

Palm/Passion Sunday

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

March 24, 2024

"Not I!" Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from his Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

It sure looked like it was going to be a good evening to have supper. Jesus enjoyed getting together for a meal as much as many of us do. Good friends, food, and fellowship make for a good combination. Scripture tells us that Jesus enjoyed dining with his friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus whenever he happened to be passing through Bethany. Jesus was looking forward to the wedding reception at Cana after assembling his disciples. And as the disciples and Jesus were about to gather to eat the Passover meal together once again, the disciples anticipated spending some quality time together with Jesus.

The disciples were proactive in planning the evening. They asked Jesus where he wanted to eat the Passover meal. Jesus told two unnamed disciples into the city to find a man carrying a jar of water and they were to follow him into the house that he would enter. Once in the house, they were to say to the master of the house, The Teacher says, "Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover meal with my disciples?" Jesus already knew the place where they would eat that evening. It was going to be a large upper room that had everything they needed. These two disciples followed Jesus' instructions, and everything happened just as he said it would.

Unfortunately, what happened next also was planned by Jesus, but it was not expected by his disciples. Instead of waiting for the meal to be finished, while the disciples were still eating, Jesus interrupted the evening with an open-ended accusation. Jesus said, "Truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." Jesus knew that his disciple Judas was the one that would betray him with a kiss in the garden of Gethsemane, but Jesus doesn't name Judas. He simply said, "One of you will betray me."

1500 years after Jesus spoke these words, Leonardo da Vinci, painted what seems to be a realistic depiction of what happened next. No longer was anyone reclining as they ate. In da Vinci's painting of the Last Supper, it seemed as if Jesus had told his 12 disciples to get into groups of three and see what they thought. Da Vinci attempted to capture the emotions of the various disciples by painting intentional details that could be easily overlooked. The three disciples on the left represented Bartholomew, James and Andrew that just seemed surprised at Jesus' accusation. The next disciple is the only one doing what we have all been told not to do when eating at the table. Judas is the only disciple whose elbow is on the table and whose head is lower than all the other disciples and he holds a purse either representing the 30 pieces of silver that he received for betraying Jesus or simply showing that he was the treasurer in charge of the purse. He also is the disciple who shows the most facial expression of surprise that he knew about the plan of his betrayal. Da Vinci takes a little liberty and has Judas in his nervousness tipping over a cup of salt that was by him. Peter is next to Judas and who was likely the most vocal in denying the accusation. The disciple's face who is just to the right of Jesus is Thomas, who Da Vinci painting holding up a finger as to foreshadow his future doubting of the resurrection until he places his finger in the side of the risen Jesus.

Scripture of course doesn't specifically identify all these details that Da Vinci painted into the Last Supper. But one thing is clear in the picture and will come true as Jesus is crucified, all the disciples will distance themselves from Jesus. Judas is often described as betraying Jesus. Peter is remembered for denying Jesus three times and we learn from Mark that all the disciples denied knowing Jesus and they all deserted him as he died on the cross.

All the disciples said, "Not I". They all became defensive when they were accused of betraying Jesus. The prophet Isaiah proclaimed what Jesus would do when he was accused of his crimes. He was not rebellious. He didn't turn his back on his accusers. Instead, he gave his back to them to be stricken. Stricken for you and for me.

Streaming of tv series is now helpful compared to when you would be left with a cliffhanger of an event in a favorite show and then the program would end with the words "To Be Continued" and you would have to wait another week before knowing what would happen. The good news for you and I is that the complete story about Jesus has been written and you don't have to watch the next season of "The Chosen" in the theaters or wait until it is on tv.

The Passover meal of remembering a time in the past was going to become something entirely new in the Lord's Supper. Jesus told his disciples as he broke the bread "This is my Body, given for you. Jesus told his disciples as he gave them the cup of wine, "This is my blood shed for you." This was no longer a meal to remember, but became a sacrament for you that does today, what it always has done.

You and I come to that Lord's Supper guilty of sin. We surround the table in this place just as the disciples surrounded Jesus on the night of the first Lord's supper. We are rightly accused of sin. However, this is not the end of the story. Jesus has taken away our sins by shedding his blood. Today you leave the altar forgiven. Today we remember Jesus, but he does not remember your sins.

There may only be 13 people that Da Vinci painted in his rendition of the Lord's supper. We know that we were there when they crucified Jesus. And we also know that despite our defensiveness and denials, Jesus did not turn his back on you and me. Jesus knows our sin but has opened his ears to your shouts of Hosanna and has saved you. Amen