

Ash Wednesday 2023

“I Will Keep the Passover”

Text: Matthew 26:17-19

^{ESV} **(Matthew 26:17-19) Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, “Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?” ¹⁸ He said, “Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.’” ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.**

Dear Fellow Christians, our midweek meditations this Lenten season are adaptations of adaptations drawn from a book, published originally by NPH, entitled *The Crucial Hours*. The book, written several decades ago by a Lutheran pastor, is a study of the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Learning the history or etymology of words often helps us to better understand them. The word *crucial*, for example, comes from the Latin word *crux* or “cross.” Fitting, isn’t it, that our expressions like “*the crux of the matter*” point back to the cross. For Christians, the cross is at the heart of everything we do. So also the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday were *crucial* because they all led to Jesus’ cross. The word now has come to mean “decisive” or “critical.” It is altogether fitting that we consider those decisive and critical hours and how they were crucial especially for Jesus, but also for you and me.

We consider first Jesus’ words, “***I will keep the Passover.***”

Clearly that’s what Jesus was going to do that Thursday evening in the Upper Room—keep the Passover. He was going to keep God’s command to celebrate the Passover, the remembrance of God’s deliverance of his people from Egypt, when the angel of death put to death every firstborn Egyptian male as a judgment on Pharaoh and his refusal to obey God’s command to let his people go. The name of the festival, however, didn’t come from what the angel of death did at each Egyptian home. It came from what the angel of death did when he came to a

Hebrew house with the blood of the Passover lamb on its doorposts. The angel *passed over* those homes, harming no one.

Of course Jesus was going to keep the Passover that evening. It’s what every *faithful* Jew did. There were undoubtedly some who thought that it wasn’t a big deal if they didn’t keep the Passover *every year*. There were probably some who had decided that they would just keep *most* of the Passover. They would get together for a meal, like everyone else, but they wouldn’t worry about attending to every last detail of the Passover.

We know that there were also some Jews who were keeping that particular Passover fastidiously *in outward appearance*—the lamb slaughtered, the bread fully unleavened, etc.—but their hearts were somewhere else. They were preoccupied with the Jesus situation and their plans to kill him. If they admitted to themselves that they weren’t exactly keeping the Passover in full, they could argue that at that moment, that particular year, they had more pressing things to attend to.

Yet if there were anyone who could have thought, “*I have more pressing things on my mind right now,*” it would have been Jesus. He had enemies plotting to kill him, a traitor in his midst, and a band of self-centered, quarreling disciples surrounding him. If anyone ever had a good excuse to skip the Passover (or to say, “*I’m going to do Passover in my own way this year*”), it was Jesus. If anyone could have said, “*I need some me time. I need to put myself first for now,*” it would have been Jesus. But he didn’t. Instead, he resolved to keep the Passover – which is an interesting word choice when you think about it—“keep.” You and I talk about the need to *keep* God’s commandments, but there are times when we believe we have more pressing things on our mind; times when, instead of keeping God’s commandments, we set them aside, just temporarily.

Just as Jesus said, “***I will keep the Passover,***” we say, “*I will keep God’s commandments...*” but then we add, “*later.*”

“I will keep the Third Commandment (by going to church)... next weekend, because I have scheduled other things for this weekend.”

“I will keep God’s commandments... when it isn’t so inconvenient for me.”

“I will keep God’s commandments... at least the ones I think are really important.”

“I will keep God’s commandments... at least more often than I break them.”

Our keeping of God’s commands is often conditional, partial, *“How about I give you 85%?”* commitment. And then we don’t even live up to *that* level of commitment. Whatever level we aim for, whatever level we attain, it’s not enough. Paraphrasing a passage from Deuteronomy 27:26, Paul wrote, **“Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”** ^{ESV}(Galatians 3:10)

Because we have failed to keep all that God commanded in “the Book of the Law,” we deserve to be cursed by God. In Exodus, God had commanded the Israelites to keep the Passover **“at the appointed time from year to year”** (Exodus 13:10). The Passover was not to be kept nine years out of ten any more than God’s commandments are to be kept only 90% of the time. The Passover was not to be kept in the years where it fit neatly into people’s schedules any more than God’s commandments are to be kept only when we find obedience convenient. The Passover was to be kept year after year, every single year, including that year. So Jesus kept the Passover.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus indicated how committed he was to doing **“all things written in the Book of the Law”**. He said, **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. ¹⁸ For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”**

