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Ash Wednesday

February 18, 2026

Text: Luke 22:1-13

Title: A Place at the Table for You (adapted from a text by Prof. D. Schmidt)

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Emily was a woman who had her place. Her pastor learned this one day as he was bringing her communion at home. She couldn't go out of the house without difficulty, and the pastor had started bringing her the Sacrament once a month. One day, after the service in her living room, she finally asked the question that was on her mind, "Pastor, has anyone begun to sit in my place?" To Emily that was very important. It was her place: her place of worship, her place of prayer, her place among God's people, so she was afraid of the answer. Because for Emily, sitting there alone in her home, knowing that she would not be coming back to church any time soon, it was very important that she still have a place.

You might know Emily's fear, the fear of losing your place. It happens to all of us. We're certain about our job, our role in someone's life and then suddenly things change and we find that someone else has come and taken our position, done our work and we've lost our place. You used to be the one who could work well with numbers at the office. But then in comes a new hire, with new software, and you find that others are seeking her advice about finances or, worse yet, they're doing it themselves. You've begun to lose your place, and you begin to wonder how long you'll be needed around here. You survey the workforce, do some mental downsizing and suddenly, you begin to wonder if you might lose your place.

If you've ever felt that fear, then you have an inkling of what was going on in our sermon text this evening from Luke 22. The evangelist tells us that "The Feast of Unleavened Bread drew near." This was the Holy Celebration of the Passover and yet it was filled with an unholy

fear. Luke tells us that “the chief priests and teachers of the law were looking for some way to get rid of Jesus, for they were afraid of the people” (v. 2). Afraid of the people? That’s a strange thing to say about these men. After all, they were the ones who confidently took their places among people. They loved having the most important seats in the synagogue. They were experts in the law, able to make a person break under its burden with just a single word. They wore the long tassels on their clothes. They gave a tenth of their possessions. They could stand in the synagogue and thank God that they were not like all of the sinners. They had wisdom, power, and the respect of the people, and then Jesus came.

His ministry attracted crowds. His words touched hearts. His hands opened eyes and his words and deeds were everywhere. His very presence brought about a life that they had never known and a gratitude that they could only describe as divine. And with his words and his work among the people, they had begun to lose their place. And so, they gather on this day, and plot the Lord’s death. While everyone around them is preparing for Passover, they are afraid, and in that fear they plot Jesus’ death.

Consider the irony here. Luke tells us that the feast of Passover was approaching and then the only preparation for the feast that he reveals is fear and conspiracy and intended murder. He takes us into the lives of the religious leaders of the community and reveals their sin. When the leaders of God’s people spend their time plotting death before the Passover, one can only wonder what lies at the heart of their religion. It shouldn’t surprise us then that Luke talks about the Foe. This is certainly Satan’s realm: religion on the outside but murderous corruption within. Luke opens our eyes to see that where there is fear, the Foe is typically close by. Satan enters Judas, and Judas discusses how he might betray Jesus. Not only is there the presence of the Foe, but there is also the use of force. Luke makes sure to point out that when Judas comes

to visit the religious leaders, he finds them with “the officers of the temple guard” (v. 4). If you can’t secure your position by your work among the people, you can at least protect your position by force. Not only does Luke point to the use of force, but he also points to finances. Upon hearing of Judas’ offer of betrayal, “they were delighted and agreed to give him money” (v. 5). So we have fear, we have force, we have finances, and we have the Foe. A truly deadly combination, and it brings about death in the life of faith, both then and now.

Remember when you used to be the pride of your child. After practice he or she came running to meet you at the car and the ride home was filled with talking, questions of your opinion, and security in your words. Now, you’re lucky if you’re needed to pick him up, and when he runs to the car, it’s to get out of there as quick as possible so that no one will see him with you. And the ride home . . . well that’s now filled with your apprehensive questions, his one word answers, and your mutual silence as he looks at his phone. You wonder where things went wrong. You realize that you’ve begun to lose your place. His friends and his desire to be free have taken your place as a parent. When you begin to fear what’s happening, it becomes easy to turn to force. You begin to demand that you pick your child up from practices. Where there is force, finances are sure to follow. Who pays for his equipment? If you pay money for his equipment, he better realize that you have a right to know what happened at the game. Force and finance and deep down, further down than any of us can notice, lies the Foe. He is working in the lives of you and your child to bring about anger and separation.

Luke, however, points out that in the face of all of this, in the face of fear, force, finances, and the power of the Foe, there is one other factor. There is God. God who prepares a place for His people at Passover. God is still at work in this story, and His work is really so simple that if you don’t read closely you may miss it altogether. Luke writes, “Jesus sent Peter and John,

saying, ‘Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover.’ . . . They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover” (v. 8 and 13). Jesus speaks, and a place is prepared. In the middle of all of this, God is still at work. He is preparing a place for His people. That is what the Passover is, after all, a place where God comes and rescues His people. A place where God declares that He and He alone is at work to set His people free.

God’s people have gone far away from Him, but Passover still draws near. Love has turned into fear. Fear has turned into action. Service has turned into force and offerings into bribes. But still, Passover draws near. Regardless of what people are doing, God continues to do His work. It is His work after all, that sets people free. God alone sets His people free. Through God’s action, His people are brought out of their sin into salvation. And year after year, decade after decade, God’s people gather to celebrate that simple and wonderful work.

Today we gather to begin another Lenten season. Once again, Passover draws near. And this year, among us, there are those who have lost their places. Relationships have changed, children have grown, jobs have become less secure, and those who were once close now seem far away. And in the midst of all this change, we might get that sinking feeling, that fear in the pit of our stomach, wondering how will we survive, how will we manage. These weeks of Lent come to show you that one thing does not change when everything else does. Passover draws near and God still does His work of redeeming love. He prepares a place for you.

This Lent, we will gather for a season to reflect on the Places of the Passion. 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 account. It’s a simple story, and you’ve been to these places before. The upper room, the garden of Gethsemane, the halls of Pontius Pilate, the hills of Golgotha, these are the places we remember when we meditate on our Lord’s Passion. Yet when Jesus

enters a place, he never leaves it as he finds it. We will see tonight and every night that no matter where we are in our lives, God is still coming, and He is preparing a place just for us.

So, tonight, we begin our Lenten observance with a celebration of the Lord's Supper. Tonight, God comes and brings with Him a feast that always has a place for you. His suffering, His death, His resurrection had 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 just for you. It's a simple meal, a simple story and a simple remembrance, but what a wonderful work God has done and is doing for His people through it. There is no need for fear, not on this day. When Jesus is the Lord of the table, and when He is the subject of your Lenten contemplation, there is always a place just for you. Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.