

March 24, 2016

Jesus!

Jesus Memorialized!

Matthew 27:17-30

Opening words: There are 52 weeks every year. Each one is important and not a single one should be wasted. What have you done this week? Have you ever stopped to consider how many weeks have occurred in the history of the world? However, there is one week that changed our world forever: Holy Week! On the Christian calendar Holy Week is the last week of Lent, beginning on Palm Sunday and ending at dawn on Easter. It is the week the church remembers the final days of Jesus's earthly ministry. This is Holy Thursday or Maundy Thursday. It is the day we remember how Jesus transformed the traditional Hebrew Seder Feast into Christian Communion. Let me call this message *Jesus Memorialized!*

Matthew 27:17-30 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?"

¹⁸ He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" ¹⁹ So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.

²⁰ When evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve. ²¹ And while they were eating, he said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me."

²² They were very sad and began to say to him one after the other, "Surely you don't mean me, Lord?"

²³ Jesus replied, "The one who has dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. ²⁴ The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born."

²⁵ Then Judas, the one who would betray him, said, "Surely you don't mean me, Rabbi?"

Jesus answered, "You have said so."

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."

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I 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."

³⁰ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

The Taj Mahal in Agra, India is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The building itself is truly amazing. It is an octagonal building with walls measuring 130 feet long by 70' high and it is surmounted by a dome, adding an additional 120' in height.

It is constructed entirely out of white marble, which is reflected by a huge pool. The interior design is magnificent, containing 12 types of inlaid stones, and mosaics of great beauty. The Taj Mahal was built in the 1600's by the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan. He built it as a memorial for his wife, Mumtaz Mahal. Many consider the Taj Mahal the greatest memorial in the world today. They are wrong. The greatest memorial is the bread and juice of Communion. If you agree with that statement say, "**Amen!**" Let me continue by asking you a question.

How is your memory? It is impossible to remember everything. How many things have you forgotten recently? When was the last time you forgot a loved one's birthday? When was the last time you lost your keys? When was the last time you forgot to return a phone call? Is there some secondary person in your life you don't call by name because you forgot their name? Have you ever forgotten to get milk at the store or to pick up a youngster from school? Have you ever forgotten where you parked at the mall or the grocery store? You can admit it. We have all forgotten something. Sometimes, it doesn't matter. For example, I can never remember Ronald Reagan's first wife. Sometimes, it does matter. Don't forget to file your taxes by April 15. This evening we remember an event that you must never forget.

It is imperative that you remember Jesus' last Seder. It would be his last meal before his appointment with the cross. For it is at that meal Jesus gave us a memorial for the ages. You know the scene. It has been reenacted in movies and inspired some of the greatest pieces of art. That makes it easy to imagine this evening's Gospel lesson. According to the text, the disciples are wondering about the Passover meal. This is not shocking. It was the reason they came to Jerusalem. They had been observing the Passover meal annually since childhood. Jesus sends two of the disciples ahead to make the arrangements. When Jesus arrives, everything is ready in that upper room. The menu for the meal was traditional. Each course represented something from the story of the exile. Every word was scripted. No one dared change a single word, but Jesus did change the words. Instead of just remembering the past, Jesus began to talk about the future. He began to speak of the period of time when he would be separated from his disciples. We know the words that he uttered because we are his contemporary disciples. The bread represents his body. The wine represents his blood. He gave us those elements for one reason. He didn't want to be forgotten. Remembering Jesus is extremely important.