^{ESV}(Matthew 5:17-18) Some of you might remember the King James translation **“one jot or one tittle.”** In Jesus’ day, a *jot* referred to the *yodh*, the smallest letter in the Hebrew alphabet. A *tittle* was even smaller, referring to a slight projecting point on some of its letters. It was very small, but it made a difference. Think of how similar are an E and an F, or a Q and an O. Tiny little marks make dramatic changes. Today’s texting and Tweeting society doesn’t seem to be all that concerned with that level of detail. They omit entire letters. It’s no big deal, as long as they more or less convey their thought. Jesus didn’t think that way. He was careful, accurate, precise. He knew that if he was going

to be our substitute, he would have to keep *everything* written in the Book of the Law—right down to the smallest jot or tittle.

So Jesus kept the Passover that evening. His “keeping” was more than just celebrating. He made careful arrangements so that no rule would be broken. They needed a lamb “without blemish or defect” that had to be killed on the proper day. They needed wine and unleavened bread. The house where they celebrated had to be completely purged of all yeast. Everything, down to the smallest detail, had to be just right. We remember the events of the upper room that night because of the institution of the Lord’s Supper and Jesus’ vivid illustration of love in washing his disciples’ feet. But his keeping of the Passover is also enormously significant because it’s one more reassurance that our Substitute kept *everything* written in God’s commands.

Then, when the meal was completed, after Jesus had kept the Passover according to the details commanded by God and with the pure heart God desired, Jesus *really* kept the Passover. The Passover meal was more than a simple remembrance of God’s deliverance of his people from Egypt through the blood of a lamb. It foreshadowed God’s deliverance of his people from sin through the promised Messiah, who would sacrifice himself to save us from our sins.

So it was that after Jesus and his disciples ate a Passover lamb, Jesus became the Passover Lamb. The expression *“You are what you eat”* has never been more true. Recall how John the Baptist had years before identified Jesus as **“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** ^{ESV}(John 1:29).

Understand that to serve as *the* Passover Lamb, Jesus also had to be “without blemish or defect.” Had he failed to keep the Law, even in what you and I might consider the most insignificant way, his sacrifice would have been inadequate. Consider then the irony in the fact that it was, in part, only because Jesus first ate a sacrificial lamb that he could serve as *the* Sacrificial Lamb of God.

Jesus did not fail. An absolutely sinless man went to the cross where, like the Passover lamb, he would die instead of sinful people. There he paid for every time that you and I have failed and refused to keep a part of God’s commandments. Because he did it perfectly, and

only because he did it perfectly, he there paid in full for the sins of the world. He there paid for *your* sins. The result is that God has issued an immutable, unalterable, indisputable decree: *“You are not guilty of the sins you have committed. My Son has been punished for them in your place.”*

What then are you and I to do with such a gift? First of all, accept it as the pure, undeserved gift that it is and treasure it above all else. What we could not, would not do, Jesus has done for us. What we could never earn has been given to us as a gift. Our sins are forgiven only because Jesus paid for them as our substitute. Second, thank him. How? Obviously not by disrespecting Jesus’ sacrifice by pointlessly trying to pay, through our own works, what Jesus has already paid in full. Rather we express our gratitude by obeying his commandments.

This is how and why the season of Lent is so valuable. It is that special opportunity not only to gather with fellow believers and to be reminded again of just what our Savior has done for us, it is that unique opportunity to reexamine our lives and conduct. Over time we tend to grow sloppy and complacent. We fall to temptation, and with each failure we grow a little more complacent, a little more accepting of what God has forbidden.

