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 Maundy Thursday

Holy Communion, Holy Eucharist, The Lord's Supper, the Mass... whatever you call it, it is THE Christian Act. The Lord's own service on the Lord's own day.

The Gospel continues to proclaim and interpret the identity of Jesus and his fulfillment of God's redemptive purpose.

What have we already been told?

At the birth of Jesus, Gabriel announced that Jesus would "reign over the house of Jacob forever" (1:33), but a darker allusion appears in the words of Simeon, spoken to Mary: "and a sword will pierce your own soul too" (2:35). After the temptation of Jesus, the devil "departed from him until an opportune time" (4:13). In later references, the devil snatches some of the seed that is sown (8:12), but Jesus' victory over Satan is also reported (10:18, 11:18, 13:16). With the beginning of the passion narrative, Satan's assault on Jesus intensifies (22:3, 31).

The Gospels make clear this is a Passover meal ... "before I suffer" ... Greek for 'suffer' is almost the same word as that for "Passover." In early Christian usage Jesus became the 'Passover.' ... Messiah's suffering is written about early and often in the OT. (Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel)

The meal that had been a celebration of God's deliverance of Israel in the past will henceforth point toward the fulfillment of God's redemptive work in the kingdom. Eucharistic language fills the Lukan passage "having received...having blessed he said take and divide."

This is the one service that Jesus founded.

"and when he had given thanks" Jesus' blessing over the bread, therefore, affirms that his death will have a vicarious, sacrificial significance. He gives himself then. The observance of the Lord's Supper is consequently a commemorative meal, a meal of remembrance of Jesus' death and expectation of its fulfillment in the kingdom of God. As a communal observance, it links the church in any generation with both its origins and the fulfillment of God's promise of redemption. Just as the Passover was observed "so that all the days of your life you may remember the day of your departure from the land of Egypt: (Deut. 16:3), so also the Lord's Supper would be observed "in remembrance of me." ANAMNESIS = more than 'remembering' ... it is participation in the meal.

By designating the cup as "the new covenant in my blood," Jesus was also evoking the prophetic promise of a new covenant. Jeremiah wrote, "The

days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.” (Jer. 31:31, 33)

The concluding affirmation of the vicarious significance of the cup in verse 20 balances the earlier statement after the bread; the bread is the body “which is given for you”, and the cup is the “new covenant” in his blood “that is poured out for you.” (The pouring out of blood in the OT is often an allusion to death.)

No other ceremony or act of worship has moved the church through the centuries as much as following Jesus’ command to eat the bread and drink the cup of the new covenant. Again we stand in the presence of mystery and wonder. How does this create community?

The act of eating together cemented Jesus’ fellowship with his disciples, the crowds, and the outcasts in Galilee on various occasions. Luke emphasizes the meal scenes more than any of the Gospel writers. Jesus demonstrates his solidarity with ALL people through table fellowship. He publicly crossed all social barriers in this act.

Paul would build the Church base on his instructions from “the Lord” concerning this meal. (1 Corinthians 11: 23-26) His was the first word written concerning this Holy Meal.

Because of the significance of meals in Jesus’ ministry and the experience of the early church, fasting has never been as significant a part of the Christian experience as eating together has been. This act, this ‘supper’, relates the community of believers physically and spiritually to the Lord, who laid down his life that they might live. It is a commemoration, a remembrance and more, a participation ‘in’, the death of Jesus, a celebration of his real and spiritual presence now, and an affirmation of the hope that we shall eat and drink with him in the kingdom of God. Every time we do this we believe and ‘know’ that Jesus is alive with us in this meal.

The experience of the supper, therefore, spans the breadth of God’s love; the depth of Jesus’ sufferings; and the past, present, and future of God’s mighty acts. The challenge for the believer is not that we grasp the full potential of its meaning but that we open ourselves to the full extent of its power to change us and create intimacy among the worshiper and the outcasts, other believers and the Lord whom we worship. What then shall we do after we eat together?