

**“Just as He Said”**

Luke 22:7–13

(Mark 14:12–26; Matthew 26:17–30)

Often our Holy Thursday reflections center on the last meal that Jesus shared with his disciples and the conversations and actions from their time together in the Upper Room. But tonight I want us to consider the scene that comes right before that meal, when Jesus sends two disciples to prepare the supper. This is recorded in all three Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke). We’re going to read Luke’s version, which is found between the plot to kill Jesus and the institution of the Lord’s Supper. It’s a dramatic little scene, filled with all the elements of good theatre—an interesting plot, a memorable setting, intriguing characters, and just enough cryptic dialogue and suspense to keep us attentive. So as I read Luke 22:7–13 from the New Living Translation, you may want to close your eyes and visualize the details of the scene. Let the Holy Spirit, through your sanctified imagination, project this scene onto your mental screen as you listen. Hear it, see it, smell the “aromas” of dusty, crowded roads, feel the occasional shove as hurrying pilgrims press up against you, anticipate the flavors of roasted lambs and bitter herbs.

Luke 22:7–13 (NLT)

Prayer

**Context and setting**

It’s important to start by setting this scene in its context. We’ve already mentioned that Luke tells this story immediately after Judas’ deliberate choice to conspire with the religious leaders to hand Jesus over to them. That may explain, in part, the cryptic nature of Jesus’ instructions to Peter and John—he doesn’t reveal the name of the host or the location of his house, lest Judas

overhear and pass that information on. The inevitable moment of betrayal must not come too soon and interrupt the meal that Jesus desires to share with his disciples. The tension is high as the story opens.

Luke also tells us that this happens on “the day of Unleavened Bread.” Those words evoke the memory of a time of *tense anticipation*. It was the day before liberation came, filled with the tension of promise given but not yet experienced. It remembered Israel still in Egypt, preparing for a journey out of slavery, the details of which they could not have imagined in their wildest dreams. I think we can all, in our current season, relate to being caught in the interim between the promise of all things set right and the actual experience of that liberation and healing, which we don’t yet see. So perhaps we are in a good place to watch and receive this drama that plays out in a context of tense anticipation.

### **The players in the drama**

If we continue with our drama metaphor, the next step is to meet the characters. In the Lenten journey through Psalms with the Eleven28 group, we’ve used a simple Bible study method that focuses on asking good questions of the Scripture passage, questions that help us *see* better what is there. The most important questions are about the “actors”—**what do you learn about God** in this passage, and **what do you learn about faithful human response?** Those are the questions we’ll ask about the little drama in Luke 22. And we’ll start where we should always start—with Jesus. What do we learn about God the Son in this scene?

**JESUS.** As I studied the passage this week, two things in particular about Jesus stood out to me. First, he is **in charge!** From the outset of his Gospel, Luke has been building up, in a steady crescendo, a strong sense of Jesus’ full awareness and full authority—and that continues to increase here, all the way to the Cross. In Luke 22:8, Jesus initiates the series of actions. He *sends* Peter and John and *gives* them explicit—although mysterious—instructions, much the same way he’d done with two disciples in

Luke 19, when he sent them to find a colt for his entry into Jerusalem. What Luke actually says in verse 8 is “*he* sent Peter and John.” There’s no antecedent reference to Jesus, but at this point in the narrative he is clearly the central figure who does not need to be named; he is easily recognized as the lead actor and the main agent of the events that are unfolding.

With complete expectation that his request will be granted, he gives Peter and John this message for the anonymous homeowner: “Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?” Mark actually sharpens that question a bit—in Mark 14:14, Jesus asks, “Where is *my* guest room?” There’s a delightful irony in his bold question—what he asks for in this moment near the end of his earthly life is exactly what he was denied at the beginning. The word “guest room” is the same as the one usually translated “inn” in the Nativity story (Luke 2:17). Where there was no room at his birth, Jesus expects to find room as his death draws near. This is clearly not a story about things that are happening to Jesus, but part of a chain of events that are set in motion by Jesus himself, with his full awareness of what is to come.

The second thing that stood out to me about this in-charge Jesus is that, despite the borrowed nature of the guest room, he is **the Host**. His whole focus in this scene is on the meal that he desires to share with his friends: “prepare the meal for us” (v. 8), “so that we may eat” (v. 8), “where I may eat with my disciples” (v. 11), “make preparations for us” (v. 12). And as the next scene unfolds, Luke clearly portrays Jesus as the Host of this shared meal: “When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him” (v. 14). And in verse 15 he tells them how he has “eagerly desired” to eat this Passover meal with them. On this last night before the cross, Jesus’ focus is on intimate communion with his beloved disciples. The Passover is a meal that was eaten in family groups—this is clearly Jesus’ family, and he is the welcoming head of the household. It makes me think of the lovely image in Psalm 23 of God the Shepherd-King, setting a table before us in the presence of our enemies. The enemies were certainly lurking in the wings in this scene!

And what Jesus welcomes them to is something totally new. Six times in verses 1–20, Luke emphasizes Passover—that is the meal Peter and John went to prepare. It was an old celebration, and one that in first-century Judaism was bittersweet, as the Jewish people longed for a new exodus miracle that would free them from Rome. But once Jesus welcomes them to the table, he remakes the Passover redemption story and its celebratory meal into something totally new, one that is centered on him, one that looks back with gratitude and forward with hope. As Paul Minear writes, the table hosted by Jesus becomes a place where “the presence of Jesus transforms the sad remembrance of things past into the glorious promise of things to come.”<sup>1</sup>

- ❖ What are the implications for us tonight? As we experience this Holy Week in painful isolation from one another, as we grapple with deep anxieties about the present and perhaps even greater fears about the future, what difference does it make that we encounter here the Jesus who is fully aware and fully in charge?
- ❖ And what are the implications for us that Jesus sits as the welcoming Host at the table we will share together on Sunday, still separated physically but united as beloved members of his family? How does the presence of Jesus—the fully-in-charge, welcoming Host—change our understanding of the present and our hope for the future?

