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Sunday, Sept. 6, 2009

Reading from the Gospel: 1 Cor. 11:23-26

Paul tells us that “the Lord Jesus, in the **night** when he was betrayed...”

It should have been a night of celebration. “Jesus sent Peter and John, saying ‘Go and prepare the Passover meal for us that we may eat it.’”

But it was a night of betrayal: “See, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table.”

A night of uncertainty: “Is it I, Lord?”

A night of apostasy: “You will all become deserters because of me this night, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”

A night of false assurance: “Peter said to him: ‘though all become deserters because of you, I will never desert you.’”

A night of sad truth: “Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”

A night of repentance: “Peter went out and wept bitterly.”

A night of bitter remorse: “Judas . . . went and hanged himself.”

A night of anguish: “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me.”

A night of loneliness: “Are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour for me?”

A night of unspeakable torment: “In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.”

A night of monstrous irony: “Judas, with a kiss you betray me?”

A night of mockery and cruelty: “The men who were holding Jesus began to mock and beat him.”

“The **Lord** Jesus, in the night he was betrayed...”

The one who was betrayed was not just a blameless man who suffered a great injustice.

The one who was betrayed was not merely one more among the many prophets that through the ages religious people have stoned and killed.

The one who was betrayed in that night was **the Lord**, ho kýrios, the title that the Bible gives to the Lord of all, to the maker of heaven and earth.

The fourth Gospel says that “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being ... And the Word was made flesh and lived among us.”

The one who sits at the table with his disciples in that dark night is the Word of God. The same Word that in another dark night said, “let there be light,” and there was light.

The same Word that sprinkled the black night with stars and planets, with galaxies and comets.

The Word at whose sound the earth trembles and the heavens flee.

But now it is night. It is night, because the Word came to his own, and his own received him not.

“The Lord Jesus, in the night he was betrayed...”

The Word who spoke in the beginning is about to speak again.

What will his word be?

Lightening from heaven, to smite the brazen traitor who dares sit at the table with him?

Fire and brimstone over Jerusalem, the ungrateful city that he would have liked to shelter as a hen shelters its chick, but will soon call for his death?

Death and pestilence on the Roman Empire, about to hang him on a cross?

A shattering of bones for those voluble disciples, that today follow him and on the morrow will flee?

“The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, ... took bread!; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is broken for you’.”

To the voluble disciples who will soon desert him: “Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you.”

To the shameless traitor who dares to eat from his plate: “Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you.”

To those who come to apprehend him with clubs and swords: "Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you."

To Caiaphas and his priests, to the scribes and elders who plot his death: "Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you."

To those who will mock him spitting on him and inviting him to prophesy: "Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you."

To that foxy Pontius Pilate, who will try to erase the shame of his actions by washing his hands: "Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you."

To the entire world, to this world of his, that was made by him, but would not receive him: "Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you."

"The Lord Jesus, in the night when he was betrayed, took bread..."

He did not take the gold and glitter of those who need to prove how important they are.

He did not take the sword or the bow of those who need to prove how powerful they are.

No! He took bread! Bread, the most common of foods.

"The Lord Jesus, in the night when he was betrayed ... took bread!; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: 'Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you'."

In the night when he was betrayed, a night of pain and anguish, a night of conspiracies and mockery, a night of disappointment and betrayal, the Lord Jesus took bread. And this bread became his response and his challenge to the darkness of the night.

"The Lord Jesus, in the night when he was betrayed ... took bread!; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said: 'Take, eat. This is my body that is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me'."

And it is for that reason, because the Lord so instructed them, that through the ages his disciples have gathered to break bread. And that bread broken in remembrance of him has become their response and their challenge to every night they have had to face.

Shortly after that dark night of betrayal, the disciples were persecuted by the most powerful empire of their time. They were said to be fanatics. They were said to be ignorant. They were said to be immoral. They were even said to be atheists! And in the midst of all that, like a light in the dark of the night, the disciples gathered. They gathered in homes. They gathered in cemeteries. They gathered under the night sky. But they gathered! They gathered **to break bread in remembrance of him.**

And centuries passed. And the roman Empire passed. And the marching of its legions became no more than a distant echo in the annals of history. And still the disciples gathered. They gathered **to break bread in remembrance of him.**

And there were invasions. There was war and destruction. There was violence and pestilence. But as in the darkness of that first night the disciples still gathered. They gathered **to break bread in remembrance of him.**

Through the ages there have been other persecutions.

There has been schism and error.

There has been doubt and complacency.

There have been difficult times, when the price of faith was high.

And there have been easy times, when faith becomes cheap and it is difficult to remain faithful to the Lord of the cross and of the narrow gate.

But through it all, high and low, his disciples have gathered. They have gathered **to break bread in remembrance of him.**

Paul tells us that he received from the Lord what he has also handed on to us, and that therefore, "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lords death, **until he comes.**

Until he comes we are still living in the night.

It is the night of terrorists and of oppression in the very land that was made holy by the Lord's feet.

It is the night of greed leading to war.

It is the night in which children starve to death and the elderly freeze to death.

It is the night in which even those who believe are assailed by doubt and despair.

It is the night in which we find it easy to desert the Lord, as his first disciples did in that first night.

It is night. **Until he comes**, it is night. It is the night of betrayal, of disappointment, of unexplainable tragedy.

And in the midst of the night, as in that first night, as in so many other nights, the disciples gather to break bread in remembrance of him, because The Lord Jesus, in the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me."

But, is it enough to break bread? When Jesus said "**This do** in remembrance of me," did he mean only that we were to break bread in remembrance of him?

What Jesus did on that night was much more than to break bread. What he did was to give his body for others. Breaking bread is easy. But what gave that bread its unique power was the betrayal of Judas, the fickleness of Peter, the anguish of Ghetsemani, the injustice of the pretorium, the agony of the cross. Jesus has given us bread, yes; but this bread is of special significance because he gave himself for us. It is in that context of giving bread and giving his own self that Jesus told his disciples, and now tell us, "**this do**, in remembrance of me." To do **this** is not just to break bread; it is also to take the cross, to give oneself for others.

"This is my body which is broken for you. This do in remembrance of me." And in remembrance of him Peter was crucified.

And in remembrance of him Paul was beheaded.

And in remembrance of him martyrs suffered.

And in remembrance of him missionaries traveled.

And in remembrance of him millions have given up their lives, and in giving it up they have found it.

And in remembrance of him homes and shelters have been built for orphans,
and for the elderly, and for the homeless, and for the sick.

And in remembrance of him the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the
captives are set free.

It is to this remembrance, to this active and costly remembrance, to this joyful and
victorious remembrance, that we commit ourselves as we share this bread and
drink of this cup, announcing the Lord's death **until he comes**.