

The Living Last Supper

(adapted from Laura Bender's version,

<http://www.homiliesbyemail.com/Special/thursday/livingsupper.html>)

Words of Welcome

Good evening, and welcome to this Maundy Thursday Service, to this Service of the Living Last Supper at First Baptist Church. On this night we reflect and remember the events of that night long ago, when Jesus ate with his disciples one final meal, when by one of his own disciples he was betrayed, when he was arrested and one by one the disciples abandoned him to death.

The scene you will witness tonight is not a historical account. We do not know all of the disciples, who they were, beyond a name, and sometimes those names do not agree between the Gospels. Others, such as Peter and Thomas and Judas, we know very well. The story presented tonight is a story of the Twelve, pieced together from Scripture, from history, and from the tradition that has been handed down from the beginning of the church.

We will share together in a moment the Last Supper. Afterwards, we will hear from each of the disciples. Following their story, they will extinguish a candle and all candles up until the next reader. At the very end, the Christ candle will be extinguished, and we will observe a time of silent reflection.

Let us listen to their story, and in it we might find our story of our relationship with Christ, for our own story speaks of trust and devotion as well as desertion and despair, betrayal and denial, yet through it all, the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

Prayer of Invocation

Lord, we ask for your presence to be made known to us tonight. On this night in particular, dear God, we ask for your help in collectively remembering the events of long ago, remembering what our Savior has done for us, remembering our own faults and shortcomings as human beings. We ask for your forgiveness, Holy One, for all the times that we have deserted and abandoned you. We ask for your forgiveness, our Savior, for our sins. Grant us an open heart and mind to hear you speak to us this night, to rededicate ourselves as your servants, so that we might follow you, even to death, and beyond. In the name of Christ, the one and only who died for us, we pray all things. Amen.

Eat this bread, drink this cup

The Living Last Supper

As we gather around the table this evening, we are reminded of the events of long ago. It was on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his

disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, '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." So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

(Sharing of the Bread and Cup)

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

Abide with me...

James

I am James, elder brother of John and a son of Zebedee. We were fishermen with our friends Andrew and Simon Peter when Jesus called us to become his disciples. John and I were quick to anger in those early days, and Jesus gave us a nick name, "Boanerges," which means "Sons of Thunder." One time, when traveling to Jerusalem, the people of a little village refused us food and shelter, and they were Samaritans. We had walked many miles that day and were footsore and weary.

John and I were furious at the lack of courtesy. Angrily, I asked Jesus “Lord, do you want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?” But Jesus sternly replied, shaking his head, “No. You do not know what you ask. The son of man did not come to destroy, but to save.”

I have tried to quiet my thunder most of the time but I get so angry with those who don't trust Jesus that sometimes it is hard to control my temper.

Peter, John, and I were constant companions of Jesus. We went up the mountain with him and were the only ones who saw Moses and Elijah with him, and how Jesus' face shown that day.

We were with him in Gethsemane that awful night before the crucifixion. We were part of the inner circle, his closest friends, and yet... *(pause)*

I can never forget how helpless we felt. Jesus was greatly troubled, and we could do nothing, say nothing. We even fell asleep when he asked us to stay with him and pray. And he even asked us not to pray for him but to pray for ourselves, that we may not come into the time of trial. And we did nothing to save him.

John

I am John, brother of James.

He has spoken of me and how, in spite of our quick tempers and foolish impulsiveness, Jesus loved us dearly. Leaving our family to follow Jesus was the most important decision of our lives.

I am the youngest of the disciples and my time with Jesus was exhilarating. I watched his many miracles with excitement and awe, and saw how his love and concerns drew hundreds of people to him. I loved Jesus, but I still at times was selfish. One time we saw another man casting out demons in Jesus' name and we tried to stop him, and we went and told Jesus about it, but Jesus told us not to stop him, for whoever is not against us is for us.

Another time, I went with my brother James and pleaded with Jesus to grant us to sit at his right and left hands in glory. Jesus warned us that we did not know what we were asking. He said to us, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?” We said we were. How foolish we were, we just did not understand. And the other disciples were upset with us for a while.

On the night in which Jesus was betrayed, we shared together this special meal of remembrance. I sat on Jesus' right hand side. He talked of betrayal, of being taken from

us. We couldn't imagine any of us would be capable of doing such a thing. And none of us could truly understand.

Philip

I am Philip, Bartholomew's brother. I first came to Bethany to hear John the Baptist speak and while there I met Jesus. I found him a very interesting person and a very powerful speaker. I was so moved by Jesus that I had to bring Nathaniel to hear him also.

For many months we traveled with the master up and down Palestine. I saw the lame walk upright; the blind made to see and even some who were dead brought back to life. Soon I realized that Jesus was indeed the true Messiah. But I still had much to learn.

