

Randall D Koehler

Hutterthal Mennonite Church

31 January 2021

Mark 14:12-26

Remember Me

Hutterthal Mennonite Church, good morning. And good morning to all of you who join us online from your home. We worship in limited forms this morning, but we earnestly await a soon-coming time when normalcy returns. Let us pray: God of freedom and deliverance, help us remember today the sacrifice that Jesus made for the entirety of creation on a Roman cross two thousand years ago. Remind us anew that you have called us to take up our own crosses and sacrifice ourselves for the kingdom that Jesus inaugurated in his death and resurrection. Give us vision for this new kingdom, the renewed creation that is breaking into our world all around us and how the bread and cup, the sacraments are signposts pointing toward this new heaven and new earth that will one day fully inhabit our present reality. Write on our hearts and in our minds the promises that have been fulfilled through Jesus, and give us the strength to remember and walk in those promises. In Jesus' name, Amen.

When I was growing up, I remember watching the communion plate pass by me, wondering when I would get to participate. I don't remember the reasons. Maybe something like you can when you're ready. I'm not even sure when I first took communion. Several things that I do remember learning, though not necessarily because people intended to teach them to me, were that we did not take communion for granted like my Lutheran or Catholic friends did. They took communion most weeks of the year because they were trying to earn their salvation. When we ate the bread and drank the cup, the bread and juice were symbols only and held no additional

power or benefit. They were strictly reminders, memorials of our savior Jesus, who had sacrificed his body and blood to pay the price for our sins, cleansing us from the brokenness that distorts our lives. I remember communion being very boring, filled with long prayers and solemn faces. Taking communion was a serious occasion, not something to be taken lightly. Filled with a sense of superiority and pride, I remember taking communion confident that the way that I participated was the right way, or at least the right way as I knew and understood it then.

Now being a part of my first communion as a participant and pastor at Hutterthal, a lot has changed since then. Communion carries much more weight than merely the symbolic nature of Jesus's sacrifice on the cross. Communion is a meal first and foremost. It includes precious time to reflect, to remember who Jesus is and how he has changed our world and our lives forever. It is a time to join our sisters and brothers in faith, celebrating that a new and different covenant has been ratified by the blood of Jesus as an older covenant had been ratified by the blood of a lamb long before it. It is a solemn time as we think about the horror and pain that Jesus endured at the hands of the Roman Empire. We also know that while the Roman and Jewish authorities were convinced that they had won and eliminated this pesky Jesus of Nazareth, little did they realize that by crowning Jesus with thorns and placing him on the throne that is the cross, they had lost so deeply that even today, kingdoms and powers still are baffled by how human suffering and nonviolence can absorb evil and oppression, coming out the other side not as the powerless but the dignified who show those who claim their power absolutely that life and resurrection will always have the final say, no matter how much violence tries to snuff it out. We celebrate in communion that through Jesus's broken body and shed blood, we participate in a different kind of kingdom, an alternate reality that embraces suffering and nonviolence so that other people may live life fully.

For this year, 2021, we will be joining together for communion at least 4 times. I will be focusing on each of the four gospel texts for our communion services, of which Mark is our first. Mark's gospel is thought to be the earliest gospel written. It is the shortest of the gospels and gives the least amount of detail surrounding Jesus's last supper with the disciples. As is often the case in Mark's gospel, we must pay close attention to every detail because Mark does not give us additional notes to make sense of all that is happening. His concise and straightforward storytelling can leave us asking more questions. Our passage this morning is true to this form.

Jesus has spent the last few chapters at the temple in Jerusalem. Before the temple, he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, mocking the Roman generals that would enter the city with legions of Roman soldiers to put the people of Jerusalem in their place. Jesus enters with cloaks and palm branches laid out in his path and people shouting, "Hosanna." Lord save us. The people in and around Jerusalem by this time have heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and some come out to show their support. Jesus then walks to the temple and clears out the money-changers and animal sellers, condemning their corruption and robbery of the poor worshippers that come to Jerusalem only a few times a year to offer their ritual sacrifices.

If these two events were not enough to kindle the anger and rage of the Sanhedrin, the highest religious authority for the Jews at this time, Jesus only adds more fuel to their fire. Jesus follows his triumphal entry and clearing of the temple with parables that are not as vague as previous ones might have been when he was in Galilee. The authorities are fully aware of what Jesus is not saying. Jesus is calling them out and warning them that they will answer to God for what they have done. Like Eli and his sons in the book of Samuel, Jesus knows that their authority is only going to stand a little while longer.

By the time that we reach our story, the religious leaders have made a deal with Judas Iscariot that Judas will hand Jesus over to them at an ideal time when fewer people will find out. The Passover is coming, the most significant holiday of the Jewish calendar, and the Jewish leaders know that security will be tight. The Romans had learned by this time that they needed to beef up their military units in Jerusalem during the Passover and the feast of Unleavened bread. Thoughts of liberation and freedom ran high during this time as people celebrated the deliverance of their ancestors from Egypt long ago. During this season, insurrectionists and revolutionaries would come out of the woodwork and attempt to violently liberate Jerusalem, the city of God. They knew that their God would come to save them at some point as the prophets had written, and Passover was one of those times where people assumed something had to happen. Therefore, the religious leaders have to be careful about arresting Jesus because the people might riot, causing the Roman military leaders to send soldiers to break up the crowds and kill whomever they need to in order to calm the situation.

