



# Weaving God's Promises

## LESSON 26

### *JESUS' LAST SUPPER*

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#### SUMMARY OF TODAY'S STORY

Jesus has his last meal with his disciples. He talks about being betrayed by one of them. Then he shares the meal with them. While they eat, he passes to them some bread and wine, saying, "This is my body... This is my blood."

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#### KEY CONCEPTS

- Last Supper
- Maundy Thursday
- Eucharist

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#### WHERE YOU'LL FIND TODAY'S STORY

##### In the Bible

We recommend the *New Revised Standard Version Bible*.

**Matthew 26:17-30**

##### In Our Sunday Lectionary

Today's story is told in church on the following Sundays:

Year A: Wednesday of Holy Week

Year B: Wednesday of Holy Week

Year C: Wednesday of Holy Week

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## WEAVING OUR STORY WITH THE BIBLICAL STORY

Jesus' last supper is no ordinary meal. After he says the words that we now repeat every Sunday, he then says, "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."

Jesus looked to the future. His supper anticipated the coming of the kingdom of God that God promised us. And Jesus used this event of the supper to establish a new covenant between God and humanity, which would come about through his death. He gives the bread and the wine to us as signs of this covenant – everyday objects become holy.

And now, each Sunday, the sacrament of bread and wine is given for us to remember and to renew this covenant. We also have a share in the kingdom when we partake of this holy food and drink.

That is what God promised us, and here Jesus offers it to us and shows us the way to that kingdom.

The Interpreter's Bible says, "[Jesus] would suffer as the Son of man, as the representative of the new messianic community which it was his Father's will to establish. His life, like that of the servant of God [in Isaiah] would be poured out for many, and by his stripes [we] would be healed."

And so God's promise to us is fulfilled. The story of our salvation, which began with the disobedience and faithlessness of Adam and Eve, ends with the perfect obedience and faith of God's own Son, who brings about our redemption and reconciliation with God. Our way to God is once again opened.



## THE EPISCOPAL THREAD

The Holy Eucharist (Rite I, *BCP*, p. 333, or Rite II, *BCP*, p. 355) is one of the two great sacraments given by Christ to his Church and the one which we celebrate every Sunday as the principal service. The Catechism (*BCP*, pp. 859-860) describes this sacrament as the Church's sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving (p. 859), and since the *1979 Prayer Book*, Episcopalians have celebrated the Eucharist every Sunday as commanded by Christ.

Holy Eucharist is so important in the Episcopal Church that an entire section in *The Hymnal 1982* (New York, NY: Church Publishing, 1985) is devoted to hymns extolling this sacrament (#300- 347).

During Holy Week, Maundy Thursday is the time that Christians, including Episcopalians, remember when Jesus institutes the Sacrament of his Body and Blood and commands us to “eat...drink...in remembrance of me.” These “words of institution” are said in every Eucharistic Prayer. But on Maundy Thursday, this sacrament is specially recognized. And coming as it does before Good Friday, it is recognized as Jesus’ last supper before he is crucified. So on Maundy Thursday, the bread and wine given is the last communion offered before Easter.

At the end of the service, the altar is stripped, every vestige of Christian symbolism is taken away and the people are deprived of their holy and basic food of Christ’s Body and Blood as they then recall the dark days of Christ’s trial and crucifixion. For Episcopalians for whom Eucharist bears such importance, this two-day deprivation feels like a great loss. But when Easter comes, Holy Eucharist returns and is greeted with great joy.

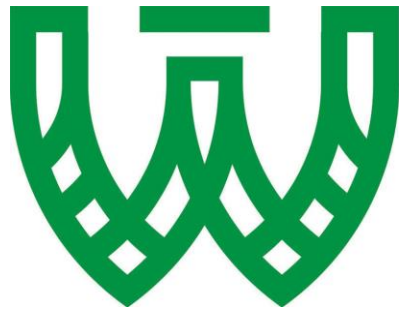


## WEAVING GOD’S BELOVED COMMUNITY

The New Covenant that Jesus instituted, in what we call the Last Supper, was a renewal of a commitment between God and God’s people. To reinforce this renewed covenant and the message that God does indeed dwell with us on earth, Jesus does not create a fancy ritual full of exotic or expensive objects. Instead, he uses the everyday food of everyday people.

