

Let Go for Lent

Week 4 - Covenant

If you've been following the suggested readings of the Easter story - from one gospel each week - I hope this slow read has been, in itself, beneficial.

Though 'marinate' is a cooking term, I think it's a good metaphor: we're allowing ourselves to 'stand' in the story in order to imbibe more of its flavour!

Having read the accounts from Matthew, Mark, and Luke, I wonder, have there been any aspects to the story that have impacted you afresh or even possibly, for the first time?

An added 'flavour' for me came from a reflection upon a detail recorded by Matthew and Mark - that the Last Supper concluded with a hymn!

'When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives' (Matt 21:1; Mark 14:26)

It was customary for the Passover to conclude with the Great Hallel (Psalms 113-118). And what did they sing in the Hallel? I've noted here just a few verses:

'From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets the name of the Lord is to be praised'-113:3

'I love the Lord for he heard my voice; I will call on him as long as I live' - 116:1,2

'The Lord is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?' -118:6

'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this and it is marvellous in our eyes' -118:22,23

How does it end? *'Give thanks to the Lord for he is good; his love endures forever'*.-118:29

These few verses (as a sample) present an astonishing picture to me of Jesus, walking to Gethsemane with a peace and serenity in the midst of the most terrible turmoil!

It would be good to let others know about any 'flavours' that might have come alive for you out of your reflective reading (a friend, spouse, or in your Life Group?) – and you can share them with me as well!

The essence of covenant:

Christians are over-familiar with the words which Jesus used at the Passover - which would eclipse all Passovers. For there, Jesus instituted something new as he said, *'Take and eat; this is my body . . . Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins'*. (Matt 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; Luke 22:19,20)

Imagine the atmosphere as Jesus replaces the hallowed formula, 'This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the wilderness, with, *'This is . . .my body'*!

This bread was so soon to be broken on the cross. Jesus' followers are to feed on him, just as the Jews fed on the Passover lamb and the unleavened bread of the first Passover. And as the Jews came to Passover to make the rescue from Egypt real, so we need to come with reverence, gratitude, and expectancy to this feast to make Jesus as real – no, more real to us. For it speaks of our rescue: it is a present feeding; and it brings the promise of future table fellowship with Jesus in the Kingdom!

The OT knows of many covenants, binding God to humankind, and from the days of Noah they are all sealed in blood. It was recognized in Israel that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sins. (Hebrews 9:22) But the new covenant would not be sealed with the blood of animals but, as the letter to the Hebrews insists so strongly in its central chapters, with the blood of Jesus.

Jeremiah foresaw the new covenant this way, *'this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they will be my people'* (Jer31:33)

It's worth re-reading the section in Jeremiah 31, but in essence, Jeremiah foresaw 3 great blessings of the new covenant – brought to the world by the shed blood of Jesus:

Sins would be forgiven

Men and women could know the Lord personally, and

His will would be written on their hearts by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

Universal pardon, universal knowledge of God, universal availability of his Spirit: these were the marks of the new covenant!



Our God is a covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. And the core of the covenant is expressed in the words, **'I take you - - to be my people/We take you to be our God'**

When God says to you and to me, 'I take you', he does so, Exclusively, Excessively, and Eternally. And he calls us to respond in kind.

In the words, 'This is my body - - this is my blood', Jesus instituted at the Last Supper something to replace the Passover as 'an ordinance for ever', in his blood.

Read - Reflect – Respond:

This is the last in our series, as we come to the 4th Gospel's account of the Easter story.

As we noted in week 1, we could anticipate a degree of 'sameness' between Matthew, Mark, and Luke (the 'Synoptic' gospels) as we know they shared at least one common source. By contrast, there is much to notice that is different in John's account. The first might be the space given to Jesus' final words: words of comfort - the promise of 'Another Counsellor'-a picture of the disciples' relationship to Jesus (Vine and branches) – and prayers. Consequently, our final reading has 9 chapters! But we do have until Easter; plenty of time for a slow reflective read.

Week 4 (Fri April 5 – Thurs April 11), you're invited to read, **John Chapters 13-21**

Taking it slowly, you might choose to read the editor's portions within each chapter over the week, or you may prefer to read each account more than once.

Whatever approach you take, before you read:

Ask Holy Spirit to illuminate the scriptures for you, so that you'll have 'eyes to see and 'ears to hear'.

Then,

Be alert to words, phrases, verses that stand out to you, and stop a while and meditate there.

Consider if there is anything you need to ask the Lord, and ask, with expectancy. As he speaks,

Determine to act – write down what you've seen/heard – and act on anything you sense you must do.

May all the power and beauty of Jesus' sacrificial love be ever more real to you this Easter, and may you experience His risen presence impacting you again this Resurrection Sunday!

