

“When Is the Best Time to Come to This Table?”

Mark 14:12-26

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When is the best time to come to this table? The table I am referring to is the communion table at the front of our altar. In a few moments, the deacons will come to pass the trays and cups as we commemorate the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples in the Upper Room.

The title of this sermon was born out of my study of the scripture for today. I was struck by the lead Jesus took to prepare a place for the disciples and him to eat the Passover meal.

When the disciples asked Jesus where they should go to prepare the Passover meal, they probably expected to engage him in a conversation about their limited options due to the vast numbers of people who had arrived in Jerusalem to observe Passover. I wonder if they were surprised when Jesus gave them specific and detailed instructions concerning where they were to go and what they were to do. I suspect they were.

Quickly, it became obvious to them that Jesus had made the necessary arrangements. All they needed to do was carry out his orders.

It also had to dawn on them that this time together was important to Jesus, important enough for him to work out all the arrangements ahead of time. This was something Jesus wanted to do, and he made sure it would happen, especially given the high demand in this crowded city for places people could gather.

When the time was right, Jesus made these arrangements and told the disciples to follow his plan. They did, and because they did, Jesus' followers have relived a portion of that night's events for two thousand years.

Timing is important, isn't it? It always has been, for Jesus, his disciples and us.

That Thursday night, timing was especially important. Later that evening, Jesus would be arrested and the next day he would die.

His heart was heavy. His spirit was restless. His emotions were raging.

There were some final things he needed to say and do with his disciples, and now was the time. “Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him.” (Mark 14:13)

When is the best time to come to this table? Generally, speaking, anytime is a good time to gather around this sacred table. I am confident Jesus always welcomes us to this table much like we would welcome people to our kitchen table and share what we have prepared.

Specifically speaking, we need to come to this table when, like Jesus, our heart is heavy, our spirit is restless and our emotions are raging.

And when we come to this table, we need to do what Jesus did. We need to talk to God about what is in our heart and on our mind.

This is what Jesus did. In addition to talking to his disciples and washing their feet, Jesus prayed.

About what did he pray? In John 17, we are told Jesus began by praying for himself, asking God for the courage and strength he needed to be faithful so he would truly reflect the heart and nature of God under the most difficult circumstances.

Then he prayed for his disciples, asking God to protect them and to lead and guide them after he was gone. He prayed God would grant them the same wisdom, strength and courage God had given him so they would also be faithful and continue the work he had begun.

Jesus included us in his prayers that solemn night. Everything he asked God to do for the disciples around that table, he asked for each one of us.

Finally, Jesus thanked God for God's goodness and faithfulness. All Jesus had needed, God had provided, including the disciples with whom he shared his grandest hopes and loftiest dreams.

When is the best time to come to this table?

Come when you are facing challenges bigger than you are, and you need wisdom, guidance, courage and strength.

Come when you are burdened for others, and you want to ask God to help them along their journey.

Come when you are overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness and faithfulness of God, and you need to express it with a sincerely humble heart.

Jesus knew how important that Thursday night was for him and the disciples. He left no detail to chance by pre-arranging everything. What would happen around that table that evening was too important to miss because there would never be another time to gather with his disciples on this side of heaven.

I hope all of us also know how important it is that we take advantage of this time around this table this morning.