

“Places of the Passion: A Place at the Table for You”

Luke 22:1-13

This evening, we gather at the beginning of another Lenten season. Our theme this year is “Places of the Passion.” This Lent, we will gather for these six weeks to reflect on the geographic places where Christ our Lord demonstrated His great love for us. We are the object of His love. There was nothing more important to Him than becoming our refuge and shield. All of Adam’s children stand condemned under the wrath of the Law. Jesus chose to stand in harm’s way between us and judgment. This was His Passion, He is obsessed with being merciful.

These six weeks, we will look at the physical places where these events happened. The concept of “place” is more than just dealing with physical location. We have a place in this story. It is important to have a sense of place in life. Many of you, when you come and sit in your pew,

you come and sit in “your” pew. There is nothing wrong with having a sense of place. Studies show that students learn better in school when they have a sense of place. It is a source of comfort to know that you are in the place where you belong.

I was excited to have this as our theme this year, because, after visiting Israel, all of these places are still etched in my mind. In the coming weeks, we will read through the entire Passion account as told by Luke, a small portion each week, and you won’t be surprised at the story. It is like any familiar story. No matter how many times you watch the movie “Titanic” or any version of the story, the boat is going to sink, and the string quartet is going to play “Nearer My God to Thee” as the musicians recognize that this is the last day of their life. Why does the movie have to include those events – because that is what actually happened.

The Lenten story is a simple story, and you’ve been to these places before – maybe not in person, but through the witness of the Word of God. The Upper Room, the Garden of Gethsemane, the halls of Pontius Pilate, the hill of Golgotha—these are the places we remember when we meditate

on our Lord's Passion. These are the places we talk about each year as we retell the story. Why do we include these details each year? Because, that is what actually happened. These are the real places where Jesus walked, talked, ate, prayed, bled, and died.

It is a simple story that we tell over and over again. This year when we tell it, Peter will still be Peter, denying Jesus in the courtyard. Pilate will still be Pilate, struggling in his judgment hall. And the crowds will still be the crowds calling for Jesus' death outside the palace. But the story of the places of the Passion is not a story of frustration and failure, for in the midst of this story, there is a wonderful, powerful love. We will see tonight and every night that no matter what place we find ourselves in our lives, God is still coming and claiming us as His children. God is still coming, preparing a place for us in His kingdom. We are still the object of His love. There is still nothing more important to Him than being our refuge and shield.

So, tonight, we begin our Lenten observance with a celebration of the Lord's Supper. No one knows the exact location of the original "Upper Room." There is a "traditional" location as a place to remember what

happened on the night Jesus was betrayed, but it is in a building built well after the time of Jesus.

Knowing the exact place where Jesus first offered His flesh and blood under the form of bread and wine is not important. What happened at that place, wherever that Upper Room was, has given us life, hope, peace, joy, comfort; the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation. Jesus establishes a new and better covenant in His blood. He offers a feast which is a fore-taste of the feast to come.

Tonight, there is a feast, and at the Lord's Table, there is a place for you. His broken body and shed blood; His suffering, His death, His resurrection had a purpose – and still has a purpose. There is no reason to fear, for your sins have been forgiven, your life is no longer your own, and tonight there is a place set at God's table for you. A simple meal, a simple story, and a simple remembrance, but what a wonderful work God has done and is doing for His people as we take our place at the table of the Lord and feast on the broken body and shed blood of the Son of God. Amen.