess around with holy communion. Sorry to shock you about this.

So, pay attention to this. Participate in communion as a follower of Jesus with reverence and not nonchalantly.

We know in Apostle Paul's letter to the first century Corinthian church that Christians were coming to the Last Supper meal and becoming gluttons and heavy drinkers, totally missing the whole point of the sacrament.

Hence, Paul wrote this to the Corinthian church, as described in the paraphrase version called The Message :

1Corinthians 11:20-34 *And then I find that you bring your divisions to worship—you come together, and instead of eating the Lord's Supper, you bring in a lot of food from the outside and make pigs of yourselves. Some are left out, and go home hungry. Others have to be carried out, too drunk to walk. I can't believe it! Don't you have your own homes to eat and drink in?*

Why would you stoop to desecrating God's church? Why would you actually shame God's poor? I never would have believed you would stoop to this. And I'm not going to stand by and say nothing.

Let me go over with you again exactly what goes on in the Lord's Supper and why it is so centrally important. I received my instructions from the Master Himself and passed them on to you.

The Master, Jesus, on the night of His betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, broken for you. Do this to remember Me." After supper, He did the same thing with the cup. "This cup is My blood, My new covenant with you. Each time you drink this cup, remember Me."

What you must solemnly realize is that every time you eat this bread and every time you drink this cup, you reenact in your words and actions the death of the Master. You will be drawn back to this meal again and again until the Master returns. You must never let familiarity breed contempt.

Anyone who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Master irreverently is like part of the crowd that jeered and spit on Him at His death. Is that the kind of "remembrance" you want to be part of? Examine your motives, test your heart, come to this meal in holy awe.

If you give no thought (or worse, don't care) about the broken body of the Master when you eat and drink, you're running the risk of serious consequences. That's why so many of you even now are listless and sick, and others have gone to an early grave (some have died—in original language).

If we get this straight now, we won't have to be straightened out later on. Better to be confronted by the Master now than to face a fiery confrontation later.

So, my friends, when you come together to the Lord's Table, be reverent and courteous with one another. If you're so hungry that you can't wait to be served, go home and get a sandwich. But by no means risk turning this Meal into an eating and drinking binge or a family squabble. It is a spiritual meal—a love feast.

So friends, now you know the fuller meaning of Communion, the Last Supper. It has now become what is called the Lord's Supper for it is all about Jesus our Lord.

Communion is a highly meaningful sacrament of our faith. And to be part of it—like the Elders and Deacons who serve us the elements—is an honor as we regularly re-enact the Lord's Supper.

So now as the elders and deacons get the elements of the bread and the cups to distribute for Communion, may we remember this sacrament is, in essence, remembering that our Best Friend Jesus died for us and

that is why we do this over and over again. He told us to do it and so we gladly do it.

Have you ever done something every year because you are fondly remembering a loved one who suffered or sacrificed for you and for God's cause?

For some, it is visiting a gravesite. For some, it is drinking a beverage and raising a toast to a deceased friend. Maybe it's for a buddy who gave his or her life in a war, defending this country.

For me, every July I smoke a cigar to remember my dear friend Don Parker. He is the man who had a literal dream that led us here to Ko'olau when we didn't know to where God wanted us to move.

He, along with Ron Mathieu and Freddie Noa, spearheaded the move from Ke'eaumoku to Ko'olau. Don Parker never got to fully see the growth of more than a thousand people come to be part of our community. He suffered and sacrificed trying to make the dream true.

After he died, his wife Sally gave me his cigars and his humidior, the container for his cigars to keep them moist.

He and I said when we found the place where God wanted us to move from our Makiki campus, we would smoke a cigar to celebrate. Pretty amazing for a guy like I who has never smoked a cigar.

After the deal was done, Don, Ron, Ted Otaguro, and I smoked a cigar at the 18th hole.

And every year since then, I have smoked a cigar in his memory around July 16, which is when he died.

In essence, we can talk about communion in high theological terms and historical events, but it is basically remembering a friend—the Savior of the World—who died and sacrificed His life for us that we might have life.

It's also a time to remember that, if He can forgive our sins, He told us we must forgive the sins of others.

Let us remember that, on the night Jesus was betrayed by people he would later forgive, He gathered His best friends. And now let us celebrate communion.

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Note: Sunday sermon texts are also available at fpchawaii.org
The audio version can be downloaded from iTunes. You may also request the audio version by visiting: fpchkoolau@gmail.com