



Week Five

The Last Supper: Risking the Loss of Friends

Open the Gathering with Prayer ~ Choose your own or read Psalm 116 responsively.

Gathering Prompt – *choose one invitation to start connecting with each other and the week's themes.*

Think of a special meal that you've shared with others. Tell the group about it: What was the occasion that brought you together? Who was there? What did you eat? What did you talk about? What made it so memorable?

Discuss how the Lord's Supper (The Eucharist/Holy Communion) is celebrated in the congregation(s) to which you belong: How often do you celebrate the Lord's Supper and why that number of times? How was the practice decided upon and when was the matter last considered? How are the elements of bread and wine distributed? Do you use wine or juice? Is the bread cut in small cubes or are they pieces of fresh bread? Who serves the elements? What do these details mean to you and your community? Are children welcome at the Table? What is participating in the sacrament of Holy Communion like for you? What do you come to the Lord's Table hoping to receive?

Overview – *a short summary of the chapter to remind participants of the main themes.*

Story ~ Jesus arranges a final supper with his followers on the first night of Passover. At the supper, Jesus gives thanks, breaks bread, distributes it and tells his followers that the bread is his body. Then he takes the cup and proclaims it is the covenant in his blood.

Religious Context ~ In the synoptic gospels, Jesus' last supper is a Passover meal (a seder). The seder was, and continues to be, a meal that Jewish people share with friends and family to retell the story of exodus from Egypt and celebrate freedom from slavery. During the Passover meal, Jesus added to the story of freedom that was so familiar by offering his own body and blood as a sacrifice. This addition did not take away from the covenant of freedom from physical enslavement. Rather, it added to God's original promise. Through Jesus, freedom from the enslavement of sin and despair is also made possible.

Social Context ~ Sacrifice in the sense of “spilling blood on an altar and then eating part of the sacrificial offering” was common practice in Jesus’ time (p. 120). When Jewish people in antiquity went to the temple, it was an opportunity to offer sacrifice and then eat the meat. For Passover during Jesus’ time, lambs were sacrificed at the temple and then friends and family would come together to eat the sacrificial meat. Levine explains that, in antiquity, eating and drinking were markers of identity; they were markers of a person’s belonging in a family, religion and community.

Scriptural Precedent ~ For Jewish people at the time of Jesus, and for many now who keep the dietary restrictions, eating blood is forbidden. The commandment from Genesis 9:3 “you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is its blood” was taken seriously, and the suggestion that those gathered at the last supper were to drink blood—Jesus’ blood at that—would have been extremely shocking. Levine explains that Jesus uses striking language to emphasize the great importance of what he is about to do. Jesus is the new paschal lamb who will save his people (John 1:29). He will give up his life for the sake of others.

Significance ~ For Jesus’ earliest followers, one aspect of eating his “body and blood” was that they became part of a new community—the family of Jesus. It is the same for those of us who are part of Jesus’ family today. One thing that we do as the family of Jesus is to remember his death by sharing Communion together. It is important to remember the profound significance of this sacrament. In participating in Communion, “We celebrate his victory over death and anticipate the joyous feast we shall have in his coming kingdom. We pledge allegiance to Christ as Lord, are fed as one church, receive these signs of his love, and are marked as his” (*Living Faith* 7.7.4).

Inquiry – *initial questions, thoughts, new ideas arising out of the reading.*

- Levine explores many different details of the Last Supper in this chapter. What details were new to you? How have these details added to your understanding of this part of the passion story? What questions does it raise for you about the ways that Holy Communion is celebrated?
- If you put yourself in the scene of the last supper, where do you see yourself? What do you think about what Jesus is saying? How are you feeling about what he is doing? If you had the opportunity to ask a question, what would it be?

Scripture – *re-read a key scripture passage together.*

Read **Luke 22:14–27** (NRSV) – the translation Levine uses in the book (p. 109–110).

AND

Read **John 13:1–16** (NRSV) – the translation Levine uses in the book (p. 110–111).

Discussion – *questions related to the scripture passage.*

Two of Jesus’ disciples stand out in the stories of the last supper: Peter and Judas.

- How do the gospels depict these characters (if at all)?
- What do the different details (or lack thereof) reveal about the gospel writer’s focus?
- What role do Peter and Judas play in helping us, the reader, understand Jesus’ sacrifice?
- What light do they shed on Christian community life?

The overarching theme of Entering the Passion of Jesus is risk – the risks taken by Jesus but also by his followers during the last week of his life. Considering what we have learned about the social, religious and political contexts of the last supper, what risks were those involved taking? How do the gospel writers alert us, as readers, to those risks?

Living Practices – *practices connected to the theme for participants to engage in between sessions.*

“During Lent you have the opportunity to think about your life alongside the life of Jesus, inviting inward transformation and then outward action” (Levine, p. 13).

Community ~ The term communion is derived from Latin *communio*, which means "sharing in common." Christians are called to build a life in common together. Coming to the Lord's Table and receiving the sacrament by eating and drinking of Christ's body and blood is a means of grace in which, among other things, Jesus invites us into deep relationship with him and each other. Many of the ways that we have for building relationships and encouraging each other to grow in faith have shifted with the pandemic. While our ability to meet in person and share the eucharist has become limited, our ability to connect with each other online, outdoors at a safe social distance and through phone calls, letters, care packages and other physically distant acts of service continues.

- Think of someone you have not seen in a while. How could you connect with them this week? Maybe it is a simple phone call or email, or perhaps (if it is safe to do so) you can deliver bread, wine or a meal to them.
- Call or video conference someone from your church community. Ask them to tell you about what part of Christian community life they enjoy the most. Listen attentively. Is there a way that you could participate in, embrace, or help to grow the part of community life they told you about?
- Read sections 7.5 and 7.7 of *Living Faith*, found on page 21: presbyterian.ca/wp-content/uploads/Living-Faith.pdf

Close the Gathering with Prayer ~ *Choose your own or say the Lord's prayer together.*

