

Michael McGowan

Matthew 26:26-29 – **The Long-Awaited Reunion**

Preached at Trinity CRC

December 23, 2018

We are on the home stretch to Christmas—

On the last Sunday of Advent.

Tomorrow night your little kids and grandchildren will be going to bed...

They'll be so excited about Tuesday's festivities that they'll probably have trouble sleeping.

(At least that's how I was)

They are full of excitement—

The anticipation is coming to its highest point—

And rightfully so...

Because soon they'll celebrate the birth of Christ...

The Son of God coming to live among us.

(Oh yeah, and they'll be excited about opening up presents too)

But this morning we're still in Advent...

An intentional season of waiting for the arrival.

And when Christmas comes...and then quickly goes...we'll still be in a season of waiting.

Because our lives are defined by this waiting.

We're living in the middle of the tension...

The tension between the birth of Christ and his coming again to us...

Our present reality is the tension between the past and the future...

Christ's 1st and 2nd coming.

I don't have to tell you that we're living in the waiting...

And living in the tension—

Because we feel it...

You may not put words to it (or label it as such), but it's something we live in everyday.

“Jesus, where are you?”

“Why are things so broken?”

“Why is life and family and work so hard?”

“Why am I so wearied by it all?”

This morning we'll be looking at the other end of the tension:

The 2nd coming of Christ.

And to get us there we'll be reading words familiar to most of us.

Hear these words from Jesus to his disciples at the Last Supper.

Matthew 26:26-29:

²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take and eat; this is my body.”

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

Our girls are 6 months old now...

And they're starting to get to that fun age—where they start to interact with us.

They recognize our faces and want to be around us.

This also means that they notice when we leave.

We can be playing on the ground together and see some of the biggest smiles...

But then when we get up...just seconds later...

Their faces start to wrinkle up and turn red.

The smile quickly turns to a look of panic and then comes the crying...

A mild form of separation anxiety.

In our passage, Jesus is getting ready to leave his disciples.

This is the last meal that he'll share with them before one of them betrays Jesus;
 The last time they get together over a meal like this before he is arrested;
 Before he is tried;
 Before he is crucified;
 And before he is killed.

Now, what do you do when a loved one is about to leave?

When a friend, spouse, or parents will be away for a couple weeks, or maybe even a few months?—maybe they're moving away for good...

What do you do?

You cancel all plans with everyone else...

And you spend time with that loved one.

You carve out space to be with them...and it's typically time spent over a meal.

This is what Jesus is doing with his disciples.

He knows that he's going away from them.

In the parallel account of the Lord's Supper in the Gospel of Luke he says:

"I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." (Luke 22:15)

Jesus is anticipating a time of separation from his friends and followers...

So he has a farewell dinner. (Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*)

I don't know if the disciples are able to grasp what's going on here...

But soon they will see:

Their teacher and friend who walked with them for a few years now;
 The one who called them out of their old vocation to follow him;
 The one who set their life in a new direction;
 The one who gave them hope...

He is about to be taken away from them.

We already know how the disciples responded to Jesus earlier when he tells them he's going away:

They're confused...

They don't understand...

Peter even gets angry and rebukes Jesus.

The disciples are uncomfortable with Jesus leaving.

They're kind of like our babies who experience separation anxiety.

And we're the same way...

We're living in the confusion, the fear, and the anxiety between Christ's 1st and 2nd coming.

Christ was born into our world and into our history...

God the Son walked among us...

He gave us love and gave us hope.

But then he was taken away from us...

He suffers a criminal's death on the tree for sins he didn't commit.

"Jesus, where did you go?"

"Jesus, why did you leave us?"

The tension that you feel today is in part from this being separated from Christ...

We sense deep down that something is missing...

There is a hole in our lives—

A connection that we're longing for—

And we try to fill it with all sorts of things.

One simple question that we can ask ourselves is:

"When I'm lonely, where do I turn?"

Something deep inside of us is looking for a divine connection...

So where do we go to make or fabricate that intimacy we're looking for?

To sustain us during our separation?

Is it social media?

Is it booze?

Is it video games?

Is it unhealthy forms of sex?

Do you move from one relationship to another, not quite finding what you're looking for...?

Always thinking it's the other person.

Do you just completely check out and sit in front of the TV for a few hours?

Do you put in too many hours at work?

There is longing inside of us—

A feeling that something's missing in our lives—

And we're longing to be put back together...

We're longing to be reunited with Christ...

Where we can see him face to face...

And know once and for all that he loves us without end.

And it's not just us...

It's happening all over the world.

There is a humanitarian crisis in Yemen as people are needlessly starving...

