

The Place Where Heaven and Earth Meet

Sermon for Maundy Thursday

Sermon Text: Matthew 26:17-30



¹⁷ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will You have us prepare for You to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.'" ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover. ²⁰ When it was evening, He reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹ And as they were eating, He said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray Me." ²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to Him one after another, "is it I, Lord?"

²³ He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with Me will betray Me. ²⁴ The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born." ²⁵ Judas, who would betray Him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so." ²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." ²⁷ And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." ³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Ebed, the youngest son of Jacob, could have burst with curiosity and excitement. Because it was the time shortly before the famous Passover Feast! Already weeks earlier there was a sense of upheaval in Jerusalem. People from all over the world came to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover feast. But Ebed looked forward to the Passover feast for a different reason. As the youngest son of Jacob, he was entitled to a special privilege. Ebed, the youngest son of Jacob, was allowed to initiate the feast with a special phrase. He must recite a sentence, that he had by now, learned by heart. Solemnly he would recite: "Why is tonight different from all other nights?" And then his father would recite almost the entire history of Israel. He would talk about slavery and captivity. He would also talk about the terrible things the people did. But God would save the people of Israel from it all. And in view of the Holy City, the feast would end with another important sentence: "See you next year in Jerusalem!" What was meant by that was that you would not only see each other again in the earthly city of Jerusalem but in the heavenly city where God would make everything new. Ebed looked forward to all of these things. But everything was different at this special feast. That is to say, Ebed's family received guests. And Ebed hadn't seen such strange guests in his entire life. On the one hand, there were normal fishermen like the ones Ebed knew elsewhere. But these fishermen were completely different than others. They didn't care

at all about fishing, rather all they care about was a teacher that the whole town was talking about. His name was Jesus. And both deep love and deep sadness radiated from Him. Ebed immediately felt pulled toward this Jesus. And as the entire group held the Passover feast in their room, Ebed hid himself behind a curtain and observed everything from a distance. At first, everything proceeded like all Passover feasts in every Jewish house. But then everything became completely different than Ebed was accustomed to. There was talk about betrayal and bad things that people could do. The crazy thing was that these things weren't in the distant past but happened directly in their lifetime so that all of Jesus' friends wanted to know, one after the other, which of them was guilty. Ebed was surprised that Jesus didn't accuse anyone but also didn't excuse anyone. And yet it became awkwardly silent as Jesus, together with one of the disciples, dipped His bread into the bowl... And both looked each other in the eyes for a long time. The disciples, who was called Judas, asked once again: "Is it I?" And Jesus again gave no answer this time except to say: "You have said so!" Right after this moment, something extremely unusual happened. One could even say something unearthly happened. Because this Jesus took the bread and solemnly lifted it up and said: This is my body. And then He did the same with the cup and said: "This blood of the new covenant is shed for your sin." The moment Jesus said this, it felt as if all the time in the world shrank away to this cup and bread. Not only that. In a very strange way, Ebed had the feeling as though the threshold of Heaven was ripped open and Heaven and earth met in this cup and bread. Ebed wasn't afraid and he saw that Jesus' disciples also weren't afraid. Because they all did exactly what Jesus said: They ate and drank. Ebed had the feeling that he understood for the first time what Passover was. All at once, he understood exactly that the fate of all mankind came together in this cup and bread. And these things were closely tied to the Jesus who stood before him. As Jesus spoke these words, it felt exactly like when God spoke the first words of Creation: and at once it also felt as if time had ended and they were all already in heaven. Dear congregation! The story of Ebed isn't in the Bible. I imagined this story, because I can imagine that a child could observe this story of the Last Supper like I just described it. Perhaps it's a small help so that we can imagine where we fit in this story. The Passover feast was always a feast of remembrance! It was a feast remembering God's rescue from many evil things. But it was also a feast where one asked: "Where do I fit in this story?" Yes, we can also ask with Jesus' disciples: "Is it I, who betrays Jesus? Is it I who lives according to my own wishes and goals instead of following God's will?" Jesus didn't shy away from our suffering. He let Himself be executed. And all that just for us! How quickly are we only half-heartedly there? Almost every Sunday we may eat and drink of this precious blood and this precious body of Jesus. Even in these Corona conditions we may do that. But how fast are we to excuse ourselves? And how quickly is something else more important than Jesus? Just as the little Ebed observed, Jesus puts himself in the middle of our story. Because Jesus is God, He joins things that don't belong together. He joins our corrupt past with God's glorious future. He joins our weakness with God's magnificent power. Jesus places Himself in our midst and we may drink His blood and body! The Christian faith is therefore much more than remembering! The Christian faith is much more than just repeating a couple of insignificant words. But the Christian faith has everything to do with the fact that the living God comes into our stories and joins our corrupt past with His glorious future. And just like Ebed from the story observed, Jesus is the living connection between everything. It is Jesus Himself who comes for you from far away and calls you a child of God! It is Jesus who also takes this unimpressive bread and these few drops of wine and joins them together with Himself. Yes, every time we come here and participate in this Lord's Supper, we are joined with Jesus. We are also at the same time joined with heaven. We are joined with God. The Jewish people did something else at the Passover feast. They took the Passover lamb, laid their hands on its

head, and said: “my sins are transferred to this lamb!” and then the lamb would be slaughtered. When I stand before God’s judgement, many sins and weaknesses will separate me from God. But then I will also be able to say what the Jewish people at Passover always did: I will point to Jesus. He carried away my sins. And I carry the body and blood of Jesus Christ in me. Amen.