

Call to Worship

Welcome to worship with Feilding Baptist Church!

As we prepare for Communion this morning, and the passage in Matthew where Jesus leads the Last Supper, these verses from Jeremiah prophesy of that time that was to come;

Jeremiah 31:31-34 New International Version - UK

31 'The days are coming,' declares the Lord,

 'when I will make a new covenant

with the people of Israel

 and with the people of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant

 I made with their ancestors

when I took them by the hand

 to lead them out of Egypt,

because they broke my covenant,

 though I was a husband to them,'

declares the Lord.

33 'This is the covenant that I will make with the people of Israel

 after that time,' declares the Lord.

'I will put my law in their minds

 and write it on their hearts.

I will be their God,

 and they will be my people.

34 No longer will they teach their neighbour,

 or say to one another, "Know the Lord,"

because they will all know me,

 from the least of them to the greatest,'

declares the Lord.

'For I will forgive their wickedness

 and will remember their sins no more.'

Father, thank you for these words that we can look back on, and feel the anticipation of something new that is ahead. Thank you that we live this side of Jesus, that we have the blessing of the new thing you were going to do. Thank you for your forgiveness, thank you for hearts that know you. Thank you for Jesus, whose death and resurrection achieved all this and more. Thank you for the Holy Spirit, for the fruits of joy, and peace, and patience.

Father, thank you for this time to gather. Please bless this time, and this space, and each of us here, Amen.

Message - Hand Over

May the richness of the symbolism in the Last Supper, the backwards, forwards, inwards, upwards, around, outwards focus, keep our Communion fresh.

We heard this week that from May this year, New Zealand Post will have 142 less retail partner stores. Then suddenly it was 141 because they've made a mistake. Te Kauwhata will keep theirs. We must still be grateful apparently for the remaining 567 stores! And of course delight in whatever the new thing is that is about to happen in Palmerston North. But that is still a lot fewer places to hand mail over to.

The main post office building in New York has inscribed along the front of it, clearly a very wide building, "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." It is the unofficial motto of the US postal service.

Interestingly, it's a quote that comes from a Greek guy around 460BC who was in awe of the Persian postal service. And who brought this service into such world wide repute sixty years earlier? None other than King Darius who we read about in Haggai.

Darius established roads across the vast Persian empire, and a postal system that could get a message across 2700 kilometres in nine days. The old way was 90 days. On my bike, it would be around 30 days. So nine days, 2500 years ago, is very impressive! So how did they do it?

They used a series of relay stations, where well fuelled horses and riders would be ready and waiting, the message or whatever would be handed on to them, and off they would go. 24 hours a day. So nine days, 216 hours, an average of 12 and a half kilometres an hour. Not fast, but incredibly efficient. Here is where you might be expecting a comparison with New Zealand Post... But no.

The Greek compound word for handing over messages from one horse rider to the next comes from here. And guess what the English word is for this handing over is? To betray.

In our second paragraph today, we have Jesus predicting His betrayal, His handing over. Judas handed Jesus over.

Now that's quite a negative thing. More positively is in a wedding ceremony. We used to have this strange custom where the bride would be handed over. The bride's parents would stand and be asked to hand over their daughter. Who remembers that? More recently we had both bride and groom handed over. And now, the bride or groom's parents are asked if they will support this new couple, only when there's a reasonable chance that they will. It's a bit awkward otherwise!

This word can also be used when someone hands themselves over. If you hand yourself over - like as in war - the word is? Surrender.

There is something of that in the next paragraph, where instead of the word for betray, paradidomi, we have just didomi - which means give. Here Jesus is freely giving Himself, in the bread, and the wine.

Yes, Jesus was betrayed, was handed over. But Jesus also, willingly gave Himself, as a gift. And that's part of the challenge of these verses, to recognise that, and decide what we will do with that gift?

Let's continue from Susan's verses last week, and her very fine message. Let's read;

Matthew 26:17-30 (NIV - UK)

The Last Supper

17 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?’

18 He replied, ‘Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, “The Teacher says: my appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.”’ 19 So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

20 When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. 21 And while they were eating, he said, ‘Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me.’

22 They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, ‘Surely you don’t mean me, Lord?’

23 Jesus replied, ‘The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.’

25 Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, ‘Surely you don’t mean me, Rabbi?’

Jesus answered, ‘You have said so.’

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’

27 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the[a] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.’

