

THE LAST SUPPER AND THE HOLY SUPPER

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Reading: Matthew 26:26-30

The night before Jesus was crucified by the people who hated Him, He and His disciples had a special meal. It was the time of year that they celebrated the Passover. They did this to remember how the Lord had saved the children of Israel from slavery long ago. The disciples thought this meal would be like any of the other Passover meals they had eaten. But something wonderful was going to happen. The Lord was going to start something new, something that is still an important part of our worship today.

On that Thursday night, Jesus knew what was going to happen to Him. He knew that He was going to be arrested before the next morning came. He knew that He was going to be put on trial and that He would be crucified. Yes, He knew that this was His last meal with His disciples before He would be put to death and placed in a sepulcher. He would not eat with the disciples again until after He had risen on Easter morning.

Jesus knew what was going to happen. And He knew that it was going to be the hardest thing He had ever done. But at that last supper, He was not worrying about Himself. Instead, He was very worried about His disciples. He wanted the people who loved Him and had followed Him to be ready for the next day. They would think that He was dead. They would wonder if everything that they had worked for had come to nothing. To get His disciples ready for what would happen, Jesus told them quite plainly that He would be put to death. But He promised that He would rise again on the third day.

The Lord knew that things would not be easy for the disciples. How could they feel that they were cared for and protected when they couldn't be with Him all the time? They would not be able to question Him or be taught directly by Him, as they had been. They would not be able to reach out and touch or be touched by Him.

At the Passover supper that final Thursday night, Jesus took some of the bread that was there. He said a blessing and broke the bread into pieces. Then He handed it to His disciples. As He handed out the bread He said something that must have sounded strange to them. He said that the bread was His body. He wanted the disciples to think of that bread as an important part of His life that He was giving to them. Then He took a cup of wine and gave it to the disciples, saying that it was His blood. He wanted them to think of the wine as also being an important part of His life that they were being given to drink.

Do you know why we need part of the Lord's life if we are going to be happy and useful? Each of us needs to receive the love of doing good things for other people. Then we will want to help other people. Each of us also needs to learn the Lord's truth. Then we can help other people. When we want to do what is good and know what is true, the Lord is with us in a very special way. The love and truth that we have then are a special gift of the Lord's life, a gift that He has given us.

Several times a year many adults attend a special church service to remind them of the last supper that the Lord had with His disciples. We call it the Holy Supper. During this church service the adults come to the front of the church in small groups. They kneel down as if praying. The priest brings them a plate with a special kind of bread on it (called unleavened bread). Each person eats a piece of this bread. Then the priest brings a cup with wine in it. Each person takes a sip from the cup. As the people eat the piece of bread and drink the sip of wine, they can remember the gift of life that the Lord wants to give each of us. They can remember that the Lord lived His life in the world to make sure that we could receive this gift. He wants us to have the gift of heavenly joy and happiness. He wants us to have the joy and happiness that come from trying to do what is good and learning what is true.

The Holy Supper can help people to remember what the Lord wants for each of us. And we must do our part if we are going to receive it. Each of us can learn what is true from the Word. Each of us can do our best to obey the Lord. The special secret is that as we do these things, we will come to see that the Lord is not far away. He has not forgotten us or left us alone. The Lord wanted His disciples to know this on that night of the last supper. And we can also know that the Lord is always near us, doing His part to lead us to heaven.

Amen.