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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Matthew 26:17-30

3 October 2021

Our Lord's Supper

Opening Greeting and Prayer:

Hutterthal Mennonite Church, good morning. Good morning to you all who are joining us online. And welcome to all of our guests this morning. We are glad to have you here with us.

Let us pray: God of the great banquet table, we come this morning to sit again at your table, to fellowship with our savior through his body and blood, the bread and the cup. Thank you that you have made a way for us to be with you, to eat with you, to rest in you. In the power of your Holy Spirit, open our ears and eyes to notice how you are moving here among us and transforming us to be more like Jesus. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Message:

It is good to be back here in Freeman. Morgan, Vivienne, and I enjoyed our time in Illinois, seeing family and friends. Contrary to popular opinion, I did not help out much on the farm while in Illinois, though the temptation in particular moments was great. Vivienne and I did spend some time riding in the combine, harvesting beans. Conditions have been dry since Mid-August in our area of Illinois, so the crops have dried down nicely, making the harvest season move along pretty quickly. By the time that Vivienne and I arrived in the field the first-time last Tuesday, my family had finished harvesting corn, which means that things slowed down considerably. Harvesting beans almost feels like a whole other world from harvesting corn. For

this particular trip to Illinois, we planned all of our evening meals with friends and family so that we could make sure to visit with those that we had not been able to previously. I was reminded again (not that I need much reminding) how important sitting down around a table is, not only for our day-to-day life but for our faith too. This morning, we come to the table, laid with bread and juice, hope-filled symbols and reminders that we have been invited and included in a great feast that is in the works for people from all nations.

This particular table has been prepared for thousands of years, beginning with the Passover and the feast of Unleavened Bread in the ancient nation of Israel. This particular meal was a reminder to them of who they were and whose they were. They had been slaves in Egypt for many years. God provided a way out of slavery into covenant or promise through the lamb's blood on the doorposts of their homes. They could not leaven the bread for the festival because they did not have time to let the bread rise. They were to be ready with sandals on and bags packed in preparation for God's leading, ready to follow God on this new journey. Passover was their New Year celebration, loaded with the possibilities of God's promise and Spirit.

Today is world Communion Sunday, so we join with Christians around the world as we also sit in anticipation of where God is leading us. In our scripture text from Matthew 26, this time of year in the first century for the disciples and Jesus was also a reminder of how they were not their own nation anymore. As Egypt had been, so the Roman Empire had become, a force standing in direct opposition to God's will and way in the world. Passover was a politically tumultuous time in first-century Palestine, especially Jerusalem where Jesus was sitting with his disciples for this meal. As I imagine the disciples walking into the city to find this house where Jesus has told them to go, I can hear the marching of the Roman soldiers, up and down the streets, symbols of the empire's power and dominance in what used to be God's city. I wonder if

the disciples are stopped at the gate by Roman guards who ask them what business they have in Jerusalem this time of year.

Jesus had already caused a disturbance in the temple, clearing out the money-changers and animals, and Jesus continue to talk mysteriously about how the Son of Man will be handed over and crucified. What are the disciples to make of all of this? They had thought Jesus was the Messiah, the great and promised King that would come and destroy the Roman authorities and the ruling Jewish aristocracy and would clear the way for God's kingdom to be established once again on David's throne in the palace of Jerusalem. Why were they sneaking around, finding a place to eat the Passover, calling Jesus the Teacher rather than the rightful Messiah that he was? Jesus must have meant something when he told them to tell the homeowner, "My time is near." Time for what? What could they have missed or what was Jesus not telling them? The disciples find the house and host as Jesus had told them; they make the preparations of wine and unleavened bread so that they can celebrate later that evening.