When Jesus told us that God was our Heavenly Father, it was almost beyond my understanding. It was I who asked him "Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied." Jesus replied, "After all I have done and said, Philip, do you not know that I am in the Father and He is in me? Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father."

For months I had watched Jesus at work. I looked but did not see. I heard what he said, but did not understand. I had accepted what Jesus did, and then demanded more proof. And though he told us over and over that he would be betrayed and destroyed, and raised up in three days, still, I did not believe him, and I fled, along with the others, when they came to arrest him.

James the Younger

I am James the Younger, son of Alphaeus and Mary. Some say I was the brother of Jesus, some say I wrote the letter of James, but that is not important. What is important, is that He called on me to become one of his disciples, and I answered his call.

The lessons I learned while with him changed my life completely. I saw how Jesus fed the five thousand who were hungry. I witnessed how Jesus showed compassion to the poor and widowed. I was there when Jesus made clean the lepers who had been cast out of the community, and restored them. I sat at the table with Jesus along with the prostitutes and tax collectors he invited to eat with him. He said that they were his family, that whoever turns to God and does the will of God and obeys it were his brothers and sisters.

Yet on that night, when Jesus said that the one who would betray him was sitting with him at the table, I could not stand it. How could Jesus know and still let things happen? How could the Almighty God allow his Son to die? I was confused and troubled, and did not know what to do.

Andrew

I am Andrew. I am not particularly gifted. I'm just an average person like any one of you.

I was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee with my brother Simon when I met John the Baptist. His challenging message moved me to follow him until the day Jesus appeared, and I knew at once that I had found the Messiah. I hurried to find my brother, Simon Peter and said to him, "We have found the Messiah."

Peter also believed and we followed the Master; leaving behind our family and our fishing nets to become fishers of people. On the day when Jesus fed the five thousand, it was I who found the boy with five loaves and two fishes. How incredible it was to feed so many with so little. Jesus filled our lives with many such wonders.

But I was scared that night when we gathered together for the Passover meal. I was afraid for Jesus and worried about what would happen to us. I looked to Simon, whom Jesus called Peter, but had no assurances from him. I became saddened, depressed, unable to find any hope that night.

Jude

I am Jude, but I am called Thaddeus or Lebbeus. Judas was also another name for me, but I am not the same Judas as the one who betrayed him.

I became a disciple because I liked the way Jesus walked boldly and bravely among all kinds of people. I thought that Jesus was the kind of leader that we needed. He had good common sense, he loved his fellow countrymen, and he was devoted to his cause.

The problem was that I did not fully understand his cause. I thought that by preparing for the coming Kingdom of God on Earth he would restore Israel to its old power and glory. How wrong I was. He talked about loving our enemies and returning good for evil...

(pause)and he didn't ever try to stir us up or reveal himself to the people in the way I thought he would. Finally, I asked him, "Lord, why are you going to reveal yourself only to us disciples, and not to the whole world?"

Jesus answered, "Because I will only reveal myself to those who love me and obey me." I was disappointed, and yet I knew Jesus well enough to think there was much meaning in his words.

Still, I hoped on that day we entered Jerusalem, as the people shouted "Hosanna, Save Us!" that all of God's power and might would come through Jesus and we would, together, make right what was wrong and turn the tables and restore the glory of the old days.

On that night, when Jesus said someone was going to betray him, I was angry. How dare anyone betray him! I waited when they came to arrest him... and he did nothing. I didn't understand. I was angry and upset. This should not have happened.

Thomas

I am Thomas, often I am called Didymus, 'the twin'. You know me as doubting Thomas.

Even though I was a man of wavering faith, my devotion to Jesus was very sincere. Like him, I had been a carpenter and I felt closer to Jesus because of my work. I am a realist and it confused and discouraged me to see the criticism of Jesus growing.

We disciples were almost too afraid to go with Jesus to Jerusalem that last time. I became so impatient with our indecision that I blurted out "Let us go with him. Even to die, if need be."

So we went, and we were all together for the Passover. The day was dark and oppressive. It matched our mood as we heard Jesus speak of leaving us. I asked him, "Lord, we don't know where you are going; how do we find the way?"

Jesus replied to me, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." But I still did not understand.

And now see what has happened? I cannot believe it. I cannot believe that they have taken him away, that he is gone.

Judas Iscariot

I am Judas Iscariot. I am known to all the world as the traitor who sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Yes, I betrayed the Christ with a kiss.

I first received my call to be an apostle by the sea of Tiberius. I was always a man of ambitious designs. In fact, in the early days, I cherished a hope that Jesus would establish an earthly kingdom and that I would receive a prominent position in his political set-up. Even though we had a tax collector among us already, I acted as treasurer for the original twelve apostles.