The second question as we probe this text is: what do we learn about faithful human response to this Jesus who is in charge and who welcomes us to his table? There are two pairs of human actors in this drama—Peter and John, and the anonymous homeowner and his equally anonymous servant. Each pair teaches us at least one important thing about a right response to Jesus.

**PETER AND JOHN.** Jesus singles out Peter and John and sends them off to be *servants*, to prepare the meal for the rest of the team. This is significant, considering the leadership roles that these

---

<sup>1</sup> Minear, “Some Glimpses of Luke’s Sacramental Theology,” 325.

two will play in Acts, and it is also sharply ironic, given the argument about “greatness” that will erupt in that upper room after dinner (Luke 22:24–30). I wonder if Peter and John felt a bit awkward or uneasy with this commission—is it possible that their question in verse 9, “*Where* do you want us to prepare?”, holds a hint of the same kind of question they asked when Jesus told them to feed 10,000 people from five loaves and two fish? Maybe the sub-text of their question is, “Um, Jesus, where in this city overflowing with pilgrims, with no space unoccupied or unspoken for, do you expect us to find spur-of-the-moment room?” And maybe they were also secretly thinking, “Why does it have to be *us*? Why can’t you send Thaddeus and Philip to do this?” There may very well have been fear for their own safety, as Jesus has been emphasizing his own danger ever since they began the journey toward Jerusalem and his public clashes with the Pharisees had grown ever-more sharp and hostile. As Jesus’ known close associates, they had to realize they were also in the cross-hairs of dangerous threat.

But whatever was going on in their minds and hearts as Jesus sent them off with that mysterious set of instructions, the main thing we see in these two disciples is that ***they went***. Isn’t that the quintessential picture of faith in Scripture, from Abraham to Moses to Jeremiah to Paul? God says, “Go,” often to places that are nonsensical to human logic or by routes that are downright dangerous—and the called ones *go*. Notice that Jesus’ instructions to them say, “*As you enter the city*, a man carrying a jug of water will meet you; follow him into the house he enters.” Finding the sign presupposes their going—and it won’t be until they actually enter the city. The first part of their trek will be sheer faith! Going was the necessary prerequisite to finding, and they had to move their feet solely on the word of Jesus. And when they do, Luke tells us, they find everything “just as Jesus had said.” They go because they know that Jesus’ word is faithful, true, authoritative, and reliable, and he proves that to them once again. Let verse 13 sink into your mind and heart tonight: “They went off to the city and found everything just as Jesus had said.”

- ❖ “To go or not to go, that is the question” that Peter and John faced—and isn’t it the central question we face as people of

faith as well? In this day of stay-at-home orders, our physical going is pretty limited, but it may very well be that Jesus is calling us to other kinds of risky going—going across the barrier of cold silence that has grown up between friends, going out of our introverted comfort zones to initiate check-ins with family, friends, and co-workers, going with our prayers and our checkbooks into places where hands-on ministry is still taking place among the most vulnerable.

**THE UNNAMED HOST.** This man is unnamed, almost invisible in his anonymity; we know nothing about him other than the fact that he has an upper room that is furnished and ready. Matthew calls him simply “a certain man.” And yet **his disposition of himself and his resources for Jesus’ use is astonishingly memorable.** He never speaks in this story and his only recorded action is to show the room to Peter and John. He doesn’t take offense when they burst into his home in the wake of his servant, making no polite excuses for either their behavior or their request. They simply make the stark announcement, “The Teacher says to you,” and that is enough for him. This man extends to Jesus a room with everything already prepared, leaving us to wonder if it was his own family’s Passover preparation that is displaced so that the space can be used by Jesus and his friends. This man is ready—ready to have carefully laid plans upset by Jesus, ready to offer his best on a moment’s notice, ready to serve in ways that don’t come accompanied by glory and name recognition.

- ❖ The question comes to us from this man’s example—are we willing to be simply “a certain man” (or woman/boy/girl) in Jesus’ bigger story, nameless and perhaps invisible on the great stage of history? Are we willing to hold loosely to our places and spaces, to our stuff and our resources, ready to release them the moment the Teacher asks, “Where are they?” Are we willing to allow the Spirit of Jesus to upset or rearrange our carefully laid plans?

We started with two questions: what does this passage teach us about God the Son, and what does it teach us about faithful

human response to Jesus? This little scene has shown us a Jesus who is fully aware and fully in charge in a moment of great tension, not taken by surprise by any of the unfolding events; a Jesus who warmly and eagerly welcomes his friends into the intimate celebration of a new act of rescue and redemption that he will accomplish on their behalf. The same sure authority and the same warm invitation are present with us tonight.

Luke has also shown us in this scene two key aspects of faithful human response to Jesus in the midst of tense, anxiety-producing moments. Peter and John demonstrated the essential act of biblical faith—*going*, in obedient response to the strange and mysterious instructions of Jesus. And in their going, they discovered once again the faithfulness of Jesus to his sent ones: “They found everything just as Jesus had said.” And the anonymous homeowner showed us radical readiness for Jesus to show up and do the unexpected, readiness to offer freely, promptly, and without protest the best that he had for the purposes of Jesus.

There are two final questions for each one of us to answer—and if we leave them pending, then our time together may very well have been wasted. These questions are: What has God spoken to you through this passage of Scripture? And what are you going to DO about it? I want to challenge you to share the answers to those two questions with someone in the next 24 hours.