Millions of people are still displaced from their homes because of fighting in Syria and parts of Central America...

Violence is increasing in this nation as seen in the homicide rate increase in Toronto.

Natural disasters are ruining coastlines, forests, and wiping out small cities.

Around the world people are suffering...

They know what it's like to live in the tension of having a broken world.

In the early 1950s North Korea and South Korea went to war...

As many of us know.

What we may not realize though is that families were separated.

Many people fled during the war...

Leaving family members across the border as they ran away from the violence.

South Korea estimates that there are 6-700,000 S. Koreans with family in N. Korea.

And still, to this day, they haven't seen their loved ones.

Most don't even know if they're alive because they're not allowed to cross the border...

In the North they're not allowed to send or receive letters, phone calls, or emails.

Could you imagine fleeing a traumatic situation...

And then not seeing your child for 70 years?

We're not talking about a baby on the floor for 10 seconds anymore...

We're talking 70 years of separation.

Can you imagine how desperate you would be just to hear their voice...

Just to know that they're still alive...

That there's still hope that you'd see them again.

Imagine how much you would long to see your mom or your dad, your son or your daughter, after 70 years.

Our world is suffering—

We feel the pain of separation—

As we live in the heightened anticipation of Christ's second coming...

Where he will come to judge both the living and the dead...

Where he will destroy all evil and heal all of this world's brokenness.

Thanks be to God that he is planning this reunion...

The Lord tells us that he's coming back.

In Christ's words we have a promise...

We're given a confident word that in fact we will be reunited.

In the last verse of our passage—

A verse that sometimes gets overlooked—

Jesus says, "I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (v.29)

He doesn't say, "when I drink it in my Father's kingdom..."

Jesus says, "when I drink it *with you* in my Father's kingdom!"

He's telling his disciples that in fact there is a day when they'll meet again...

They'll meet again in the flesh in the fullness of time...

When God makes all things right.

And in that eternal kingdom there will be a meal—

It will be a feast—

When Jesus is reunited with his friends and followers those feelings of separation—

Brokenness;

Loneliness;

Anxiety—

They'll all be met and healed when our Savior returns.

When Christ comes to judge the living and the dead, we won't have to be afraid...

We do not have to fear God's wrath, because in Christ the penalty of our sin has been paid for.

We can be confident that when we're reunited there will be much joy.

Like seeing a beloved friend after decades of separation.

Just this past summer the N. Korean government allowed 90 elderly S. Koreans into the country for a few days to reunite with their loved ones.

This is a picture of a 92-year-old S. Korean woman who was separated from her son...

Lee was reunited with her son Ri after 70 years this past August.

The last time she saw him he was 4.

This is 99-year-old Han seeing her 2 daughters for the first time since the war.

After years of separation—

Years of longing—

You can't really put into words what it's like to be together again.

I imagine this is how it will be for us when we're reunited with Christ...face to face.

All of the longing...

All of the brokenness...

All of the sadness...

All of the anger...

It's all going to be mended and transformed into unspeakable joy when we're reunited with Christ.

In Christ's words there is a promise...

But in the meal he shares there's also fulfillment.

The Lord has not turned his back on our present condition.

God has not forsaken us now in this time.

For in this meal it has already started...

The veil between heaven and earth has been torn open...

And the Lord comes to meet with us now.

This meal is not just a symbol of what's to come...

This is the beginning/commencement of what will some day be fulfilled when we dine with Christ in the flesh in the kingdom of God. (Ridderbos, 412)

Every time we break bread together at this table...

We commune with the living Spirit of Christ.

Yes, we live in the tension of Christ's 1st and 2nd coming...

Yes, we feel the physical separation of our Lord in not being able to see him...

But we don't live in the tension alone.

Because the Spirit has been sent into this world now.

The Spirit walks with us wherever we go...

He is present with us as we journey through the pain and suffering of life...

Always pointing us back to Christ.

And the Spirit is especially present with us at this meal...

Allowing us to eat with our risen Savior.

But this meal is only for God's people...

It's only for those who have been welcomed into God's family through the sacrifice of Christ.

Because when Jesus took the cup and said,

“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”—

He was pointing to what he was about to do on the cross.

He was about to shed his blood for the sins of God’s people...

Jesus was going to be the sacrificial lamb on which was laid all of the wrongs committed against God by his people.

In his blood, Christ was opening up the way to God for us.

This is the only way that our reunion with God happens:

Through the work of Christ on our behalf.

So if you feel the Spirit tugging on your heart...

I encourage you to respond...

Repent of the wrongs you’ve done in your life...

And allow Christ to pay the price for you...

So that you can be reunited with the source of all life and joy.

Let’s pray.