Sermon Mid-Week Lenten Service 9/3/22

The Passion History – The Upper Room

For three or so years Jesus has been spending time with his disciples. Showing them through words and actions both his character and his purpose. Now he has less than 24 hours to live and he knows it. He is having his last meal with them. Not an ordinary meal but a Passover celebration. A celebration full of meaning and rich history that reminds his disciples of God’s gracious acts redeeming the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

Last words are important. When someone you love dies often it is the last things that they said that stick in your mind. Jesus knows that the words he speaks on his last night at this final meal will stick in his disciples’ minds. As usual, Jesus speaks with purpose, and he speaks carefully. As usual, Jesus wants to impart words that will enable his disciples to live life to the full.

Not every word Jesus spoke is recorded but we do have the most important ones recorded, including a specific commandment. The one key commandment that Jesus wants his disciples to live by. The commandment that will make them stand out as his disciples and draw others to faith in him. What is that commandment? It is a commandment they know well from the Old Testament, but Jesus has changed something.

The commandment they knew went like this, ‘Love your neighbour as yourself’ (Lev 19:18). The commandment Jesus gave is, *“Love one another.  As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”* Jesus has increased the stakes. The old commandment asks us to look at how we love ourselves and how we care about ourselves in thought word and deed and then do the same for our neighbour. The new commandment asks us to look at Jesus and how he loves us and then do the same for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

All the time that the disciples have been following Jesus they have experienced his love for them in everything he has said and done. In Jesus, they have experienced a love like they have never known before and now he expects them to love each other the same way. What a massive ask. We all know it is virtually impossible to love other people as we love ourselves, but to love them like Jesus loves us, now that is love at a whole other level. To be patient like Jesus, to be kind like Jesus, to forgive like Jesus, to sacrifice for others to the point of death like Jesus.

Jesus knows what he is asking is hard. He knows his disciples need help. Not only his disciples back then but his disciples down through the ages, they all need help, we all need help. We need to have someone or something that can give us the strength we need to love like Jesus. Jesus knows this and leaves his disciples a gift. Jesus institutes a new meal that would give his disciples of all time the strength they need.

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat, this is my body given for you; do this in remem­brance of me.”*

*Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you.  This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”*

In a few hours, Jesus would be arrested and crucified. Yes, he would be resurrected, and he would spend time some with them again but not long afterward he would go to the Father. Yet in this new meal, he had instituted he had given them a way to touch him again and again. Not only them but all disciples down through the ages including us.

Through this meal Jesus has given us a way of holding him and receiving from him personally his body and blood. With his body and blood, we also now receive again and again personally his forgiveness. With his body and blood, we receive again and again assurance and strengthening of faith. With his body and blood, we are continually changed more and more into his likeness. More and more into people who love like Jesus loves.

**Amen**