

Mark 14: 12-26 The Last Supper (Williamson, Jr.)

This passage consists of three small units: preparation for Passover (vv.12-16), prediction of betrayal (vv. 17-21), and covenant meal (vv. 22-25). The three are tied together by unity of place (in the city) and of action (the last supper). Verse 26 is transitional, for it marks the end of the Last Supper passage. The preceding unit (14:1-22) showed the preparations for Jesus' death by his enemies and by an anonymous woman. Now Jesus himself and his disciples prepare for the Passover. The supper itself prepares participants to understand the impending death of Jesus, to be sustained in their life together while he is absent, and to anticipate eagerly with him the coming Kingdom of God. ¹

Preparation for Passover (14:12-16).

The point of specifying the time is to draw attention to the fact that Jesus died during the Jewish fest of liberation. Mark insists that the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples was Passover; the commemoration of God's deliverance of his people from bondage.²

Covenant Meal (14: 22-26)

The series of verbs, took, blessed, broke, gave, and said (v.22), though not found in Old Testament passages on Passover, characterize each account of the institution of the Christian Eucharist (Matt. 26:26-29); Luke 22:14-23; I Cor. 11: 23-26). "Eucharist" derives from the Greek word for "having given thanks" (eucharistesas, v. 23) which here parallel "blessed" (v. 22). Both terms doubtless refer to the traditional Jewish benedictions pronounced over bread and wine:

*Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe,
who brings forth bread from the earth,
Blessed art Thou, L Lord our God, King of the Universe,
who createst the fruit of the vine. (Midrash Breakoth VI.!)*

God is blessed, not the bread or wine; the blessing consists in giving thanks. These blessings, used by pious Jews at any meal including Passover, underlie the terminology of the Christian Eucharist, a thanksgiving to God for Christ's gift of his life ("Take, this is my body;" "this is my blood... poured out for many"). The use of "cup" instead of "wine" (v. 23) has symbolic significance, as at 10:38-39 (when James and John seek first places) and at 14:36 (in Gethsemane). In all three texts, God gives the cup; it is a cup of death. Pss. 116:13 and 23:5 also speak of a cup symbolically; "the cup of salvation." paradoxically, the cup of 14:23 is a cup of death and a cup of salvation. The cup is related to the blood of the covenant (v. 24; cf. Ex. 24:3-8). The particular formulation, "My blood of the covenant," interprets Jesus' death in terms of a new covenant (cf. Jer. 31:31-34) sealed by his bloodshed "for many" (cf. Mark 10:45; notes p. 190) and appropriated in this new covenant meal. ³

"*Truly, I say to you, I shall not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.*" Jesus vows to abstain from drinking wine until, in the newness of the time of consummation (Rev. 21:5), he will drink it at the messianic banquet (Is. 25: 6-8) in the Kingdom of God

¹ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Interpretation: Bible Commentary on Mark* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983), 250.

² Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Interpretation: Bible Commentary on Mark* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983), 251.

³ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Interpretation: Bible Commentary on Mark* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983), 253.

(Matt. 22:1-10; par. Luke 14:15-24). His solemn affirmation underscores the certainty of the kingdom hope and strongly suggests the nearness of the coming of the Son of man... It is memorable affirmation look beyond present distress and give thanks to God for coming victory (cf. esp. Ps. 118:1, 17, 22-23, 29). A passage which began by preparing disciples for the death of Jesus ends by pointing them to the glory of his coming kingdom.⁴

This theme makes of the Lord's Supper not only memorial but also an anticipation. Whatever may be our sense of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament, our communion with him in the interim between his resurrection and his return is incomplete. Jesus' vow of abstinence points to a fulfillment, still future for us but impending, toward which he looks with eager anticipation. Disciples who share this hope are united in a common yearning as they "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26).⁵

SIGNIFICANCE

This passage is the foundation story for the church's central liturgical act, the Eucharist. Mark 14:12-26 appears in the lectionaries as a reading from Maundy Thursday or Passion Sunday. It is appropriately preached or taught any time the Lord's Supper is observed, or in preparation for such occasions. Ironically, the sacrament intended to celebrate the unity of Christians with their Lord and each other has become a source of division in the church. Interpretation might therefore focus on the themes of the Gospel of Mark that come together in this passage, for they tend to unify not only the Gospel but also Jesus' disciples who reflect on them today.⁶

The Eucharistic theme, first seen in the feeding stories of 6:30-44 (pp. 128-29) and 8: 1-21(pp. 142, 146), finds echo and fulfillment when Jesus gives bread and wine to the Twelve in the upper room. Although the presence of a betrayer casts an ominous shadow (vv. 17-21), the meal is nevertheless an expression of communion between Jesus and his disciples (v. 14b) that nourishes disciples individually and binds them to their Lord and to each other (".... they all drank of it," v. 23b). We search Mark in vain for "Do this in remembrance of me" (I Cor. 11:24-25). The communion depicted here is not institutionalized. Instead, the text speaks of oneness with Jesus Christ based on inward appropriation of his death for us and oneness with each other that unites those who, at great personal cost, seek to follow Jesus, thereby drinking his cup (10:39).⁷

The present passage is significant because it helps us to understand that Jesus' death is for us, that it sets us free, and that it secures for us a place among the covenant people of God. Mark 14: 12-26 binds disciples of Jesus to their Lord, to each other, and to God's redemptive work in history.⁸

⁴ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Interpretation: Bible Commentary on Mark* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983), 254.

⁵ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Interpretation: Bible Commentary on Mark* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983), 256.

⁶ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Interpretation: Bible Commentary on Mark* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983), 254.

⁷ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Interpretation: Bible Commentary on Mark* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983), 255.

⁸ Lamar Williamson, Jr. *Interpretation: Bible Commentary on Mark* (John Knox Press: Atlanta, 1983), 256.