

**Luke 22:14** When the hour had come, He reclined at the table, and the apostles with Him. **15** And He said to them, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; **16** for I say to you, I shall never again eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” **17** And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He said, “Take this and share it among yourselves; **18** for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.” **19** And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” **20** And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, “This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. **21** But behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with [lit. Me] Mine on the table. **22** For indeed, the Son of Man is going as it has been determined; but woe to that man by whom He is betrayed!” **23** And they began to discuss among themselves which one of them it might be who was going to do this thing. It may seem a little thing, but in verse 22, the literal reading is **But, behold, the hand of the one betraying Me is with Me on the table**. Here is an amazing detail, Judas’ hand, at that moment **with Jesus**, literally and figuratively identifies who Jesus’ betrayer is! **Questioning one another** then is vain and it must suggest a subtext of self-doubt, or a subtle realization that everyone disciple felt the potential for betrayal was something they could own! I mean, this self-doubt would not necessarily be false guilt at all.

Luke 22:14-23 is the parallel text, the gospel parallel, to 1 Corinthians 11:23-27 which is our regular reading for Communion.

Paul writes that Jesus **on the night that he was betrayed**. Luke records the event differently, he writes **I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer**. These two reports cover the same event but they convey very different information. Paul places the event within the context of betrayal. Luke frames the event within the Lord’s desire (**earnestly desired**) **to eat this Passover with you . . . before I suffer**. And we should note that **before I suffer** clearly precedes the institution of the Lord supper, the bread as **My body** and the **cup poured out for you as the new covenant in My blood**. **And it is only after this that the matter of betrayal by the one with Me on the table** (remember, they are reclining **at the table** in such a manner as to prompt Jesus’ saying **on the table**).

Paul’s opening words are: **For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you**. I have commented on the supernatural sourcing of Paul’s description of what happened on the **Passover** that Jesus **eagerly desired** to share **with you before I suffer**. I do not need to repeat that here but you might benefit from reviewing that fact. Paul was not there in person, but the Lord, *in person*, revealed to Paul what he, the Lord, would have us know. That doesn’t preclude us from knowing more (we have the gospel records!) *but it does suggest we should know nothing less*.

But what I want us to do is to rewind. I want us to go back and consider the very first thing that Jesus says, according to Luke 22:14-23. Here it is: **I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.** First the eagerness. Second, the substance. Third, the timing.

I hardly know the best way to explain this to you. Jesus, out of the great love he bore his disciples—and all who have come to Him through them, says I am eager, excited, highly motivated to be with you, to eat with you—to feast with you! Wouldn't you just thrill to be there with Him and with all the attendees?! To be with Jesus, to share with Jesus, to experience down time, eating with Him. Friends, that is just what we are about to do—only we forget that Jesus is more eager to eat with us than we appear eager to eat with him. This past Thursday I met William for lunch in South Portland. It was so great. Truly I was excited, eager to eat with him. But, frankly, even greater things had already unfolded in my day—more on that later.

Friends, let's suppose that Jesus invited us to join him in a circle on the front lawn of our church. Let's suppose that he sat us down and plainly told us what to do. Wouldn't you want to be part of that circle? Wouldn't you want to be told what we are to do by Him? We do not have to pretend. In Matthew 6:1-6 and 14-18, Jesus has his followers seated on the ground and he instructs them in the practice of **righteousness. When you practice your righteousness don't do it to impress others . . . you will not be rewarded by the Father for that. When you give to the needy . . . when you pray . . . when you fast.** The practice of righteousness includes, as unto the Lord, giving alms, praying, fasting. These are what Jesus tells us to do. We are not to shrug them off as something other Christians do because they may be Orthodox, or Roman Catholic, or Moravian, or the Brethren. Good heavens, could anything be plainer? How do we know that we are Christians? By our love? Yes. By our love as manifest in the practice of righteousness through our caring for the poor, our praying and our fasting. We may distinguish ourselves by labels (Evangelical, Baptist, Reformed?) but we should be indistinguishable in practice. O, Lord, sit us down and explain these things to us again!

