

The Table of Grace (Mark 14, Part 1)

If you've been around Gracepoint for any length of time, something you notice is that every Sunday there is a bit of a rhythm to what we do.

We sing, we welcome everyone, we pray for our own hearts and other churches, we get into the Scriptures, we give you an opportunity for prayer at the end of services or through our prayer board . . .

and then we always take communion together as Jesus said, "do so in remembrance of me."

And so we take the bread, and we take the wine as a reminder that the body and blood of Christ was broken so that all people of all stories and backgrounds, of all nations – could have communion with God.

And then we go out into the city as people who are living out the story of a broken Christ, a spilled out Christ, a resurrected Christ for the benefit of a world that needs Christ.

So our text today is a picture of why we go to the table every week.

We're going to talk about what that means from the context of Mark 14 – and then we're going to go to the table of grace to commune with Christ and with one another.

BEFORE WE DO – LET'S PRAY . . .

In Mark 14, we see a number of people who surround Jesus in his last and most difficult days of life – some who understand his mission, but many others who do not.

Read 1-3

Verses 1-2 – the Passover (or Feast of Unleavened Bread) was the celebration of how God rescued Israel from bondage in Egypt. (So it's no accident that just as God rescued his people from bondage in Egypt, Jesus' death will be the rescue humanity needs from the bondage of our broken world).

3 – (Bethany was just a little piece out of town, and Jesus stays there with a friend).

In Jesus day, people would lean back on their sides on a circle around a table – but only the men. Women would eat in a separate area (which was the custom of the day and is still the custom in many places around the world today).

And so in the midst of this intimate meal, a woman breaks into the room (most believe this is Mary Magdalene, who came from a really rough background but was saved by Jesus).

She has an alabaster jar of costly perfume. (PICTURE – alabaster was an expensive stone (it still is) because it not only feels like marble – it's a translucent stone. So if you put a light up to a box of alabaster, it glows in the dark.)

And this is the kind of box that contained the perfume.

She comes in with a pint of pure nard – and when it says an "expensive" jar of perfume, it would have been worth a year's wages (somewhere around \$30,000 dollars at the time). In fact, this is the same perfume the Romans would put on the Caesar's when they were crowned – the same

kind of perfume the Jewish people would use to anoint their kings in the Old Testament.

Verses 4-9

So – what’s going on here with the perfume?

Well, in those days when you came to a big event, it was perfectly normal to get out the perfume. Why? Because (not making fun) - this is the year’s before refrigeration, this is the years before deodorant, before toothpaste – before regular baths and showers and running water).

And what you had in a hot climate was- everything smelled bad, everyone smelled bad.

(You say, “Back then it was different.” No it wasn’t. By our standards, and their standards things smelled bad.)

So it was normal to get our spices and scents to make the place smell better.

In fact, it was customary for the host or hostess to dab a bit of the perfume on your head.

Very similar to perfume. And immediately you are surrounded by a protective shield of nice aroma. (And you didn’t have a banquet without it).

The disciples are upset about this – they just blurt out something that is harsh – and pretty much the whole room started yelling at her – “What are you doing?”

What did she do?

She broke the box. Look what it says this is – she got out a pint of pure nard, expensive perfume. It doesn’t say she

poured it, she broke it. And when you break the container, that means not a little dab – it’s all running out. She’s using the whole thing.

And it wasn’t just that he experienced a little dab and there was a fragrance around him – the house was filled with the fragrance.

Not only that – since in alabaster box, it was an heirloom being passed on down, and so it really was the financial security of that family.

But she breaks it and pours the whole thing out. (And she does what was humiliating in that culture. The Gospel of John says she put it on his feet – because dealing with the feet in that culture was humiliating).

And she wiped it with her hair – she unbound it in public, which culturally would have been a complete scandal – but she just didn’t care what people thought.

And the disciples yell at her for this. And what does Jesus say? “Leave her alone.”

Here’s a woman who knew something the men missed. She knew exactly who he was – He is the king of Kings! The King of the Universe. And so she does this elaborate thing because she gets it.

And you know what – when you understand who Jesus is – it’s not hard at all to give him your everything. Right? (In fact, when she smashed the jar itself, it meant that the vessel could never be used again – which symbolized the totality of her gift. (Reminds you of another woman we read

about two weeks ago – the widow in the temple who gave all that she had). THESE WERE INCREDIBLE WOMEN.

