

Sermon Text for February 25, 2024

At Black Rock PSA Retreat

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Psalm 117, Matthew 26:26-30

“Jesus is among us”

Welcome to worship at Black Rock. We have shared a lot over these few days that we have spent together. I pray that it will be an experience that we will be able to say: Remember when we went to Black Rock as a church on a retreat, yeah, that was significant, that was important, my life with Jesus was changed forever. That’s the goal, that through this emphasis on prayer, Scripture and action we will have a relationship with Jesus that will change us from what we were to who we are now, followers of Jesus.

The intimacy of all that we have done together, eaten 5 meals together, shared smores, studied about and taken to heart a what it means to be a disciple. Just the amount of time that we have spent together is unique for a church family, and I hope that it has brought us closer together. We have had an opportunity to focus on PSA, that was the main reason to be here together, and this in turn would increase our love of Jesus. We have seen in Scripture Jesus who went away in order to be closer to His father, and that is in essence what we have done. The difference is that hopefully it has brought us not only closer to our Father but also to each other.

Now, as a final act together in this place, we gather to worship to praise the one that we love. As we see the table before us, we also gather to do that which his earliest disciples had done. The Scripture that we are about to read is called the Institution of the Lord’s Supper. Some people want to avoid the word institution because it implies something cold and routine, which surely can’t be of God, but instead we do see that Jesus commands us to do this in a way that does not bring shame and dishonor on him and his movement.

We know that the disciples shared all things in common. The recognition that Jesus is among us creates within us a desire to go deeper, but also makes us recognize that what we are doing is real, is serious, is pure joy, and it should not be taken lightly or as if it doesn’t matter. It matters. It leaves us today with the question of how are we going to live now that Jesus is among us? Let’s read in Matthew.

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Think of some of the highlights that we have experienced around the tables here at Black Rock. We have shared real life together around tables and around food. I have always said that

a lot can happen around a table, it tends to be Jesus' primary working ground, it is where he certainly does his best work.

A lot happens at a table with Jesus. If you're not careful you may find yourself doused with really nice expensive and fragrant and soothing lotion. You may find yourself with your shoes off and someone washing your feet, all of this at the table with Jesus. Or you may find Jesus sharing bread and wine with us and telling us to love one another as if it is a new commandment, or telling us to do this in remembrance of him forever. A lot can happen around a table. God is able to work around a table in a way that transforms and convicts and encourages and renews. All of this can happen around a table.

But this is not our table, as if we could lay any claim to it, as if we had any type of possession over it, or as if we could own it. It is almost like asking the question does he have the Holy Spirit? No, one has the Holy Spirit in the sense that not one of us possesses the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit possesses us, this table is God's and it claims us, we can't call it our table. It is His table, or Jesus' table. And as we already said, a lot can happen at Jesus' table.

One thing that happens at Jesus' table in this Scripture is the institution or the beginning of the Lord's Supper, the launching of the Lord's Supper. We see Jesus making commands to his disciples and to all of us: take, eat, and then again drink from it all of you. These are commands to us that we should take part in this Supper. If you wanted to know where this whole correlation between the bread being the body of Jesus and the wine or the juice being the blood of Jesus you can see it graphically in John 6:48-56.

Jesus says I am the bread of life. Then he goes further, he says in vs.54 those who eat my bread and drink my blood will have eternal life. He then says in vs.56 those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me and I in them. In I Corinthians 11 we read in vs.27 whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves.

We believe that in this meal, at Jesus' table, Jesus is among us. I know that we are at a retreat today, but it doesn't lower the bar on what we do around this table, because it is not our table. If it were our table we could do anything we want and it wouldn't matter. But because we believe in the real spiritual presence of Jesus in our midst, among us, then what we do here matters. I mean it always matters, but especially today, especially around a table, it matters. Anything less is mocking God.

So what are we doing around this table? Well, we find in vs.28 the reason why we gather around this table. He tells us clearly "this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for

many for the forgiveness of sins.” We gather around this table because Jesus forgives our sins. It is as simple as that. When Jesus shed his blood on the cross at Calvary, this blood of the covenant, produced the forgiveness of our sins. Why is that, because as Hebrews 9:22 states, that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. Even back in the Old Testament the Israelites needed blood to have their sins forgiven. Look at Exodus 24:8 where we see Moses sprinkling blood on the people so that their sins would be forgiven.

Jesus’ blood on the cross is that which forgave our sins once and for all. No more blood is needed because the blood of Jesus was sufficient. This table allows us to celebrate the fact that the body and the blood of Jesus which was broken and shed upon the cross, allows us to have our sins forgiven. Someone read Psalm 117, this is the right time for that!

Remember when Jesus was born? Look at Matthew 2:21, what did the angel say that his purpose was going to be? Why did he come into the world? Today the disciples and Jesus are celebrating a meal together, a meal that was the precursor to the Passover meal which allowed the Israelites to remember how God had delivered them out of Egypt. The most significant passage out of bondage to slavery, and now Jesus is giving them freedom from bondage to sin.

Jesus takes this very familiar Passover ritual and gives it a meaning no one had ever heard or experienced before. Take eat, this is my body, take drink, this is my blood. No one had ever said that before at a Passover meal, he gave a brand new meaning to the liberation of the people of God, but this time it is from slavery to sin.

This is our new reality, but it was also the new reality of the disciples and they were pretty unaware of the impact of this new reality. Jesus was among them, Jesus just instituted a new covenant in their midst which would be finalized by his death on the cross, but it didn’t really phase them. We read in vs.30 that they sang the hymn after they ate. We know that after the Passover meal the Israelites would sing the Hallel, those Psalms that were bunched together as clear praise psalms. So they would be Psalms 113-118, and 117, the one we read for our First Scripture was absolutely one of them.

After our communion together we sing our Halleluiah and I pray it prepares us for what comes next in our relationship with Jesus. After the meal the disciples had to leave that upper room in Jerusalem and they made their way across the valley, they probably didn’t have a place to sleep that evening so they made their way to what was called the garden of Gethsemane, it is right across from the city walls, you can see it, it is an olive grove and an ideal place for a nap, or for Jesus and his disciples, a late night sleep. We know Jesus wanted his disciples to stay up

with him, but that comes at a later time, they crossed the valley into the Garden of Gethsemane to clearly get some sleep, as they went, they sang the hymn. (Alleluia)

The deliverance that Jesus brought was not like the first exodus, escape from slavery from an external enemy, or Pharaoh, but redemption from the slavery to sin. And we know that even though we have this victory in Jesus, sin and death still exist and are real enemies. We have our battles before us, but Jesus is the one who gives us the victory.

I invite you to rest in the thought that our sins are forgiven in Jesus and our battles against flesh and blood, our battles against sin and death have been won by him already. And now, Jesus invites his disciples, that's us, to share in his fate, we too will die, we are called to share in his life of self-sacrifice for the poorest of the poor and for those he was friend, and we will share in his future because he has forgiven us of our sin and liberated us from that sin.

He tell sus to eat his body, drink his blood, carry the cross. That's our task, that's our duty, that's our joy when Jesus is among us. Amen.