



## Sermon by Rev Ross Pearce Highfield Road Uniting Church Holy Thursday, March 24, 2016

### Luke 22: 14-23

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Jesus got a reputation with some as a glutton and a drunkard because of his willingness to share a meal with anyone, even those who have a low reputation. Paul and Peter had a great tussle over sharing a meal between Jews and Greeks and Paul criticised the people at Corinth for their inhospitable behaviour when they met for the fellowship meal. The Christian church can be said to be born around a table; and despite coming from a faith that also had a meal at the centre of its religious life, the Christian experience is that the table is a place of bonding and sharing, of breaking down barriers and building understanding. While it could be seen that the last Supper was an exclusive event – Jesus invites twelve Jewish men into that upper room to celebrate Jewish festival – the disciples saw the significance and reflected on all the other meals that Jesus shared, and made table fellowship the centre of the expression of their faith.

Jesus eagerly celebrates this meal, which Luke makes clear is a Passover meal, but reimagines some of the symbols of the celebration to be symbols of a new covenant. While Luke doesn't use the word, the very similar account in Paul's letter to the Corinthians says the cup is a covenant in blood. The blood is not shed there and then as it was in the original Passover in Egypt, it is shed on the cross at the hands of the mob and the Romans and the priests and leaders. I don't think the disciples thought that through, I think they may have been taken with other, more immediate symbols. Jesus had no problem sharing the meal, in all its symbolism, with Judas. If Judas is welcome, how can we exclude any others? Jesus had no problem reinterpreting the symbols of the meal away from Judaism. If he wasn't bound by the old symbols and ways, how can we cling to exclusivism? It is telling that Peter's vision in Acts, about being open to Cornelius and other Romans, comes in the form of animals and eating. The table and meals are central to the faith.

Where the Jewish practice, build on their central meal as one of escape from foreign domination, made the table exclusive and forbade eating with other races or national groups, the church followed Jesus example and welcomed all to the table. Where the Greek and Roman practice, built on their culture and economy, made the table exclusive to class and status, the church followed Jesus practice and welcomed all, slave, worker, master and leader to the table. It's no wonder that Paul was so annoyed with the people at Corinth, rich people getting drunk and leaving the poor with no food at what was

supposed to be a community, fellowship meal is a complete contradiction of the faith of table fellowship. At its simplest, Jesus is telling the disciples in the Last Supper, “Share food with each other as a remembrance of me, the one who shared table with everyone”.

The many points of reference and remembrance of this night – foot washing, the new commandment, Gethsemane, the betrayal – all coalesce around this central rite of the Christian church. Jesus is both servant and host, his lesson on love is to be lived out in the open welcome to the table and high cost of salvation, grieved over at Gethsemane, is the blood of the new covenant. As we come to share in the rite tonight, and I hope the revised format opens new meanings and understandings for you, reflect on the centrality of this simple rite to our faith. Scraps that become a feast, symbols that feed the spirit and sharing that demonstrates the open welcome of God in Jesus Christ.