

We are a covenant people. Were you aware of that? Covenant relationships are the kind that God forms with his people. It is a relationship filled with God’s promises. God said through Jeremiah, “*I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people*” (31:33). Jeremiah spoke of a *new covenant*. God initiated it and God established the boundaries. And God guarantees the covenant will be kept. In the Lord’s Supper, Jesus shows that he is the one who fulfills God’s covenant promises. The set time had fully come, and a *new covenant* was established through the blood of Jesus.

The sacrament of Baptism initiates us into the covenantal family of God. It is a sign and seal of our participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. We pass through water, like Israel passed through the Red Sea. We are delivered and we receive a new identity. As baptism is a one-time sacrament showing we belong to Christ, the Lord’s Supper is an oft-repeated renewal of that baptismal promise. We are *new covenant* people living as citizens in the kingdom of God—showing the reign of Jesus in our homes, at work, in our relationships, and through our character. All aspects of our lives become a foretaste of the kingdom of God.

The Lord’s Supper is a meal by which we renew our baptismal identity: God’s covenant people becoming God’s kingdom people. Mark’s telling of the Last Supper is the only gospel that refers to *both* covenant and kingdom. That’s why I chose it for today’s Scripture. I want everyone to see the connection between the sacrament of baptism and our invitation to the Lord’s table. If Communion is a covenant meal for the covenant people of God, then it is a meal for baptized believers, including children who are baptized believers and who have their parents’ blessing to participate. If you are an unbaptized believer you may want to call me sometime so we can discuss taking the plunge, so to speak. But now, let’s dig deeper into Mark’s account of Jesus’ institution of the supper.

In William Lane’s commentary, *The Gospel of Mark*, we read that observance of the Passover would typically involve the following elements (Eerdmans, 1974, pp. 501-502):

- A blessing of the festival and the wine.
- Drinking the first of four cups of wine.
- Presentation of the food—unleavened bread, bitter herbs, stewed fruit, and lamb.
- The son’s question: “Why is this night different from all other nights?”
- The father’s recounting of the Exodus story.
- A word of praise and thanksgiving for redemption.
- The singing of a Hallel Psalm (from Psalms 113-115).

- Drinking the second cup of wine.
- The taking of bread and the offering of a blessing.
- The breaking of bread and the distribution.
- Eating bread with bitter herbs and stewed fruit.
- Eating roasted lamb.
- Drinking the third cup of wine with a prayer of thanksgiving.
- The singing of a Hallel Psalm (from Psalms 116-118).
- Drinking the fourth cup of wine.

By the time the Gospel of Mark was written, the Lord's Supper would have been an established ritual within the early church—observed as a Christian practice rather than a Jewish one. The church simplified the Passover observance and tailored it to its own beliefs and needs. The focus naturally became Jesus rather than the Exodus. However, the church retained the Passover emphasis on blessings bestowed by God in the past and the hope of blessings that will be bestowed by God at some time in the future.

“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples” (v. 22a). From the Passover list I just read, the taking of the bread and the offering of a blessing take place about halfway into the festivities. Jesus assumes the role of father in blessing, breaking, and distributing the bread. As noted, this would have taken place after the drinking of the second cup of wine. The Passover blessing Jesus would have used is this: “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.” The blessing, you see, was a blessing of *God* rather than the *bread* per se. *“And [he] gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take it; this is my body’”* (v. 22b). Matthew’s Gospel reports Jesus as saying, *“Take and eat; this is my body”* (26:26). Luke’s Gospel reports Jesus as saying, *“This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me”* (22:19). In 1st Corinthians Paul reports Jesus as saying, *“This is my body which is for you; do this in remembrance of me”* (11:24).

Most of us are aware that Protestants and Catholics interpret these words differently. You may be wondering what these different interpretations mean:

- Catholics, interpret these words literally, believing in Transubstantiation—that the bread and wine, when consecrated, become the body and blood of Christ, even though they maintain the appearance of bread and wine.
- Lutherans believe in Consubstantiation—that “the body and blood of Christ are present to the communicant ‘in, with, and under’ the elements of bread and wine.” The old *Encarta* encyclopedia says that “Luther illustrated Consubstantiation by the analogy of iron put into a fire: Iron and fire are united in red-hot iron; yet the two substances remain unchanged.”