Here's Mary - she gave it all – and poured it right on his head. (In fact, it's likely that Jesus kept this scent on his body throughout the following week).

Someone said, “When he suffered the anguish of crucifixion, Mary’s gift remained. It was the last beautiful thing he smelled as he went to the cross.” Just wonderful!

And without realizing the deeper significance of the moment, she prepared Jesus for his death.

And Jesus said, “Wherever the Gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will be told.”

Isn't this amazing – that 2000 years later we're talking about it?

Jesus said, “They’re going to be talking about this woman all over the world until the world is no more.”

So today – this woman would have never thought that by pouring out this expensive perfume and sacrificing all she had, that 2000 years later a bunch of people on another continent in Savannah, TN would be talking about this woman.

But what's great about this is this: when we honor Jesus and make sacrifices, we have no idea how many people that will impact. We may never see it in our lifetime. (One day in heaven I believe we will see it).

But we have no idea how exponentially bigger our impact is going to be.

Because you serve here – because you give sacrificially – there will be some body's child, grandchild, greatgrandchild that will have the whole course of their life altered, because of what you've done.

(Judged until judgment day – because we are rewarded for what we do, and that will not be known until sometime in the future after we die, because the legacy of what we do will live on. And that will also be considered when we are judged. So – are you thinking that way? Are you looking ahead.

Chris Smith – “Do good for the lowly, and it will do you good.” He said, “Spend time with the lowly. You will have a fair amount of disappointment and discouragement (because a lot of folks are skating on the edge), but the successes (Oh my goodness . . .) they will bless you eternally.”

Next – we have a plot twist. We find that one of Jesus' disciples is going to sell him out. (So you have a contrast – one person giving all she has, the other taking all he can get).

10-11

The Gospel of Matthew tells us they counted out 30 silver coins to him.

These coins are the shekel of Tyre – it was the temple tax coin, and one shekel was about half a week's salary, so for a relatively small amount, Judas was willing to betray Jesus in the hour of trial.



So get the contrast - Mary pours out a year's salary and lavishes it on Jesus; and Judas is going to sell his Savior out for a few hundred dollars. Crazy.

Why in the world would Judas – a man that saw Jesus raise people from the grave, a man that saw him heal the sick and make the blind see – he was present when Jesus miraculously fed 5000 on a hillside – he saw all this. So why in the world would he have the audacity to sell Jesus out?

Quite simply – he was greedy and selfish. And secondly, he couldn't have been that good of a friend to Jesus. (Apparently, he never built a relationship with Jesus – because you wouldn't do this to a close friend).

So, when we're not good friends, when we only think about ourselves, we become betrayers of God as well.

But he's not the only one – next part

12-13 (12 - unleavened bread was a symbol – you may remember – that God was going to rescue the Israelites in Egypt so quickly, they wouldn't have a chance for their bread to rise. And so they had a whole feast devoted to bread without yeast.

(13 – and we'll see here – that even with plots that are swirling around him, Jesus was in complete control of his destiny as he approaches the Cross).

But we read in 14-21

So how could anyone betray Jesus? All he's done is loved people and done good.

And all Jesus says is, "Woe to the man that does that."

Woe means catastrophe. (It says it a lot in Revelation – it means catastrophic).

When the Bible says "Woe to you" it means that if you don't change it's going to be really bad.

So - God is love – but he's also coming back to judge.

(We read in Romans 12, "Leave room for God's wrath." But God's wrath is not getting even; but it's designed to point people in the right direction. To get our attention.

Jesus says, "For the one that betrays me, it would be better that he was never born."

The Gospel of Matthew tells us he's talking about Judas.

But here's the thing – all of us have betrayed Jesus. All of us have been Judas.

And he tells us that in verse 27-31 (jumping ahead a little)

Notice – it's not just Judas – he says, "You will all fall away."

And it's not something theoretical – it is up close and personal.

And Jesus makes it clear he's not just going to the cross to die for the **sins of the world – Jesus is going to the cross to die for the sins of his friends.**

You see - Jesus did not just come to die for the most despicable people of Hardin and McNairy and Wayne County – he did not just come to die for the most

despicable people of our country – Jesus came to die for those who consider themselves the friends of God.