Thank him then this Lenten season in part by reassessing and reevaluating your thoughts and actions. Be honest with yourself. Something as simple as Jesus’ celebration of the Passover reminds us that we have no right or authority to regard any and every form of disobedience as anything less than the evil it truly is. We were not called to sit in judgment over God’s commandments; we were called to humble, faithful, consistent obedience. God’s will for our lives is obedience, but his ultimate goal is our eternal salvation. As Paul wrote to Timothy, ***This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.***^{ESV} (1 Timothy 2:3-4) Our Savior-God here reminds us of his love for us, even in his commandments. We are saved by God’s grace through faith alone in Jesus, and God knows that sin erodes saving faith. If left unattended, sin carries the terrible power to destroy saving faith. All sin. Every sin. That’s clearly not what our Heavenly Father wants for us. He wants our faith to be preserved and strengthened day by day

– because he wants us to spend all eternity with him in heaven. What an absolutely amazing truth.

In humble gratitude, let this then be our simple, humble prayer as we enter the season of Lent: *“Heavenly Father, create in us clean hearts, and help us in loving gratitude to identify and purge from our lives all that displeases you.”* Amen.

^{ESV} **Genesis 3:1-7** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" ² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

^{ESV} **Romans 5:12-19** Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned-- ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ ¶ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ ¶ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous.

^{ESV} **Matthew 26:17-19** Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.



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The First Sunday in Lent – February 26, 2023

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 148 (Stanzas 1-6) (Red Hymnal)

"Lord Jesus Christ, My Life, My Light"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The Old Testament Lesson: (Genesis 3:1-7) As we enter the Lenten season it is fitting that we examine the cause for the suffering of our Lord Jesus. The cause was sin, brought into the world through Adam and Eve and passed from them to all mankind. Yet blame is not limited to Adam and Eve. Our sin too had to be carried by Jesus. Lent is therefore a time to reflect on just what Jesus has done not just for others, but for me.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 40) (Brown Hymnal)

The New Testament Lesson: (Romans 5:12-19) Sin was and is the cause for all trouble in this world. It was the reason Christ had to be born, suffer, and die. Yet we make a mistake if we regard sin as someone else's problem. It was *our* sin that separated us from our God. In Adam *we all* sinned, yet in Christ Jesus *we all* have been given Life. Jesus won our battle for us by satisfying the demands of the Law in our place.

The Confession of Faith -

The Nicene Creed – (Projected on screens)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 723 (Brown Hymnal)

"What Wondrous Love Is This"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 26:17-19 (Printed on the back page)

"I Will Keep the Passover"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Prayers

The Pre-Communion Hymn – 145 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Refuge of the Weary"

The Preparation for Holy Communion (Brown Hymnal page 17)

The Distribution

The Nunc Dimittis and Thanksgiving (Brown Hymnal page 20)

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 47 (Red Hymnal)

"Savior, Again to Thy Dear Name We Raise"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors worshipping with us this morning and invite you to join us each Sunday at this time. We are glad you are here! **To our Visitors seeking Holy Communion** – In obedience to God's Word, we practice "Close Communion." This practice stresses both our concern for others, not wanting anyone to receive the sacrament to their harm (1 Cor. 11:27-30) and the importance of unity in confession and faith (1 Cor. 10:16-17). For this reason we ask that anyone who has not established this unity through membership in a CLC congregation please meet with the pastor to discuss this Scriptural doctrine before communing. This is a practice that we follow out of love and concern for you, and out of obedience to God's Word, not in judgment of anyone's Christian faith.

Attendance – Sunday (30) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service w/Holy Communion
	-11:15 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Wednesday	-5:45 p.m.	– Confirmation Class
	-7:00 p.m.	– Midweek Lenten Service
Next Sunday	-9:00 a.m.	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – Pastor Neal Radichel is considering the call to Messiah of Eau Claire. Pastor Tom Naumann is considering the calls to Redemption of Lynnwood and Ascension of Tacoma.

Lenten Season – This morning we conduct our rescheduled Ash Wednesday commemoration, which was postponed due to weather. Regular midweek services resume this Wednesday. Please make plans now to attend as many of these special services as possible. **Confirmation students and parents** please note the 5:45pm start time through Easter.

Easter Flower Order – It is time for our annual Easter Flower order. Please consult the sheet on the mailbox table or see Sandy Roehl for more information. Please also note that updated member contact sheets are available on the mailbox table.

Called Home – LaVonne Johnson, mother of Mick Johnson, was called home yesterday evening. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."