

The Glory of Jesus' Suffering, Death, and Resurrection

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Lesson One

Jesus and His Disciples in the Upper Room

Here is my servant . . . my chosen one in whom I delight. (Isaiah 42:1)

1. The disciples illustrate our need for a Servant-Lord
2. See the beauty of the Lord who serves

Worship

Read responsively Isaiah 42:1-4. (The words of God the Father about his incarnate Son)

A: Here is my servant, whom I uphold,

B: My chosen one in whom I delight;

A: I will put my Spirit on him

B: And he will bring justice to the nations.

A: He will not shout or cry out,

B: Or raise his voice in the streets.

A: A bruised reed he will not break,

B: And a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.

A: In faithfulness he will bring forth justice;

B: He will not falter or be discouraged

A: Till he establishes justice on earth.

B: In his law the islands will put their hope.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, how often our spiritual lives resemble bruised reeds or smoldering wicks. As we study your suffering, death, and resurrection, bind us up strongly in your grace and fan our faith into flame. Lead us to delight in your merciful service to miserable sinners so that at all times we put our hope in your Word. Amen.

Introduction

Scripture references:

Matthew 26:1-5,14-35

Mark 14:1,2,10-31

Luke 22:1-38

John 13

As Moses drew near the burning bush on Mount Sinai, the voice of God proclaimed to him: "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). Moses was in the presence of the awesome Lord himself, who was about to fulfill his promise and rescue the people from their bondage in Egypt. It would be fitting if we would heed the same words as we approach what is before us in these eight lessons on the

suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The place where we are standing is also “holy ground.” All of history points to these events—the Lord acting to fulfill his promise to rescue mankind from the bonds of sin.

Background

On Thursday afternoon of what we now call Holy Week, Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to prepare the Passover meal. For 14 centuries God’s Old Testament people had celebrated the Passover with great joy and expectation. They had celebrated this feast ever since that night in Egypt when the blood of unblemished lambs had rescued them from the angel of death, who had struck the firstborn of the Egyptians.

But the Passover did more than remind the people of Israel of the past. The Passover was a powerful picture of the Messiah, who came to rescue not only the Israelites but all people from the bondage of their sins and the plague of eternal death.

Finally, understand Jesus’ eagerness to eat this Passover meal. Jesus knew it would be the last he would eat with his beloved disciples. He knew that in less than 24 hours his body would lie still and cold in Joseph’s tomb. With eager anticipation, he gathered his disciples about him, anxious to institute a new meal in which he would give them his body and blood.

Truly, in this upper room, the disciples would receive a powerful picture of the Lord, who came to serve.

The disciples illustrate our need for a Servant-Lord

In betrayal

Jesus had once told his disciples: “There is nothing . . . hidden that will not be made known” (Matthew 10:26). What Judas did in secret—agreeing to betray his Lord—now is made known to Jesus’ disciples.

Read Matthew 26:1-5,14-16,20-25.

1. How do you see the hand of God the Father guiding the details of his plan of salvation? Consider the plans of the Jewish leaders and their conspiracy with Judas.
2. How can we explain Judas’ willingness to betray Jesus? (See John 12:4-6.)
3. The disciples were distressed when Jesus announced that one of them would betray him. What good attitude did the disciples show when they all asked, “Surely not I, Lord?”

4. What impression does Scripture wish to make on our hearts by holding before us the sad story of Judas' betrayal of Jesus? (See 1 Corinthians 10:11,12.)

In denial and desertion

Speaking through the prophet Isaiah seven hundred years before Jesus' incarnation, the Savior proclaimed, "He saw that there was no one, he was appalled that there was no one to intervene; so his own arm worked salvation for him" (Isaiah 59:16). According to God's plan, Jesus would face his hour of greatest suffering utterly alone. Speaking to his disciples, he now explains how that would happen.

Read Matthew 26:31-35.

1. As Jesus shared with his disciples the sobering news that soon they would flee from him, he also shared with them the hope of his resurrection. Why do you think the promise of the resurrection, which Jesus so often shared with his disciples, seemed to have so little effect on them?
2. What is the "fatal flaw" in Peter's objections to Jesus' warnings?
3. When are we most vulnerable to Satan's temptations?
4. List some modern-day examples of situations in which we, in ways all too similar to Peter and Judas, are tempted to betray and deny our Lord.

By wanting to be the master, not the servant, of all

As at any banquet, there were positions of honor at the Passover meal. As "father" of this household, Jesus would occupy the head position at the table. The two places closest to Jesus, at his right and left, were the positions of greatest honor. The positions of least honor would be those furthest from Jesus. Seeming favoritism may have sparked the old argument about who of them was the greatest.

Read Luke 22:24-26a.

1. What inborn sinful tendency was behind this dispute?

2. Give examples from everyday life (home, work, school, church) that show that this inborn tendency troubles us just as it did the first disciples.

What a sight were the apostles! One would betray Jesus, one would deny Jesus, and all the rest would flee from him. All of them were too proud to take the lowest place at the meal. What powerful evidence that they needed—and we need—our Servant-Lord!

See the beauty of the Lord who serves

The Lord of heaven makes himself the lowest of servants

Jewish custom dictated that everyone come to celebrate the Passover meal freshly bathed and wearing his or her finest clothing. However, walking on dusty roads in open sandals left the feet covered with dust. It was the task of the lowest servant to wash the feet of the family members as they arrived. In all likelihood this poor family (the disciples and Jesus) had no servants to do this work. Someone among them would have to do the work of the lowest servant. Who would it be?

Read John 13:1-17.

1. Describe the expressions on the disciples' faces as Jesus began to wash their feet.
2. How does Peter overreact twice?
3. What does Jesus teach his disciples of all time by washing the disciples' feet? (Note verses 12-17.)

The Servant-Lord offers us his meal

Under the old covenant, the height of celebration of God's goodness was a festive meal in which the participants remembered God's mercy in the past and rejoiced in his promises to come. So also in the new covenant, our Servant-Lord offers us a joyous meal in which we celebrate his mercy, receive his goodness, and anticipate the joy that will be ours forever.

Read Matthew 26:26-29.

1. Why did Jesus pick the Passover celebration as the time to begin his Supper?

2. Together with the bread and wine, Jesus tells those who receive this meal that they are receiving his actual body and blood, given and shed on the cross of Calvary. While the words he speaks are plain and simple, few words of Scripture have caused greater debate and disagreement in the visible church. We simply maintain that Jesus meant what he said: “This is my body. . . . This is my blood.” Although Jesus’ words are clear enough by themselves, how does 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 help assure us that we in the Lutheran church are not misunderstanding what Jesus is saying here?

3. The greatest blessing of the Lord’s Supper is the forgiveness of sins. Why does Jesus give us this gift in the Lord’s Supper when we already have his Word, which tells us we are forgiven?

4. See Matthew 26:29. What additional gift does our great Servant give us whenever we eat and drink at this meal?

What an amazing truth it is that the Lord of heaven and earth came to be our Servant! Every weakness and need we have as his disciples are met by his serving mercy and grace.

During the week

Since we cannot focus on everything that happened in the upper room, read through all the Scripture references listed in the introduction. Try to find at least two more examples of how Jesus served us.

To prepare for the next lesson, read through John 14–17. This section usually receives little attention in the midst of all the action of Holy Week.