



Matthew 26:26

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.”

Reflection

The Passover, from Deuteronomy 16,

16 Observe the month of Aviv and celebrate the Passover of the Lord

your God, because in the month of Aviv he brought you out of Egypt by night. 2 Sacrifice as the Passover to the Lord your God an animal from your flock or herd at the place the Lord will choose as a dwelling for his Name. 3 Do not eat it with bread made with yeast, but for seven days eat unleavened bread, the bread of affliction, because you left Egypt in haste—so that all the days of your life you may remember the time of your departure from Egypt.

The Passover. A time-honoured tradition; families, gathered over an annual meal, eating and drinking in remembrance of the Exodus from Egypt, the great deliverance that led to the birth of their nation. This family is in mourning. The solemn

occasion is overwhelmed by sadness. Closer than brothers, they've shared every waking moment together for the past three years, as followers, trainees, and disciples of the Messiah. And they've just learnt that he is leaving them, betrayed by one of their own number.

With this news hanging heavy in the room, Jesus continues to preside over the time-honoured Passover meal, a meal that each of these Jewish men would have shared in, conducted in precisely the same way, since they were young boys. The meal had begun with Jesus, as the head of the household, praying a prayer of thanksgiving for the meal, and then over the first of four cups of watered down wine. Then a course of greens and bitter herbs was served which were dipped

into a sauce. At this point in the meal, the youngest in the household would ceremonially ask the meaning of the meal. This is following Exodus 12:26 which says,

26 And when your children ask you, ‘What does this ceremony mean to you?’ 27 then tell them, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice to the Lord, who passed over the houses of the Israelites in Egypt and spared our homes when he struck down the Egyptians.’” Then the people bowed down and worshiped.

Jesus would have answered this ceremonial question, explaining the symbolism behind the meal. By eating it they were partaking in the redemption of God’s people from slavery in Egypt, remembering

their great deliverance that gave birth to the Israelite nation. Each of the disciples would have asked this question as a boy, and heard, year-in-year out, the significance of the meal, in this same time-honoured way.

The greens and bitter herbs now almost finished, that bitter taste in their mouths, and deep sadness in their hearts, Jesus continues the ceremony.

26 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples,

Unleavened bread. The bread of affliction. The bread of slavery. Baked without yeast because of the haste of their de-

parture; there was no time to wait for the bread rise. Jesus would have prayed over it according to the usual formula that each of them would have known by heart. But, in a stunning departure from a thousand year liturgy,

when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

Every eye would have turned to Jesus at this shocking departure from the script. Twelve disciples, twelve times, plenty of time for Jesus’ words to sink in, and be written indelibly in their memories forever,

“Take and eat; this is my body.”

What can he mean? They don’t know,

they're not sure, but Jesus isn't one to depart lightly from what is prescribed in the Bible. Something profound is going on but they can't quite grasp it. And of course, the full reality of what was going on wouldn't hit them until after Jesus' death, when his body was figuratively broken, and his blood was poured out for many. But his disciples in that moment would have known that this was the beginning of something profound, a new beginning of sorts, a new and greater exodus of God's people.

The Jews had believed for some time that the original Exodus pointed forward to a new and greater one. An exodus in which God would finally do what he had long promised. He would forgive the sins of Israel and of the world, once and for all. Sin, a far greater slave-master than anything

they'd experienced in Egypt, would be defeated forever. These words that Jesus is saying, breaking with a thousand year tradition, could this be the moment?

It is the moment. For hundreds of years, Jewish people had been eating and drinking and remembering the Exodus from Egypt, the great deliverance, the beginnings of the Israelite nation. And for thousands of years into the future Christians will be hearing Jesus' words 'this is my body, broken for you', eating and drinking and remembering the sacrifice that gave birth to a new nation, a nation filled with people from every tribe and nation on earth, Jew, Gentile, slave and free. A new act of deliverance, a far greater salvation, remembered by the simple act of breaking bread over a meal.

Think

Take some time today to think over the significance of this communal meal that Christians share in remembrance of our great salvation. You might like to meditate over the significance of this tradition that can be traced back down the generations of God's people, back thousands of years to the time of Moses, to the very beginnings of the nation of Israel. Despite all of the various church traditions that have developed, there is nothing mysterious about Jesus' words in this passage. It's just Jesus, the master teacher who drew parables from everyday life, making his teaching so relatable, so profound and so memorable. He's doing the same with the breaking of bread over a family meal. And

in so doing, he changed this simple act forever, to help us remember him, making it a symbol of what he did for us on the cross.

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.”

You might like to consider starting something similar in your family. Many cultures eat bread with their meals. Why not make it a habit in your household? And then break it, give some to your partner, give some to your children. And when your children ask you what you're doing, tell them about Jesus and what he has done for them. But not in the same way each time, fill your words with life and love just

as he has filled you with life and love.

And next time you share in communion at church, why not experience this meal in a richer way, by considering it in the light of the Passover; its ancient roots, the ancient echoes and foreshadowings of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that began in the land of Egypt over three thousand years ago.

Pray

Why not close today with our Lord's prayer? There's a line in it that might have some added significance after today's devotion, Matthew 6:9–13,

9 “This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
10 your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
11 Give us today our daily bread.
12 And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debt-
ors.
13 And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.