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Hutterthal Mennonite Church

Luke 22:14-38

30 January 2022

Broken Bread and Shared Cup

Opening Greeting and Prayer:

Hutterthal Mennonite Church, good morning. Good morning also to all of you who join us this morning online. Welcome to any and all guests. We are glad that you are here with us.

Let us pray: Ancient and Mysterious God, we gather around the table this morning seeking new life and transformation that only you can provide through the fresh breath of your Spirit. Startle us with the story and meaning of the broken bread and shared cup as we join together at your table. Thank you for inviting and making space for each one of us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Message: Today, we step away from Jesus early ministry in Galilee from last Sunday, and we join Jesus and his disciples at the Passover meal, a yearly celebration and reminder of how the ancient Israelites had been saved by God and freed from slavery in Egypt. We are shadows in the room as Jesus and the disciples take a seat at the table, which has been prepared ahead of time by Peter and John in Luke's account. The unleavened bread sitting on the table is a reminder to each of them of how their ancestors did not have time to allow the bread dough to rise because they were to be ready with their sandals on and their bags packed for their departure. The 4 cups of wine at the table, shared before and after the meal, are signs of the intimacy of relationship between those at the table. Jesus and his 12 closest friends share this sacred moment together.

The roasted lamb lays on the table, its blood already smeared on the doorposts and mantel of the house. Those at the table will eat their fill of the meat with the rest burned the following morning. The lamb's blood was also a reminder of the covenant or formal relationship that ancient Israel had consummated at Mount Sinai with YHWH, the Lord, the god who had called this people out of Egypt. In Exodus 24, some of the blood from the sacrifices offered at the foot of the mountain was spattered on the gathered crowd, a consummation of the relationship between the Lord and this new people.

This moment at the Passover table was anything but calm and somber. Tensions are high in Jerusalem for this New Year's celebration. Pilate, the Roman governor, would have ordered more Roman soldiers to be monitoring the streets as the population of Jerusalem grew exponentially. Just as their ancient ancestors had been freed from slavery, so this time of the year would often be filled with violent revolts against the Romans as Jewish political groups attempted to liberate their homeland as the Maccabees had done 200 years prior. Jesus is on the religious leaders' hit-list, and they have already found a weak link in Judas, one of Jesus's followers. Jesus had sent Peter and John ahead of the group to get things prepared and quite possibly waited until it was dark to come into the city with the rest of the disciples. When the hour comes to sit at the table, Luke does not give us a picture of where everyone is seated. Eating a meal together in the first-century had many unwritten dimensions. Traditionally, those sitting closest to Jesus would have been the more important or of higher status than those farther from Jesus. Sitting together for a meal was a sign of intimacy, friendship, inclusion, and trust, which makes Judas's presence at the table even more startling.

We can sense the urgency and intimacy of the moment in Jesus's first words at the table in verse 15: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." Ominous

words from a teacher who has escaped the hands of angry crowds before. What suffering is Jesus alluding to? What does Jesus have planned that they do not know about? From what we know of Passover rituals in the first-century, there were 4 cups of wine, 2 of which were shared before the meal and 2 to share after the meal. Jesus takes one of the first cups and passes it among the disciples, repeating those words again about the coming of God's kingdom. After the first two cups have been consumed, Jesus takes the unleavened bread, breaks it, and passes the pieces among the disciples saying that this bread, now broken, is his body given for them. Whenever you break bread together from now on, do it in remembrance of me and my suffering.

Then they eat the rest of the meal, sharing in the lamb and bitter herbs that would have been prepared for them. When everyone has eaten, Jesus takes one of the two cups after the meal and shares it with the disciples, saying that this cup is a sign of the new covenant that will be consummated or formalized in my blood. As the blood of the animals on Mount Sinai marked the new covenant people in Exodus 24, so Jesus's blood, symbolized in the wine shared among the disciples, marks the new covenant that Jesus is establishing among God's renewed people in this in-breaking kingdom. What had been an intimate, yet puzzling, moment for the disciples is startled by the truth and trauma of betrayal. The very one, who has sold out his place among Jesus' followers, is sitting at the table with them. The feeling of the room has shifted as the disciples glance at each other, eyeing their neighbors to see who has flinched at Jesus's words. Even this betrayal though will be transformed by God's grace into liberation and salvation.

As Jesus finishes speaking, we can hear the conversation pick up and the arguing and bickering among the disciples slowly build into a dull roar as they jockey for who is most likely the traitor among them and who then is deserving of their place and status at the table. Remember that where they are sitting is a testimony to their importance in the group. Finally,

when Jesus has heard enough of their ridiculousness, he interrupts them, turning all of their arguments into useless words. In Greek and Roman literature of the time, great teachers would offer a farewell address in the moments before their inclement death. This address would include a summary of their key teachings and a selection of new leadership in the teacher's absence. Jesus tells the disciples that the rulers and authorities, the kings and noble men of the Gentiles lord their status and wealth over the people, but it will not be this way for them. Get all of that status, honor, and greatness talk out of your heads and listen. If you want to be the greatest, you will become like the youngest child, the servant, the one with the least amount of right to speak up. Have you not watched me these three years? You are right that everyone else gives the greatest honor to those seated at the table, but I have been here with you and given you an example of service and love for others. Can you see it? Because you have been with me from the beginning, you will be the first to join me in this new kingdom and you will be the leaders of this new people, a people built on the sacrifice and humiliation of its teacher.

I wonder if it is at the end of verse 30 that Jesus washes the disciples' feet because Jesus seems to shift from his farewell address to warning and preparing the disciples for what is going to happen these next few hours. Even though Peter is quick to disagree, Jesus warns him that he will desert Jesus, even to the point of denying any knowledge of who Jesus is. Jesus has been praying for him that he will turn from his denial and strengthen the faith of the others even when things turn most dismal. Then Jesus's final warning shifts from Peter to all of the disciples. What had once been hospitality from their friends and neighbors when they travelled the Galilean countryside will no longer be. Jesus is referring to the suffering and persecution that is to come for followers of Jesus' way. Prepare yourselves because life will not be easy. Jesus tells them that he will be called a criminal, an insurrectionist, and a traitor by the people, which will fulfill

what the scriptures have spoken about the Messiah. They hear his words about buying swords and take them literally, responding to his warnings that they have two swords already. Jesus has grown so frustrated by their lack of understanding that he ends the conversation. In the NRSV, Jesus says “It is enough,” which gives us the idea that the amount of available swords is adequate for the difficulties ahead, but that does not make any sense in light of what he has already said, not to mention that Jesus will rebuke the disciples for using the sword in the Garden of Gethsemane. Rather, the words that he speaks would be better translated as an exasperated sigh, “Enough of this. Let’s go!” And they head out to the Mount of Olives.

Lest we judge the disciples too harshly in this moment as they follow Jesus to his arrest and soon-coming death, we must as shadows in the room reflect on how much we can be like the disciples when we hear the words of Jesus. Just like the disciples, our tendencies are to force, coerce, manipulate, and flee when the truly difficult work of creative peace-making and mutual transformation becomes difficult. Using our power to get others to do what we want is far easier than including them in the decision-making and asking for their investment and commitment. We come to the table, aware too that we want to lord our authority over those that we think are below us, but the truly radical nature of the kingdom is that Jesus has called us to be humble servants, faithful and authentic, seeking the life and hope of Jesus for everyone.

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 nor have we followed your example of service and love. As we come to your table, fill us with your spirit. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear the transformative story of the broken body and shed blood of Jesus. Thank you that you have extended an invitation to each of us to share at your table.