On this Maundy Thursday I want to tell you why Jesus wanted to be remembered. I want to tell you why Jesus was memorialized. I don't want to sound trite, but Jesus' memorial is like all memorials. All memorials hope to do three things. Let me give them to you now. First, we remember **past events**. Not every day is the same. Some days are more important. Second, we remember **past lessons**. It is important that we learn from history. That way we can eliminate mistakes. Third and finally, we remember **past values**. In other words, past events define us and shape our core values. So if you are ready to begin, say, "**Amen!**"

Past Events

Did you know that in the state of Ohio there are 1420 historical markers? Each one has been placed by the Ohio Historical Society. I think my father read every one. It used to drive me crazy when I was young. Now I read as many as I can. Time changes things. Did you know there are 16 historical markers within the zip code of this church? Maybe you have seen them? Has anyone read the marker at the Mahoning Dispatch building or the one at the Pioneer Pavilion? Each one exists for the same reason. They don't want you to forget the past.

The disciples observed that annual Seder for the same reason. It was a meal designed to remember the past. It was a meal designed to teach the youngest about their past. Each participant heard the story again. Their ancestors were held in bondage in Egypt. They had no hope of liberation, so God sent them a leader. His name was Moses. He spoke on behalf of God to the Pharaoh and announced a series of plagues. Each one was miserable. There were the plagues of blood, frogs, gnats, flies, livestock, boils, hail, locust and darkness. However, the last plague was the worst, the plague on the first born. It was that plague that changed the heart of Pharaoh. He released the Hebrews. We remember because there are events that should not be forgotten. It is not just true of them. It is true of us. We should never forget the events of that upper room. If you find some truth there, say, "**Amen!**" We remember because past events are important. We remember because past events hold lessons.

Past Lessons

Someone asked me recently, "What is the worst thing about traveling?" I think he wanted to hear about bad food and lumpy beds. Instead, I told him about airport security. If you have traveled in the past fifteen years, you know it is true. It is part of the day. You take off your shoes. You take off your belt. You empty your pockets. You show your boarding pass and passport. You step into the machine to get x-rayed and you are patted down by someone who needs a breath mint. It is annoying, but I never complain. Why? You know the answer. We have learned from the past. September 11 changed our world. Someone once said, "*Growing up is learning from yesterday's mistakes.*" How many times have you said, "I will never do that again!" We remember so we don't make the same mistakes again. If you find some truth there, then say, "**Amen!**" We remember because those past events are important. We remember those past events because those past events hold lessons. However, they also remind us of our core values.

Past Values

The Seder is designed to help people remember the past. However, the Seder is designed to do more. It is an annual reminder to the Jews that their relationship with God is unique. They call themselves "God's Chosen People." It is a statement that is hard to argue with when you remember the events in the wilderness. Pharaoh had changed his mind, and sent his army to retrieve the slaves. Moses had led the people to the shore of the Red Sea. Things looked bad. The people could not go back because of

the army. The people could not go forward because of the water. They were trapped and they had no hope. However, they were God's chosen people, so God divided the waters for them. The water was held back for the Hebrews but not the Egyptians. It is not just a story of a miracle; it is a reminder that they are special. When they remember it, they remember their core values. When we partake of the body and the blood of Christ, you are not just remembering some past event. You are remembering our core values. You have a unique relationship with God. You are a disciple of Jesus Christ! And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"

It is amazing how fast things change. I took Kathryn and our Russian visitors to the airport on Monday afternoon. My house went from mayhem to tranquility. One of the best parts of that visit for me was Kolya. He is sixteen years old and his English is good. Every night, we would stay up late and watch television and talk. We did that last Wednesday night. He came to the dinner last Wednesday night and he stayed for Communion. As we sat there talking, he asked, "Russ, what is this 'communion'?" Remember, he is being raised in a society with a communist hangover. I told him about Jesus. I told him that Jesus was the son of God, God incarnate. I told him he never committed a single sin. I told him Jesus died for the sins of the world. I told him Jesus has given us the opportunity to go to heaven. Salvation is a gift. I told him Communion is a memorial. It reminds us of Jesus. The bread is his body. The juice is his blood. He responded by saying, "Wow! This Jesus was a good man." I said, "Kolya, you are wrong. Jesus wasn't just a good man. Jesus was the best man ever." May we never forget him.

Will you pray with me?