Jesus has been spending his days in Jerusalem and his nights in Bethany, most likely at the home of Mary and Martha. In our passage this morning, what is strange about Mark's account is that Jesus sends his disciples into Jerusalem to prepare a place to eat the Passover meal, but Mark writes this day is the first of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Traditionally, the Passover lamb was sacrificed on the day before the feast of unleavened bread because the Israelites would have prepared to leave Egypt, not leavened their bread and roasted the Passover lamb to eat with their bags packed and shoes on. They were to burn any of the lamb left over so that they could leave right away. If we follow Mark's timeline, the Passover has already happened, and they are taking the meal the following evening. Either way, Jesus sends his disciples into Jerusalem with specific instructions to speak with a man carrying a jar of water.

The owner of the home where he is taking the water will have an upper room furnished and ready for Passover preparations to be completed. Everything happens as Jesus predicts, so the two disciples prepare the meal. That evening, Jesus and the other disciples join them.

As they are eating the roasted lamb, Jesus tells his disciples that one of them will betray him. Of course, all of the disciples are wondering what Jesus is talking about. Who is it? How does Jesus know? We do not get any idea how Judas responded in this moment or if Jesus somehow let him know that he knew who it was. Of course, they are all waiting for Jesus to tell them who it is, but Jesus does not. Mark writes chapter 14 in such a way that the reader or listener can contrast how Jesus responds to God's calling with how everyone else responds. In the beginning of chapter 14, Mark shows how the leading religious authorities in Jerusalem have no intention of listening to his teaching. They are convinced that he needs to be killed, showing just how far Israel has strayed from their calling. God has come in the person Jesus to visit them and they miss it completely. Right after that story, we hear of the woman who gives the most valuable possession she owns to Jesus so that she can anoint him in preparation for the suffering ahead of him. Of course, the disciples are so blinded by their longing for power and their hope that Jesus will be taking over Jerusalem soon that they criticize the woman for wasting what could have been sold and given to the poor. Then we must contrast her response to Jesus with Judas, who has decided to betray Jesus to the authorities, to hand him over to their purposes.

Then we get to our story, in which Jesus knows what is coming this very night. He knows what he must do and what is going to happen so he takes the Passover meal with his disciples, following the way that God has called: from his home in Nazareth to the lion's den in Jerusalem. At the Passover table, Jesus warns them of the traitor among them, but he doesn't tell them who it is. He knows that by the end of the night, they all will have deserted him to face his suffering

alone. Notice in chapter 14, the woman and Jesus are faithful to God's call, while the religious leaders and disciples, all of whom are men and who claim to know God or Jesus, have missed what is right in front of them.

After the disciples murmurs have quieted down about betrayal, Jesus picks up a loaf of unleavened bread, a symbol already loaded with meaning for the Jewish people. All bread during this festival was unleavened to remind them that when God called them out of Egypt after Passover, they did not have time to leaven the bread or let it rise. God was calling them to freedom and they had to be ready to go. Jesus adds another layer of meaning. After blessing and breaking this bread, he tells his disciples to take a piece. Just as the bread is broken so that they could eat it and participate in Passover, so his body will be broken so that they can be free again just like when their ancestors left Egypt. But this time, they will be free from the weight of sin that has left them in exile and they will be able to join Jesus fully in his new kingdom work.

Then Jesus takes a cup from the table, gives thanks for it, and passes it among the disciples telling them that the wine they drink is his blood poured out. But this blood is of a new covenant, one that will be consummated when he is murdered on the cross like the lamb that Moses slaughtered, ratifying the covenant between God and Israel on Mt. Sinai. This new covenant is different than the one that came before. Jesus's entire ministry, including this supper, have shown that God's kingdom is not coming as we would expect. Whatever God is going to do through Jesus, it will lead to victory and freedom as the Passover meal did. Just as God liberates the people of Israel, showing that his kingdom is far more powerful than Pharaoh's empire or armies, Jesus is showing his disciples in this new meal together that this new kingdom will see its leader crowned king and enthroned on a Roman cross, that by Jesus's nonviolent sacrifice,

this new covenant will bring freedom and hope and peace and love and power to not only God's chosen people but to the entire world.

Jesus adds, in this solemn moment, that he will not taste wine again until he drinks it anew in the Kingdom of God, referring to his resurrection and his future interactions with the disciples. At this point, the disciples have got to be wondering what Jesus is talking about, but Jesus does not give them or us any more details. They sing a hymn to finish the meal and leave the city to go out to the Mount of Olives.

We take the bread and the cup today, remembering Jesus and this new kingdom's beginnings. We also take this bread and drink this cup as a foreshadowing of, a looking ahead to the great feast that we will enjoy together with all of the saints of God, past present and future. We take time today to grieve those that we have lost or who have passed on, but we earnestly look forward to a great feast and celebration with them in Jesus's presence. Finally, we take this bread and drink this cup today, knowing and proclaiming that when we eat and drink together, something transformative happens to all of us. Though we may not be taking communion in the ways that we are used to, we remember Jesus, his body and blood. We pray his presence here among us as we eat and drink together. We pray that we are transformed into his likeness, willing to suffer as he suffered and willing to sacrifice ourselves as he sacrificed himself.

Let us pray: God of the bread and the cup, we thank you for communion, how it reminds us of who you are and how you work in our world. Let us never forget how eating and drinking together is a gift from you, an opportunity to grow together even though we cannot participate like we want in light of COVID. We look to you and the new covenant that Jesus instituted with his death and resurrection; we look forward to the day when the kingdom is fully consummated and we eat and drink together in your fullest presence. In Jesus' name. Amen.