And if nobody existed in this city other than the people in this room – who are in church on Sunday, right – we would need the blood of Christ and the body of Christ to save us.

And Jesus looks at the disciples and says, “I want you to look face to face, I want you to come into the kitchen and sit at the table of the only Son – I want you to sit and experience the magnitude of your guilt.”

BUT – please hear me, especially if you grew up in church.

The table of the Lord is not about guilt – the table of the Lord is about his grace.

But until we make the choice to be honest with ourselves – that we are sinners, even the best of us – until we own the weight of our sin, walking to the table and taking the bread and the wine is nothing more than a dead, religious ritual that you do before you leave.

But here’s the beauty – he doesn’t end with the guilt – he says, “I want you to see the magnitude of my grace.

Look at how Jesus responds – verse 22 – 26

How does he respond to the guilt of his disciples? How would you if you were in his shoes?

Knowing that those at the table with him will desert him – that one of them will sell him out for a few dollars worth of cash – how would you respond?

Kick them out? Look for a new group of friends? Do like we do – blast them on social media?

No – he loves them. He eats with them. And he gives us this beautiful moment – that when the disciples are at their very worst, Jesus is at his very best!

You see - when they let him down, Jesus invited them in.

Thank God – he’s not like us. He’s our Savior.

And because he’s our Savior - you can go to the table of grace! (in fact, there is no place more filled with grace, than the table of the Lord).

So the early church would come around it over and over and over again.

“In contrast to all other religious communities of their time, the early Christians had no temple, no statues, no priests, no special cult; the only thing visible was a table with a meal around which they came together every week” (Eduard Schweizer).

This is not just a routine we go through each week – this is not just something we “observe.”

When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, we come to the table and COMMUNE with the Lord. We commune with one another. (do you realized, that today, all around the world, the diversity of humanity now sits at the same table – rich and poor, Jew and Gentile, all tribes and nations – together at the table).

So we take the **bread**. (And in the supper Jesus gives it new meaning. Today it is not simply that we won't have time for our bread to rise. Now the unleavened bread is a reminder that Jesus's body was broken as he died for us. It's a reminder of the body of Jesus.

Then, in the **last supper**, the cup was simply part of the meal. But now Jesus gives it special significance. Just as wine is the color of blood, Jesus says, "My death, my blood spilled will serve as the sacrifice that cleanses you from your sins."

And so Jesus gives the Passover new meaning and fulfillment.

So here's the significance of the Supper (which gets fleshed out by the Apostle Paul sometime later):

God takes on the penalty that I earned for my sins.

The heartbeat of the Gospel is – I broke relations with God – and you did too.

Each of us have disappointed God, we have polluted his good creation with injustice, and dishonesty, and abuse, and mistreatment of one another – and we are all guilty because of our sin!

(And somebody has to pay the price for the sins we have committed, because God has a right to hold us accountable for what we have done).

But because God is so good, so gracious and merciful – he resolved the problem by becoming sin for us and taking the penalty upon himself.

SO AS WE GO TO THE TABLE – I want to give you three things to focus on (just play some music softly, go to the table, DON'T GET IN A HURRY – and if you are unable and need someone to bring communion to you, just raise your hand).

PRAYER: Take time to pray.

(Whether in your seat, with someone). I ASK: "If someone needs prayer, _____ can you pray with them?")

REFLECTION: Where are you, what has Jesus done?

Passage to read: Acts 2:42-27; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; 11:23-26

COMMUNITY: Take time to connect with your brothers and sisters – I want you to find someone in the room, perhaps someone you don't know -and introduce yourself – and a gratitude – find someone and say, "I want to thank you for something you may not know."

We'll have a beautiful communion song playing – now let's commune together with the Lord and with one another.

Close

Here's something I love. Even though we have denied him and betrayed him and have all "fallen away," what does he say in verse 28? "Meet me in Galilee. I'll be waiting for you there when you get back up."

That's our hope!

Jesus says this in Matthew 26:28-29: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ² 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."

No matter how messed up things are now – all the greatest longings of your heart will be met finally when we sit down with Jesus in heaven and meet him at the table.

Verse 26 - "they sung a hymn and went to the Mount of Olives – which we will learn about next week as Gethsemane"

We'll close by singing a song together. (Imagine a group of men, on a dusty hillside).

A Common Love