- Most Protestants interpret Jesus' words metaphorically and find in the bread and wine symbols of the body and blood of Jesus and a promise that Christ is truly present with us (as Calvin said) when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. But all Christians agree that Jesus transformed the meaning of the bread and wine so that rather than pointing to the Exodus deliverance, they now point to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross and our deliverance from sin and death. And we all agree that Jesus is present with us in some form in the Lord's Supper.

"Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it" (v. 23). This would be the third of the four cups in the Passover. As I mentioned earlier, usually they would have eaten the roasted lamb between the distribution of the bread and the distribution of the wine. Jesus says in v. 24 *"This is my blood of the covenant."* In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (26:28).* In Luke's Gospel, Jesus says, *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you" (22:20).* Take note of the addition of the word "new" in Luke. Paul also uses the word "new" when he records Jesus words: *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:25).* Jeremiah prophesied this *new covenant*—a covenant where God would write his law on people's hearts and where God would say, *"For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more" (Jeremiah 31:34).*

The first mention of "the blood of the covenant" (and the only time that phrase is used in the Old Testament) took place after God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. At God's direction, Moses assembled the elders to worship God. They made animal sacrifices and sprinkled blood on the altar. Moses also took blood and sprinkled it on the people, saying, *"This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words" (Exodus 24:8).* A covenant, as I said before, is an agreement between two parties. Essentially, a contract that typically describes what is required of each party and the benefits that each party can expect to enjoy. Examples of human covenants include everything from an agreement between a buyer and a seller to a treaty between two or more nations. (We could desperately use one in Ukraine)

In a relationship between two parties of unequal power, the more powerful person would likely dictate the terms of the covenant. In keeping with this reality, God always initiated covenants with people and established their terms. However, unlike most human covenants, where the terms would favor the more powerful party, covenants between God and humans typically were quite generous to God's human partners. The first covenant

was established when Noah came out of the ark and God promised that “*Never again will all life be destroyed by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth*” (Genesis 9:11). The next covenant was established between God and Abram. God required that Abram leave his father’s house and go to the land that God would show him. In return, God promised to make Abram the father of a great nation and to bless him and to make him a blessing to all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). God renewed this covenant with Moses (Exodus 24) with Joshua (Joshua 24) with Jehoiada (2 Kings 11) with Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29:10) with Josiah (2 Kings 23:3) and with David (2 Samuel 7:12-17). These covenants were all preliminary to the *new covenant* established by Jesus (Mark 14:24).

Jesus says, “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many*” (v. 24). Jesus had just experienced an anointing with an expensive ointment. It caused some people to say, “*Why this waste of perfume?*” (14:4). But Jesus replies, “*Leave her alone. Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing...She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial*” (14:6-8). Pouring out a cup of wine might appear to be wasteful—as would the blood of Jesus. But Jesus’ blood would be “*poured out for many,*” a sacrifice that would bring salvation to the world. It would NOT be wasted; but would instead draw people everywhere to Jesus. Then he says, “*Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God*” (v. 25). In verse 25, Jesus confirms his expectation that he will soon die—yet he makes the promise of drinking wine with his disciples in the kingdom of God.

A few years ago, when our son Jeremy and his family were still living in Brooklyn, NY we attended church with them one Sunday morning. They celebrated the Lord’s Supper every Sunday and always invited the children to receive Communion as well. As Jayne and I walked forward to those who were serving, the Anderson family were a few steps ahead of us. Four-year-old Stanley was at his mother’s side. But somehow, he had wiggled ahead of her and when one of the servers lowered the tray of wine Stanley grabbed one and gulped it down before anyone knew it. His mother stood there shocked. But Stanley, a child of the covenant, had a truly classic reaction: *Aah!*

In the Lord’s Supper, we remember not only what Jesus has done for us on the cross, but we anticipate living with him in *the kingdom of God*. At that time, Jesus will share that fourth cup of wine with all of his followers, you and me, and Stanley, when we drink it and say, *Aah! Amen.*