



Sermon Title: Rhythms of Grace

Mark 14:12-26

Speaker: Annie Duncan

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Good morning, BelPres.

Good morning. My name's Annie Duncan. I'm the executive pastor here. And as always, it is wonderful to be with you and worship this morning. This summer, we have been walking through the Gospel of Mark, and so today's scripture comes from chapter 14 verses 12 through 26.

"On the first day of the festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus disciples asked Him, 'Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?' So He sent two of His disciples telling them, 'Go into the city and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, the teacher asks, 'Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready, make preparations for us there.' The disciples left and went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover."

"When evening came, Jesus arrived with the 12. While they were reclining at the table eating, He said, 'Truly, I tell you one of you will betray me, one who was eating with me. They were saddened. And one by one they said, 'Surely you don't mean me is one of the 12.' Jesus replied, 'One who dips bread into the bowl with me. The son of man will go just as it is written about him, but woe to that man who betrays the son of man. It would be better for him if he had not been born'."

"While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples saying, 'Take it. This is my body.' Then He took a cup, and again, when He had given thanks, He gave it to them and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' He said to them. 'Truly, I tell

you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.' When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives."

Tim Mackie, who is the co-founder of the BibleProject, talks about rhythm when he walks through this particular passage of scripture. And if you've ever heard somebody building a deck, there is no rhythm to that at all. That is just noise, right? Bang! Bang, bang! Usually at 6:00 in the morning on a Saturday when you're trying to just get some shut-eye.

Rhythm is found in the songs that we just sang. Rhythm is found in an established cadence and order of life. And Jesus and His disciples knew all about rhythm, cadence and order. Growing up in the Jewish tradition, there was a rhythm to their everyday lives. They celebrated a weekly Sabbath. They had prayers that they would do daily and yearly festivals and feasts.

In this particular passage of scripture here, they're celebrating Passover together. Jesus does something radical here, and to miss it is to misunderstand who Jesus is entirely. Jesus disrupts a centuries old rhythm, the rhythm of a Passover meal, and establishes a brand new rhythm, the rhythm of the communion meal that we still celebrate today. Each of these meals are symbolic and they're tied to God's grace and love. So to help us better understand the communion meal that we celebrate today, let's walk through these rhythms of grace that are found in the Passover meal, the last Supper meal, that scripture that we just read, and the communion meal.

So first, the Passover meal. Mark, the Gospel of Mark, he makes it clear that he expects the reader to understand what a Passover meal would've been like. Now, some of us may know what a Passover meal is like, maybe we've participated in a Seder dinner before. And others of us maybe we have no idea at all, and that's okay. But here are some important things to know about Passover.

The Passover meal was one of Israel's many feasts that they celebrated. Passover was celebrated yearly. And it was a pilgrimage feast. People were required to celebrate Passover were within the walls of Jerusalem, which is an important fact for when we talk about the last Supper meal, so remember that. They had to celebrate it within Jerusalem. Passover was symbolic. If you're not familiar with the story of God's people, the Israelites, here's a quick recap. You can read a lot more in the book of Exodus. But God came near to a particular people, the people of Israel, and establishes a covenant with them, that's promise. It's another word for promise. Israel was in slavery to Egypt, so God rescued them out of Egypt. This is where you hear about those 10 plagues of Egypt, right? The final plague was the angel of death killing every firstborn son in Egypt, but God spared his people Israel through a symbol of blood from a lamb that was painted on their door posts, foreshadowing Jesus as our sacrificial lamb.

So knowing all of that, an authentic Passover meal then had three important elements, the lamb, unleavened bread, and wine. And again, the lamb represented the lambs that were sacrificed, their blood painted on the door posts of Israel's home so that they were spared the justice of Egypt's injustice. The unleavened bread represented Israel's haste at leaving Egypt. They didn't have time to let the bread rise. They didn't know when they would need to leave, but they knew that when they would, it would need to be in a hurry.

And the wine represented the four cups of wine that people drank during a Passover meal, which represented God's four promises that He makes to His people in the Exodus. First, the cup of sanctification where God promises, "I will bring you out from under the burden of slavery," the cup of deliverance where God promises, "I will rescue you from Egypt's bondage," the cup of redemption where God promises, "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm." And finally, the cup of praise where God promises, "I will take you as my people." And don't worry, these four cups of wine, they weren't drank all at the beginning of the meal. They were drank throughout the entire evening. Passover often lasted until the wee hours of the morning. There was a cadence to it, and the meal was broken up into four parts. Each of those four parts concluded with people raising the cup and proclaiming God's promises.

But the most important thing to remember about the symbolism that happens within a Passover meal is that through the lamb, God rescues the Israelites from their slavery to Pharaoh. Whenever Passover was celebrated, the Jewish people were reminded of this rhythm of grace that was set in motion and how God rescued them and will rescue them again. Because in celebrating Passover, Jewish people were remembering their past deliverance and anticipating their future Messiah that would come.