In the beginning, I was intrigued by Jesus. I wanted to follow him. I believed what he said. But Jesus made us do things that I didn't like—like share our food, give up our possessions, take nothing with us but depend upon the goodness of the strangers we were to meet. That was not the way a future king was supposed to live! That was not what I had bargained for when I joined this operation.

When Mary anointed the feet of Jesus I protested. "Why wasn't this ointment sold and the money given to the poor?" Some of the other disciples agreed with me, but they didn't know that I had planned to keep the money myself.

I managed to conceal my true motives from the others, but somehow Jesus could always see through me, and somehow, Jesus still hoped that I would come around, that I would change my ways.

Once he said, "Haven't I chosen twelve of you? And one of you is the devil."

Do you know why I betrayed Jesus? Do you? I know that a lot of you think you know. Maybe I was selfish and greedy. Maybe I really was in it for myself. Maybe I just gave into the temptation and wanted too much power... (pause)

Or maybe I was really, really afraid. Maybe I was afraid of what was going to happen to us. I knew that the priests and elders were unhappy with this movement. We were in Jerusalem at the height of Passover and I knew there could be a lot of trouble. All of us could have been arrested and tried with treason together.

When the chief priests offered me the money, I considered it for a while. You see, there was nothing that Jesus had done that they could charge him with. I thought and thought of all the things he had done and there was no crime committed. Nothing that they could do according to the Law of Moses that would condemn him to death.

I thought to myself, "I can stop this madness, this foolishness. I'll turn Jesus over to the priests, they won't be able to charge him with anything too harsh, but everyone will start distrusting him and this whole charade will be over."

But when I saw them take Jesus to Pilate, I knew it was too late. I had gone too far. I repented; I took the money back to the chief priests and said that everything I told them was a lie. But they didn't care. I threw down the money in the temple, and went off, away from the others. For I no longer have the will to live. I have betrayed him, deceived him, the only one who saw any hope for my life.

Matthew

Like Zaccheus, I am a tax collector. Some call me Levi, others call me Matthew.

It is said that there is no class of men in the world more hated than tax collectors. In our day, we were hired by the Roman government to collect taxes. How we got paid was by charging a surcharge—we had to extort money from those who were to pay in order to get paid ourselves.

However, that did not stop this man called Jesus. In fact, he came by my office one day and said "Follow me." There was no way I could resist. So I left everything and followed him. Later I gave him a great feast in my home and many of his disciples and my business friends were present.

When some of the Pharisees complained about Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus said, "Those who are well have no need of a doctor, those who are sick do."

It was said that never had there been a man more unsuited for the job than I, but in the hands of Jesus Christ, He took me from a life of money and gave me riches of a far greater kind. He spoke of storing up treasures in heaven.

I was so glad to be part of the twelve, part of a group that was liked and loved by Jesus. I was so sad that night when we gathered together, when Jesus told us that one of us was going to betray him—I even wondered if it was me, if I just didn't have enough faith. I had tried hard to be a good disciple, but maybe I lacked something. I was so bothered by what he said that when we left to go to the Mount of Olives I went off by myself, until I heard the commotion. And then it was too late—there was nothing I could do. He had been arrested.

Bartholomew

My name is Bartholomew, but I am also known as Nathaniel. I have always been a bit on the stubborn side, but I was honest and trustworthy. Everyone knew they could come to me and I would tell them the truth and not hold anything back. I had studied the laws of Moses and knew the Scriptures well, but still, I yearned for something more, a way of knowing God closer.

It was my brother Philip who told me that he had found the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth. I couldn't believe my ears and asked him, "Can anything good from Nazareth?" Philip ignored my sarcasm and insisted that I go with him.

When Jesus saw us coming, he looked and said, "Here comes an honest man, a true son of Israel." That stopped me short: "How do you know who I am?" I demanded.

Jesus looked steadily back at me and replied, "I knew who you were even before Philip found you." Filled with elation, I called, "Rabbi! You are the Son of God! You are the king of Israel."

I knew within my heart that he was the Christ, and that I, Nathaniel needed him. I followed him for three years as one of the disciples.

On that night, when Jesus told us that he was to be betrayed, I was filled with sadness. I sort of had a feeling all along that this might happen. I could tell that Jesus was troubled, but I did not know quite what to do or what to expect next. When Jesus went off to the Garden of Gethsemane, I went to a private place and said my own prayers for him, that he would be able to do what he was sent to do. I heard the news the next day.

Simon

I am Simon the Zealot. Before Jesus called me, I belonged to the group of hot headed, bloodthirsty revolutionaries known as Zealots. I hated Rome for enslaving my country, and God for turning His back on us. My Jewish brothers seemed not to care that they were slaves in their own kingdom.

But one day while I was by the sea of Tiberias, I met Jesus of Nazareth.