30 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Footnotes

Matthew 26:28 Some manuscripts the new

The Feast of the Passover was combined with the feast of Unleavened Bread by the time of Jesus, and was now a week long. Three million people would flood into Jerusalem for this highly significant week. There were many protocols. Some things had to be done within the city walls. People could stay outside the city walls, but not go too far. The Passover meal had to be celebrated after dark, which at that time of the year would be after 6pm, which was also the start of a new calendar day.

This time was for people to remember and give thanks for God’s freeing of the people from being slaves in Egypt (Exodus 12). Back then God had brought plagues on Egypt to encourage the leaders to let the people go. But they, Pharaoh would not. Finally God said, every first born will die, unless a lamb is killed, and the blood put on the doorposts of the house. The angel of death passed over the protected houses. The first born in every household that didn’t have the protection of the blood died.

That was enough for the Egyptian leaders, and the people were told to leave. They left quickly, heading for the Red Sea, and then the Wilderness.

1200 or more years later, to the time of Jesus, the people were still remembering. They had a significant meal that took most of Thursday to prepare, the ritual killing of the lamb, the cleansing of the house of yeast, the preparation of the bread and bitter herbs, the tables and the setting, the other foods, fruit puree, the salt water and wine, lots of wine - four times they passed around the cup, recalling the four promises in Exodus 6:6-7 I will bring you out, I will free you, I will redeem you, I will take you for my own people and I will be your God.

Then the story of the Exodus events would be told, from Egypt, through the Red Sea, the Wilderness journey, to the Promised Land, the land with the giant bunch of grapes that took two people to carry! Think of the wine from these!

And then Jesus went off script. It was expected that Jesus as the leader, the host, would say the usual things - 'This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the wilderness'. But Jesus didn't, changing the expected into the unexpected - this bread is my body, this is my blood.

We don't appreciate the horror Jesus words would have brought, eat his body, drink His blood. This is an abomination, Jews didn't drink blood, certainly not human blood (Green, 273)! But here was the establishing of the new covenant, that Jeremiah talked about.

A covenant was no simple agreement. It's really a stunning blend of both law and love. It is a relationship much more intimate and loving than a mere legal contract could create. Yet it is a relationship more enduring and binding than personal affection alone could make. It is a bond of love made more intimate and solid because it is legal.

This is the very opposite of a customer shopkeeper/vendor relationship (NZ Post), in which the connection is maintained only if it serves both parties' self-interest. A covenant, by contrast, is the solemn, permanent, whole self giving of two parties to each other. Here is love, joy, and freedom (Keller, 104).

Here was a new covenant that could do what the Old Testament sacrificial system could not. The old system pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus, atoning for the sins of those in the past, those alive at the time of Jesus, and us now, and in the future (Green, 276). This is the meaning of Hebrews 10:1-4 where it appears in frustration, that the previous system could not cope with the sins of the people. There were not enough animals to cope with the sins of the world. Again and again they were slaughtering animals.

Hebrews 10:3-4

3 But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. 4 It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

In the New Covenant sins would be forgiven, men and women would know God personally, God's will would be written on their hearts by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Universal pardon, universal knowledge of God, universal availability of the Spirit of God - these are the marks of the new covenant. These would be sealed in Jesus' blood, and Jesus wanted to make sure we never forgot it. The Last Supper replaces the Passover, as a lasting ordinance (Green, 276).

And the beauty of the last supper is that it doesn't just remind us of historical events. Yes, it looks backward to what Jesus has done for us, giving Himself, in dying, rising again. But it also looks forward, to Jesus coming again, to the promised land where there will be no more evil, pain, death.

The Last Supper also draws us to look inwards, at our hearts, at our response to what Jesus has done for us. Self examination. We should also look upwards in thanks to our victorious king who sits

alongside the Father! We also look around in this sharing of the bread and the cup, at those with us, in community. And we look outward, to those who don't know about Jesus, mission.

So having said all that, we should celebrate! This is a meal that embraces joy and dignity. It is far more future focussed than I have thought. We talk about remembering Jesus. While that is good, it's a lot more than that. It's about appreciating what Jesus was doing. It's seeing where Jesus was going. It's grasping the present and future focus of what Jesus was doing, by breaking bread, and sharing wine.

Here in this sharing is a unity that is profound, with those who are not like us, but who also call Jesus Lord. Here in this sharing, is a unity with those who also are looking to a time to come, when we will be free of evil, of sin, of darkness, of death. It is okay to long for Jesus' return, and for God's Kingdom to come!