

## **SERMON: “like me: the extent of grace.”**

Rev. Geoff Ross: Thursday, March 29, 2018, St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church

As we have heard through our series on grace, Jesus came to offer lost, discouraged, broken sinners like you/like me hope and salvation. We’ve learned that this was not because of anything we’ve done – or deserved – but that it was because of who He/God is and His love for us. We’ve also heard that Jesus’ purpose for being-with us – His purpose for coming down from heaven to be-with us, for becoming and living as one of us, and for dying for us – was to fulfill God’s promise to restore and redeem us before God. We have heard examples of how Jesus extended grace to Levi and his tax collector friends, to Nicodemus whose life would be changed, to Paul, the adulterous woman, the prodigal son, even to several Greek Jewish pilgrims – wretches like you/like me in need of salvation: but tonight we hear Jesus offer grace to the world, it is the night on which we observe the full extent of God’s grace.

While it would seem to be obvious the fact is we forget that Jesus was Jewish – raised/schooled/lived according to the Jewish faith/traditions. As such, Jesus would have celebrated the Passover – as would His disciples. On the night before His arrest/trial/crucifixion, Jesus met with His disciples and together, as they would have during their time together, to celebrate the Passover meal, with all its rituals and meaning. As Christians – followers of Jesus Christ – we inherited our faith from His/its Jewish origins, and nowhere is this more obvious/significant than in our Sacrament of Communion. Even though, as Paul argued that the “old”/Jewish ways of sacrificing animals was no longer necessary to take away sin – because this saving/atoning action was taken on by Jesus (Heb 10) – what we know as Communion echoes the ancient rituals/meaning/significance of in the Passover meal – the Seder.

Briefly, the Jewish Passover is a commemoration of their deliverance from bondage and slavery in Egypt – it is celebrated to remind the people of Israel how God’s grace blessed them with salvation/freedom from slavery/death, and a promised land. In the same way, the Christian Communion is a both a memorial of Jesus’ sacrifice and a reminder of the power of God’s grace to deliver/save us from slavery to sin/death. In both understandings – old and new – the meal is a symbol that represented the real thing: and that’s how Jesus used the Passover meal to represent His coming sacrifice. Taking on the symbolic sacrifice of the Passover, Jesus took onto himself the saving role of offering himself in our place for our salvation.

Seen from this side of the cross the early Church – and Christians since – have seen Jesus as the innocent “Lamb of God,” slaughtered for the blood that takes away our sins and death; Jesus’ body was striped from the whip, and pierced by the thorns and the sword as the matzoh – that is pierced and striped; Jesus’ crucifixion/beaten/broken body/death/burial/resurrection as the middle matzoh (the aifkoman), that is held aloft, broken, wrapped, hidden and later redeemed – likely held up when Jesus said the words; *“This is my body broken for you.”* (1 Corinthians 11:24) It was the third cup of promise

– *"I will redeem you ..."*, that Jesus used when he declared *"This is my blood poured out for you."* (1 Corinthians 11:25) And with the fourth cup that promises *"I will make you my people"* Jesus stated *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."* (Luke 22:20)

Tonight/Maundy Thursday is when we experience/celebrate the full extent of God's grace. It's the night on which Jesus claimed that He was the fulfillment of God's promise of redemption – that His coming/life/ministry and death reveals the full plan/purpose/extent of God's grace – a promise revealed in that God *"loved us and sent his Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins."* Friends, as we move toward the Table and then from this 'Upper Room' toward the darkness of the garden and the horror of Good Friday – as we gather around the Table and hear Jesus claim for us the hope and promise of a *"love so amazing, so divine,"* – a grace so amazing *"that is saved a wretch like me!"* – let the full extent of God's grace melt your heart. It is through grace that God moved toward you/me by sending His Son to be-with us. It is by grace that He unilaterally moved toward us/you/me to take our place in order to offer us salvation by dying for you/me. Christ came to you/me: come to Christ – taste and see that God is good; come to Christ – and experience the extent of grace. Amen.