So now let's go back to the scripture for today, where Jesus, the anticipated Messiah, was celebrating Passover with His disciples with this last supper meal. Now no one but Jesus would have thought of it as that, the last supper meal, that's what we know it of today. But Jesus knew what He was about to do and strategically explains His soon and coming death within this particular meal. Because Jesus' ministry was roughly three years, we can assume that Jesus' disciples would've probably celebrated Passover at least once, if not twice already with Jesus. So to them this was just another part of their yearly natural rhythm and cadence celebrating Passover together.

But it's at this meal where Jesus disrupts some of those rhythms of the Passover meal and introduces a brand new rhythm of grace that is for all people. Because within this Passover meal that was celebrated yearly, the last Supper meal, well, this is a once and for all kind of meal. Not only is this the last time that Jesus would share a meal like this with his disciples before His crucifixion, but this is the last time that the disciples would need to celebrate Passover as it had been because Jesus is about to do something new.

Jesus intentionally times His last hours with His disciples around this meal. So like we mentioned before, Passover was this pilgrimage feast where Jews were required to celebrate Passover within the walls of Jerusalem. So you can imagine that the city would be jam-packed with people. And Jesus at this point, He was a well-known figure and recognizable. He'd been in the city for a week and He'd already upset some religious figures by literally flipping some tables, and so He had a mark on His back. So in stealth-like fashion, Jesus secretly prearranges everything for this meal to happen.

So when the disciples ask Him in verse 12, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" Jesus responds with these really interesting verses here where He says, "Go into a city and the man carrying the jar will meet you." It's like a spy movie, right? Whether you think Jesus prearranged everything or Jesus because, He's God incarnate, He just knew that there would be a man with a jar, it's still weird, right? There's a man with a jar.

Anyway, I'm sure the disciples were used to it after being with Jesus for three years. He probably said some odd things, right? But they go about what Jesus asked them to do. And of course there was a guy with a jar that led them to an upper room, right?

So now let's fast-forward to that upper room. The Passover meal is underway, and everything at this point is following that natural cadence and rhythm of your typical Passover meal until Jesus has this mic drop moment in verse 18, "While they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, 'Truly, I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.'"

It's hours into the meal and everybody's reclining at the table, which is another way of saying they've had too much to eat and they're about to slip into a food coma, right? But it's in the midst of their reclining, hours into the meal, that Jesus disrupts the rhythm of this Passover meal for the first but not the last time by saying, "One of you will betray me." And the disciples, one by one, they say, "Surely you can't mean me, Jesus. It's not me." And the disciple that Jesus was referring to, it could have been Judas, who is the first one to betray Jesus and will hand Him over to the authorities to be killed later on that evening. Or Jesus could have been referring to Peter, who is going to deny Jesus three times after this meal is done, or it could have been any of the disciples, for they all abandoned Jesus after He was taken into custody.

The moment right before Jesus draws the entire meaning of the Passover meal to Himself, He underscores how his upcoming death is not for the worthy but the unworthy, those that betray Him. And that includes us today and our sin in our betrayal like the disciples and their shortcomings and in our shortcomings through this extraordinary extension of God's grace, we are welcomed into this new table that Jesus is talking about as he's establishing this new rhythm, which is why Paul later writes to the Romans that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

So saying that there is a betrayer among them at this Passover celebration is Jesus' first disruption. The second comes moments later. While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and He gave it to His disciples saying, "Take it. This is my body." Now the Gospel of Mark is known for his brevity. He skips details and gets straight to the action. The Gospel of Luke, which is double the content than the Gospel of Mark, puts this moment this way where Jesus says, "This is my body which has been given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

The second disruption that Jesus does here in the Passover meal, it again would've caught the disciples off guard, "Jesus, what are you talking about? What are you talking about that the bread is your body?" Jesus isn't just presiding at the Passover feast. He's saying that He is the feast, which is why when we celebrate the communion meal together, we take the bread and the cup, we don't take the lamb. Jesus is hinting that He is the Passover lamb. He takes an ancient symbol and He transforms it in a brand new way. His death that's about to happen is going to bring life and sustenance, not just for Israel, but for all people.

And then comes the third disruption. He took a cup, and when he had given thanks, He gave it to them and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," He said to them. If the disciples missed it the first time with the bread, Jesus underscores it here a second time with His blood. He ties His blood to a new covenant. The covenant that they knew before was being made new. And Jesus now seals a new covenant with His blood saying that's been poured out for many.