I wonder if Jesus waits until evening to enter the city and join the disciples so that he is not apprehended by any of the local authorities. Relief washes over the disciples as Jesus enters the room. The tension is released as they begin eating together. What are they going to do now? Jesus tells them that one of them is going to betray him, one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with them, meaning any one of them. I can picture the disciples looking at each other, trying to see what they might have missed before. Matthew notes that while everyone else responds, "Surely not I, Lord," Judas responds by saying, "Surely not I, Rabbi." I wonder in this moment if Jesus' response, "You have said so," is a way of telling Judas discreetly, "I'm not going to call you out in this moment because you know what you are doing and what anguish it will cause you. You might think that lying about your evil intentions will relieve you conscience,

but you will realize in time.” Just like those moments when we make poor decisions, break promises, or hurt our friends and neighbors, we struggle to consider all of the consequences of our particular actions. I wonder if Judas, at this moment, feels down to his money pouch, touching the very blood money for the one sitting in front of him, holding onto his fortitude.

The tension has returned, unresolved as the disciples wonder who the traitor among them might be. The formal Passover religious meal begins and Jesus takes the bread, prays a blessing over it, breaks it, and gives it to the disciples. Strangely and unexpectedly, Jesus says that the bread is his body. I'm wondering if the tension continues to mount as the disciples become more and more confused. What could Jesus mean that this unleavened bread is his body? Jesus had mentioned to them back in Galilee that they would have to eat his body and drink his blood, but what did that have to do with Passover? Was Jesus to be broken as the bread was, or is Jesus already broken in such a way? After they have eaten the bread together, Jesus takes the cup, gives thanks for it, and tells them to drink from it, to share in this blood of the covenant that will be poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Hadn't someone already smeared blood on the doorposts outside of the house? How was this wine also Jesus's blood, and how could they drink it? The law of Moses stated that the blood was never to be consumed.

I'm wondering what Judas is thinking also as the cup is passed around, and Jesus cryptically tells them that he will not drink wine again until he does so in the coming kingdom. Judas has already agreed to betray him and laid out his plan for his arrest by the Jewish authorities. Is Jesus alluding to something that Judas doesn't know about? Is Jesus going to storm the temple and the palace yet tonight? I can picture Judas beginning to nervously sweat a little as he considers what his best plan is to prevent Jesus from doing what he might be thinking. Little does Judas realize, as we often do too, that his plans and betrayal of Jesus are not to be thwarted

but are fulfilling exactly what Jesus had already been predicting. That God could work even Judas's betrayal for good is one of the most difficult pieces of this story. When we are filled with anxiety and fear in light of the brokenness of the world, we can trust that God has not left us behind but is actively working in even the worst of circumstances, like the betrayal of a close friend, toward love and hope and peace and goodness and truth.

And so, here we are this morning at the table of our Lord. We sit with the disciples as they argue with Jesus about who could betray him, and we sit in awe at our savior, leader, and friend who knew the identity of the traitor, yet still welcomed him at the table. This is the one hope that I hold onto when I come to our Lord's supper: no matter what is happening in my heart and life, no matter how much I have fallen flat on my face or hurt my neighbor, no matter how many times I have walked away from God, Jesus still has a place for me at the table. The same applies for you and any other followers of Jesus with us this morning. With gratitude and longing, we sit at the table, remembering the kind of king and leader that we serve, one who sacrifices his own body and blood for the sake of his enemies. We eat the bread and drink the juice this morning also as a commitment to this way of working in our world, to loving our enemies and caring for those who seek to hurt us. We eat this bread and drink this juice because we know that through the love and hope of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, we are being saved and transformed; we are eating and drinking in anticipation of a great feast to come.

Closing Prayer before Communion:

Let us pray: God of fellowship and hope, we ask you for forgiveness. We confess that we have not always welcomed everyone at our tables. We have withheld invitations to fellowship for a multitude of reasons. Fill us with your spirit this morning as we come to your table. Empower

the broken body and shed blood of Jesus to transform us and challenge us. Thank you that you have extended an invitation to each of us to share in fellowship with you at your table.