

## Our Broken World

A sermon preached by Ted Atkinson, Minister, Oxford Presbyterian Church, Oxford, PA on Maundy Thursday, March 31, 1988. Scripture Lessons: Psalm 116; 1 Corinthians 10:16-17; Mark 14:12-26.

**IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.**

*Bob Dylan song*  
We live in a broken world. Broken treaties. Broken promises. Broken hearts. Broken dreams. Broken families. God participates in the brokenness of our world. He came into the world in Jesus and experienced the brokenness of our lives. He knew all about broken promises. He knew the heart break of friends who denied and betrayed him. His body was broken on the cross and he died of a broken heart.

But we're here tonight because we believe, or at least want to believe, that on the cross the body of Christ was broken so that this world might be made whole. Tonight Christians around the world will remember the death of Jesus. Russian Christians, Palestinian Christians, Christians in Northern Ireland, Christian Blacks and Whites in South Africa, Christian Contras and Christian Sandinistas in Central America are remembering the death of Jesus tonight. And we can't remember the death of Jesus without realizing that the things that divide us~~ our nationality, our race, our language, our politics~~ count for nothing at the Table of the Lord. Here there are no Democrats or Republicans, there are neither Americans or Russians, there are neither Sandinistas or Contras but we are one. We're broken people who have come to Jesus to be made whole. "We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread."

Jesus gathered his apostles at a friends house on the first Maundy Thursday to eat the Passover supper. The Passover meal celebrated the time when Israel was a slave in Egypt. The angel of death flew over Egypt and struck dead the first born son of everyone in the land. God, however, told the Jews to kill a lamb and sprinkle its blood on their doors. When the

angel of death passed over the land he spared the sons of those whose doors were splattered with blood. Jews have remember that night from that time till now by eating the Passover meal.

Jesus and his disciples were eating this meal on the first Maundy Thursday. But at the end of the meal Jesus transformed it into something new. What he did with the bread and wine, and what he said about them visibly dramatized his death before it took place and gave his own explanation of its meaning and purpose. He was teaching at least three lessons.

The first lesson concerned *the centrality of his death*. Solemnly and deliberately he gave instructions for his own memorial service. Today we have memorial services. We had one this week here in this church. But ~~ordinarily we don't repeat memorial services.~~ But Jesus meant for his memorial service to be repeated. Over and over he wanted his followers to remember his death. The Lord's Supper, then, dramatizes neither his birth nor his life, neither his words nor his works, but ~~only~~ his death. Jesus wants us to know that his death on the cross is at the very center of the Christian faith. Central to the Christian faith is a service that reminds us that our Lord died as an outcast between two thieves. He wants to reminds us of that over and over again. That is central to our faith.

Secondly Jesus was teaching about *the purpose of his death*. Through the shedding of his blood in death God established a new covenant with his people. He promised to write his law on our hearts and forgive our sins. Jesus died in order to bring us into a new relationship with God. We call it the New Covenant, the New Testament.

The third lesson Jesus was teaching concerned *the need to appropriate his death personally.* Jesus didn't simply break the bread

and pour the cup. He wasn't simply an actor on a stage with 12 people in the audience watching. He drew them into the drama. He invited them to participate with him in the drama. He gave them the bread and said, "Take, eat." He gave them the cup and they all drank of it. They all participated. ~~It wasn't enough for the bread to be broken and the wine to be poured out. They had to eat and drink. It wasn't enough for him to die, but they had to appropriate the benefits of his death personally.~~ The eating and drinking were, and still are, a vivid acted parable of receiving Christ as our crucified Saviour and of feeding on him in our hearts by faith. The Lord's Supper is intended to be "a participation in the body and blood of Christ."

The Rev. John Stott writes, "I can still remember what a revelation it was to me as a young man to be told that any action on my part was ~~necessary. I used to imagine that because Christ had died, the world had~~ been automatically put right. When someone explained to me that Christ had died for *me*, I responded rather haughtily 'everybody knows that', as if the fact itself or my knowledge of the fact had brought me salvation." The sacrament of the Lord's Supper invites us to participate personally. When we take the bread and the cup we realize that Christ died for me. He is my savior.

Here, then, are the lessons of the upper room about the death of Christ. First, it was central to his own thinking about himself and his mission, and he wants it to be central to ours. Secondly, it took place in order to establish the new covenant and to make the forgiveness of sins possible. Third, it needs to be appropriated individually if its benefits (the covenant and the forgiveness) are to be enjoyed.

He is the Lamb of God whose blood will save us from the Angel of Death. When we broken men and women trust in Jesus and receive him

healing begins for us. Sometimes it seems hard to believe, there is so much brokenness in the world and in our lives. But, in faith, we take that Bread and drink that Cup as an outward sign of our desire for Jesus to come into our hearts and heal them, to come into our lives and heal our broken relationships, to come into our lives and forgive our broken promises.