He told me of another kind of kingdom, the heavenly kingdom where God reigns and God's ways are our ways. A kingdom where everyone's hearts are changed, where everyone knows God and loves one another.

Since that day, my attitude toward Rome, toward God, and toward others has changed. My inner tensions have been relieved. I'm not uptight about things anymore. He gave me a balance in life that I had not enjoyed before, a peace beyond understanding. I became dedicated to Him, the Prince of Peace, and his teachings about peace.

I remembered what the prophets had said about the day when nations would learn to study war no more, when people would beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. I gave up the sword the day I gave my life to Jesus the Christ.

Still, in the end, on that last night I was unsettled. I knew something was strange, and when Jesus said that one of us would betray him, I wondered in my heart if that was me, if that was the old me wanting to rise up and challenge those foolish priests and elders who didn't understand who Jesus was. I wondered that in my zeal for the Gospel I might once again be a Zealot, become violent and angry. I questioned myself to the point it consumed me, and I was unable to do anything, but watch and wait.

Peter

I am Simon. I was a fisherman when my brother Andrew brought me to Jesus. Jesus looked at me and said "Your name shall be Cephas," which translated means "The Rock." You know my name translated as Peter.

Maybe he saw already in me the faith and steadfastness that I would yearn for and which would take so long to grow. I was so headstrong and my impulsive spirit caused me to do and say many things for which I am now sorry. I was so ready to follow this Messiah I left my nets and my family behind. I was so certain I knew who Christ that I often said some fairly rash things.

When Jesus asked me who I said he was, I told him, "You are the Messiah, the Holy Son of God." And in the next breath I was telling Jesus to stop talking about his death. Oh yes, you see, Jesus knew he was going to die and he talked about it a few times but I always tried to shut him up. Once I made him so mad he said "Get behind me Satan; for you are setting your mind on human things and not on divine things."

That night at the table, Jesus said that we would abandon him and I promised him that I would never leave his side. Jesus turned to me and said "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." I told him, I promised him I wouldn't.

In the Garden of Gethsemane, when the mob came after Jesus, I drew my sword to protect him and cut off the ear of a slave. Jesus was furious. "Put your sword back in its sheath" he said, "for they that live by the sword will die by the sword."

And I fled in shame and terror. It was I who boasted that I would never forsake Jesus and then, in the face of danger, I cursed and denied my Savior... (pause) Three times I did it. And then I heard that sound of the rooster crowing, and I turned and looked... (pause) and right then, I could hear Jesus' words in my ears and I could even see his face.

I ran away and wept bitterly. I cried that I didn't have the strength, the faith, to stand by Him, my Savior. Judas may have betrayed him, but I abandoned him. I fell asleep in the Garden, I got angry and violent, and in the end, I broke my word to save myself.

I am ashamed. I am not worthy to be called his friend. I am the least of the disciples, the one who should have stayed by his side, but fled because I just didn't have the strength.

Mary

Most of the time I am not called one of the twelve disciples, but I was there every step of the way. Though it may be hard for you to understand, I had been tormented by family and friends, and by demons. Jesus came along and cast out those demons, called me his sister, and from that moment I followed him. Along with Susanna and Joanna and other women, we helped provide for the disciples out of our finances.

I heard what Jesus had said to the disciples, over and over again. Though I wished and prayed it would not be true, I knew that he would go to the death. He did this to save everyone, rather than himself. So I brought that jar of ointment, that single jar that had been passed on to me after my mother had died. That jar was to be saved for my dowry for my wedding, but instead I broke it and poured it over Jesus' head and feet, to anoint him.

Some of the other disciples were angry, especially Judas. They complained I should have sold the jar and given the money to the poor. Perhaps in that moment they had forgotten how much I had given to them out of my finances, or how much any of the women had given. But Jesus could see that they were missing the point. I was doing this to serve Jesus, to give of my best to him.

It doesn't say whether I was present in that room with the disciples or not that fateful night. But that doesn't matter, because I was there when they crucified him. I was there when the Roman soldiers brought him out to Golgotha. I was there when the crowds of people spat on him and shouted "Crucify him!" I was there when Simon of Cyrene was

made to carry the cross because Jesus could not. I was there when they nailed him up... (pause).

I was there when he cried out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” I was there when the skies turned black as night and he breathed his last. I heard the centurion speak, “Truly, this was God’s son.”

I felt the earth shake and tremble. Later, I would hear the rumors that the temple curtain itself had torn in two that very moment.

I went with the other women to prepare oil and spices, but it was too late; the sun was going down. Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate—he was such a brave man—and boldly asked for Jesus’ body. He had it placed in his own tomb, and it was sealed shut by a great stone. I took Mary, Jesus’ mother, by her arm and led her away. We would come back, after the Sabbath.