In the living out of God’s Beloved Community every day, we too renew our commitment to God. And we too can find in our environment the everyday objects of God’s creation to reinforce our commitment to God’s world. In this way, all of creation shares with us our union with God.

- What are some examples in God’s creation of God’s presence?
- Where are places that you feel most connected with God?
- What everyday things remind you of God’s love for God’s creation and community? How can you share those with others?



# Weaving God's Promises

## MATTHEW 26:17-30

Jesus and his disciples celebrate the Passover meal

Everybody in Jerusalem is getting ready for the Jewish Passover feast. Jesus and his disciples will be together for this feast.

“Where shall we go to prepare for the Passover?” they ask Jesus. Since this is not their hometown, they need to find a place to eat.

Jesus knows what to do. He tells them, “Go into the city and find a man whose name I will tell you later. When you see him, say to him, ‘The Teacher says, my time is near. I want to keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’ The man is a friend of mine, so he will understand. He will let us use his house.”

Jesus and his disciples need a special room to eat. So the disciples leave Jesus and go find the house of Jesus’ friend. Jesus is right. His friend knows what to do. He opens up his house, and the disciples go inside and get ready for the Passover. They prepare the meal that they need to make. They are alone. There are no more crowds.

Now it is evening. Jesus comes to the house. The disciples have gotten everything ready – the food, the table and the seating. Jesus sits down, and they begin to eat the meal. While they are eating and enjoying their food, suddenly Jesus says, “One of you is going to betray me.”

The disciples’ eyes open wide. They sit up and look at each other. What is he talking about? Who will betray him? And why? We

are his best friends, his disciples!

Peter says, "It won't be me!" And Andrew: "Surely not me, either!" Nathaniel: "I won't betray you!" James: "Nor me!" John: "I will never betray you!" One after another, the disciples promise to stay with Jesus forever. They are confused and scared about what Jesus has just said to them.

Jesus says, "One of you dipped your hand in this bowl, just as I did. It will be one of you who did this."

Then Judas says to Jesus, "Surely it won't be me, will it, Teacher?" But Jesus says to him, very quietly so no one else can hear, "You've said it."

### **Jesus' last supper and what he does**

*Jesus' last supper is the last meal he will have before he is arrested and then crucified. He knows that he will be killed, and that this will be his last night with his beloved disciples. He would like to say many things to them. He has already taught them, shown them how he heals, and loves, and serves the poor. Now he needs to help them remember him.*

While the friends are eating, Jesus asks the disciples to be silent. He has something to tell them, and something to do with them.

Then Jesus picks up a loaf of bread. He says a blessing as the Jews are taught to do. Then he breaks the bread in half. The disciples watch and wait in silence. Then Jesus passes out the bread to them and says, "Take." They take the bread. Then he says, "Eat. This is my body." Slowly they eat the bread.

Then Jesus takes a cup of wine. Holding the cup in his hands, he gives thanks to God, as the Jews are taught to do. Then he says to his disciples, "Drink from this cup, all of you." As each one takes a sip from the cup, Jesus says, "This is my blood of the new covenant

(promise). This blood is poured out for you and for many, for the forgiveness of sins.”

The disciples are quiet. His body, his blood. A new promise, the forgiveness of sins.

Then Jesus says to them, “I tell you, I will never again drink wine until the day when I drink it with you in God my Father’s kingdom.”

The disciples do not yet understand, but they are quiet as they struggle to understand what Jesus is saying. Then, as is the custom at dinner, they sing a hymn. After this supper, it is hard to sing. Something strange is happening, and it does not sound good.

Then it is time to go outside.

