

June 2, 2019

## Lesson 1: Jesus Institutes the New Covenant

Scripture: Mark 14: 12-31; Hebrews 8

### **Context:**

The summer of 2019 moves us to reexamine the word “covenant.” Throughout both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, we read of how God has formed a covenant with humanity. Each week we will dive a little deeper into how that plays out in Jesus’s ministry as well as other stories in the Bible.

The scripture readings for this morning come from the Gospel of Mark and contain what we know as the words of institution. Jesus has gathered with his disciples on his last night on earth at Passover. In the midst of the meal, Jesus reveals that one of the twelve will betray him. Yet that same person will eat from that bowl and drink from the same cup. Not even the betrayer will be left out.

Of course we come to know the betrayer as Judas. For years, scholars have struggled with providence and how evil occurred in this case. A closer look though teaches that God plans for Jesus to be betrayed by one of the twelve, but it does not state explicitly that it was to be Judas forced by God to do so.<sup>1</sup> Judas makes the choice to betray Jesus; no one forces him to do so. However, even in his betrayal, Judas’s act is like that of Joseph’s brothers in Genesis, an evil act becomes a means for good.<sup>2</sup> Even in the midst of it, Jesus includes Judas as part of the meal.

Jesus moves into the words of the institution in which he gives a new covenant at the Passover meal. The bread becomes his body. The cup becomes his blood of the new covenant. At this time, the communion is not institutionalized and instead focuses on a oneness with Jesus Christ based on inward appropriation of his death for us and oneness with each other that unites all who seek to follow Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Jesus is giving a new way by which to live out his teachings and is helping give the disciples a picture by how they are to see their lives.

The Hebrews text that accompanies the scripture passage explains in more detail how Jesus’s words and actions bring a new covenant. The words of institution will be addressed by the lives that people lead and will be in accordance with the teachings of Jesus. Their hearts and minds will be what guide them in how they live. While the book of Hebrews does not explicitly focus on the details of Jesus’s last night, it does reiterate the themes from Jesus’s ministry and reflects the theology present in the early church. Jesus was the embodiment of a new covenant to initiate with all people.

### **Application**

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<sup>1</sup> Lamar Williamson Jr., “Mark,” *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (John Knox Press; Louisville, KY, 1983), 252.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 253.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

Some of the most beautiful verses in all of scripture come from the words of institution. Jesus, in giving of himself, was giving one of the greatest gifts to humanity. As he gave of himself, he asks that his disciples remember him in how they lead their lives and that they participate in this new covenant that he makes with them, even the one who will betray him.

Much has been made over the words of institution and what we know as Holy Communion in the United Methodist Church. For some denominations, you cannot receive this means of grace unless you meet or follow certain criteria. I have no problem in respecting this aspect as every denomination has their understanding of scripture and tradition.

However, I do love in the United Methodist Church that we focus on how this means of grace is a part of the covenant that God opens to all people. Whenever we eat the bread and drink the juice, we are continuing to remember Jesus and how the Spirit dwells and moves in us. And ALL people are invited to receive this gift. Jesus invites them to receive of his blood and body and makes them his own.

In covenant, we receive a gift in which Jesus invites us to a relationship. Even though he continues to upkeep his part of the covenant, we break it time and time again. And yet as Hebrews reminds us, Jesus is lenient towards our actions and remembers our sins no more. It does not mean that we will stop sinning instantaneously or that sometimes we will take the wrong course. It does mean that Jesus will never give up on us.

Better yet, Jesus invites us to embody our part of the covenant and to place his laws in our hearts and minds. They are not the laws that make us morally superior to others, but are the laws that allow us to grow. They are the laws of love, forgiveness, peace with neighbor, and kindness. He demonstrated them at the last Supper and gave his disciples a new identity.

How do you receive Holy Communion; do you come forward to receive with your palms at this gift given or a hand outstretched to snatch it up? How do you understand covenant and what it means for your life? What do you do to embody the love and forgiveness that Jesus embodied for his disciples and us?

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