But didn't, some might object, Jesus say to do things privately, or in secret? Yes. But that doesn't mean don't do them. That doesn't mean fake it . . . be hypocritical. It means that because you are living before God, you recognize that he sees, he notes everything. He applauds your behavior which is to be the behavior of obedient children. He will reward it properly. Every Christian should be practicing these things (and others). Alas, if being a righteous Christian (giving, praying, fasting) were a crime, would there be enough evidence to convict us? All of us? Any of us?

So, Jesus is eager **to eat** with us. He was looking forward to **this Passover**. This Passover?! 1 Corinthians 5:6-8 is celebrated in hymn form (1982, the Episcopal Church):

Christ our passover has been sacrificed for us,  
so let us celebrate the feast,  
Not with the old leaven of corruption and wickedness,  
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Christ once raised from the dead dies no more;

death has no more dominion over him.  
 In dying, he died to sin once for all;  
 in living, he lives to God.

See yourselves, therefore, as dead to sin  
 and alive to God in Jesus Christ our Lord.  
 Christ has been raised from the dead;  
 the first fruits of those who sleep.

For since by one man came death,  
 by another has come also the resurrection of the dead,  
 For as in Adam all die,  
 even so in Christ shall all be made alive.<sup>1</sup>

We do not cast aside the Passover, rather we celebrate it as fulfilled in Christ and, at the same time, we pick up on the echoes of deliverance which come from the escape from bondage of the Hebrews in Egypt. We do this quite explicitly at our Seder Supper Celebration! That brings us to the substance part of what we do as a body of believers.

Remember, I am eager to celebrate this Easter with you in person, together. All of it with all of you. I do not want to be unclear again. I invited everyone to a mid-week Ash Wednesday Service. At the service I shared our “lesson on the ground:” Jesus’ exhortation for us to give, prayer and fast. This call to righteousness is so important, so central to our calling, that I am bringing Ash Wednesday to you today. The service has as its focus; giving and prayer. Not liturgy (although there is some of that), not candles and incense and high church trappings. No, Ash Wednesday is a mid-week preaching service (an extra!) where we step out of our usual round to be together and to hear from our Lord: give, pray and fast.

It is a service where we pray together for the church, our nation and the world. And being people of tender conscience, when we hear the Lord’s admonition to give, pray and fast, *some are moved to sadness, even repentance. We ask for forgiveness because we can always do better. We are grateful for the refreshment of our call to duty—an aspiration. And we take up a collection for the relief of the poor.* No one has missed out finally on that part—simply make a gift for “the relief of the poor” and add to the collection. The Father will repay you, and those who benefit will thank you.

Lent is, basically, a season of preparation for Resurrection Day—you are free to begin your preparation whenever you wish. I simply hope you do. Ash Wednesday is offered as a convenient day to begin a spiritual preparation—forty days, excluding Sundays, leading up to Jesus’ resurrection. You do not have to exclude Sundays. (I have never done so.) Please pray daily. I have offered a prayer guide for forty days. I will be using it. You are free to pray as the Lord leads, but obligated to do so. Please do pray. I will be fasting on Good Friday (sunrise to sunset)—hopefully, no one will

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<sup>1</sup> Based on 1 Cor. 5:6 Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough? 7 Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. 8 Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

notice but I would love to welcome companions on that day. I know some can't, and I know some do. I am eager to celebrate this Easter with you in person and together. If you need information on fasting safely, I can provide it. (Longer fasts should be undertaken with prudence and your doctor's consent/approval/permission.) Fast, pray, give.

Timing. We will celebrate Communion four times between now and Easter Sunday, April 12th (today, March 15, April 5, Palm Sunday, and 9th at our Seder Supper)—it will be more frequent than any other six week period of our church year. Holy Week, the review of Jesus' last week of his earthly ministry prior to resurrection begins with Jesus' triumphal entry and his survey of the Temple compound. Maundy (or Holy) Thursday is a great celebration and feast day. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper at that Passover, is crucified for our benefit on Good Friday and Easter vigil (we remember the grieving and praying disciples while Jesus was in the grave). Then, we are up with the dawn on the day of Resurrection—this did not happen at the first Easter but it happens here because we are fully aware that Jesus defeated death and rose from the grave triumphant at that house. So what we do and when we do it. This is your invitation to join us in all of that because this is our Easter at East Winthrop Baptist Church. And in order for it to be all it can be, we hope and pray to see you there.

Amen.