The four cups of wine that marked God's four promises to the Israelites in the Exodus, Jesus now takes all of those upon Himself through His blood and establishes a brand new covenant that extends to all people. Through Jesus' blood, He fulfills the cup of sanctification, the cup of deliverance, the cup of redemption, and the cup of praise. And this is the moment here where Jesus established a brand new covenant with His people here at the last Supper. At Passover, where they remembered their deliverance from Egypt and anticipated their future redemption of the coming Messiah, the Messiah that they anticipated was right here at the meal with them.

Jesus explaining the meaning behind his soon and coming death within this meal is completely deliberate. Jesus takes the Passover meal, where through the lamb, God rescues the Israelites from their slavery to Pharaoh, and He inserts Himself. He swaps out the players. Through Jesus, God rescued the world from slavery to the powers of sin and death. In our lobby, we have a printout of the Gospel Mark from the BibleProject. And in the bottom right-hand corner, it depicts chapter 14 this way. You can see the picture on the screen, where it talks about this covenant, the old meaning, the liberation from sin and death through the death of the Passover lamb. And then what Jesus does here at the last Supper meal, by creating a new meaning, that the liberation from sin and death through the death of the Messiah. Jesus establishes a new rhythm of grace.

After the last Supper was finished, the disciples sang a hymn and they headed to the mountain of Olives where Jesus would be arrested and then taken from there and later killed and crucified.

I have to imagine that in the days and weeks to come after Jesus rose from the dead, His disciples and followers would've started to piece together all of the symbolism that Jesus had talked about in this last Supper meal. They would've recalled Jesus' words, "This is my body broken for you. This is my blood shed for you," and they would remember, which is what we celebrate in our communion meal today where we celebrate that regularly.

Jesus took a meal that was celebrated annually and established a new rhythm for people to remember, to remember God's unmatched grace and love for all people through Jesus' sacrifice, that whenever we gather, we remember what Jesus did through His life, death and resurrection. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that saves us from the corruption of sin.

And this isn't just a meal where we go through the motions. It's not just a moment in history that we're continuing, but there is power in remembering Jesus. There is power in remembering Jesus' sacrifice. It ties us to this ongoing rhythm of grace that started long, long ago echoing God's work of restoration for all people. And communion like the Passover meal and like the last Supper meal, it's symbolic. It is tied to our senses. The meal isn't about what we've done for Jesus, but all about what Jesus has done for us.

But communion is not the final meal that Jesus has prepared for us. There is one more meal to come. In the book of Revelation, it paints this beautiful picture of God and the Lamb, and that's Jesus. And there's a supper feast that is being prepared where we will be in Jesus' presence forever and ever worshiping before the throne of the Lamb. And that future meal, BelPres, get hungry, because that future meal is for eternity. Eternity. And while the time has yet to be determined, whenever we celebrate the communion meal together, we also anticipate Jesus' return and this glorious feast that awaits.

Just like the Israelites, remembered how God brought them out of slavery and anticipated their coming Messiah. Whenever we celebrate the Sacrament of Communion together, we are remembering Jesus' sacrifice for us and anticipating Jesus' return in that glorious feast that awaits. This rhythm of grace that God established so, so long ago, we have a choice where we can enter into it or we can forget about it and just live our chaotic lives living for ourselves. But on remembering what Jesus did, on remembering Jesus' sacrifice, we reattach again and again to this overarching story of God's great love and grace.

Now, I think it's interesting that this sermon falls on a week where we are not taking communion together. And while that is interesting, I also think it's pretty cool because we

don't have to wait for the first Sunday of the month to remember and to gather around a meal together. We get to do this regularly. Nowhere in the last Supper passage that we just read to Jesus say, "Do this once a month and the pastor will say the special words and then you'll all come together." I love celebrating communion as a church, but we get to celebrate Jesus' sacrifice and remember all the time.

So that is your simple practice for this week, BelPres, gather around a meal and remember, break bread together, have wine or juice together. And remember that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. That was good news for the betraying disciples many, many years ago, and it is still good news for us today that as we anticipate Jesus' return and that glorious feast that awaits.

So God, we thank you for your rhythms of grace that we see all throughout scripture and how they are continued today. Jesus, we thank you for your sacrifice. We thank you for your body and your blood and what those elements mean for us today. Jesus, we thank you for your grace that you command us to remember because we too often forget. So God, as we practice together, as your followers gathering around a meal, help us to declare and share who you are in our lives today and in the days to come. It's in your name that we pray, and everybody said together, amen.

Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back to last week's sermon and scripture... How did you live differently or practice what we talked about in your life this week? What did you do and how did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Discuss the significance of Passover in Jewish history. How did Jesus fulfill and transform these traditions at the Last Supper?

- Explore the meaning of Jesus' words about the bread and wine. How does this represent a new covenant compared to the old covenant?
- Discuss the importance of the Lord's Supper in remembering Jesus' sacrifice. How does participating in this sacrament impact our daily lives and walk with Jesus?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.