

*12On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" 13So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, 14and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' 15He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." 16So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.*

*17When it was evening, he came with the twelve. 18And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." 19They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" 20He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. 21For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."*

*22While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." 23Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. 24He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. 25Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

*26When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

Maybe it was because our well water was scarce. Maybe it was because time was scarce or because my mother's energy was scarce.

Whatever the reason at our house when I was very young, baths were a once a week event. No daily shower, but once a week, on Saturday night, one after another we four children were given a bath. Always on Saturday night for on Sunday morning we would be going to church.

To go to church meant that we wore our very best, we were our very cleanest. We were going to worship God.

In our own way, we were being like the ancient people of Israel. The holiest place in their land was the place of God's dwelling in the temple. Only the most pure, the most prepared could approach.

I think of God's presence with God's people as a great treasure. The people surrounded that treasure with their best and their finest - the way it should be.

But tonight we find out how it is.

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it to them and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."

God had prepared for this most holy moment. Jesus told the disciples of the man carrying the jar, the upper room furnished and ready. Everything was as Jesus had told them. A holy moment, a holy meal - and how was it surrounded? Hear Jesus words before and after.

"Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me."

That was just before the holy moment.

After? Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'"

God took the treasure of the Last Supper and placed it in a pile of garbage. God took the holy jewel of Jesus faithfulness and surrounded it by a setting of the disciples' betrayal and desertion. Instead of gathering around Jesus a people pure and holy, he sat at table with friends who were filthy and failing.

How foreign to every human instinct was this act of God in Jesus.

If only we could gather a really committed people, I tell myself - a worthy people - a holy people - a people all shiny clean - leaders, models of righteousness.

The world would flock to us; want to be like us, one of us.

But God gathers deserters, a betrayer, a denier at the table of God's Son. God establishes God's new covenant with people who fall asleep when asked to watch and pray. The inner circle, the very best, fall asleep.

To these Jesus said, "Take, this is my body." And as all of them drank from the cup he promised, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many."

One of the great dangers that you and I face with bodies recently bathed, and clothes crisp and new is to think that we are different from them. Make it any them that you want - the lazy - the ones who take advantage of the system - the ones who do little work around here - the rich - the poor - anyone who is not like me. We think we belong to Jesus in a way they do not.

But then we remember that Jesus invited only deserters and betrayers to his supper. And still does.

As we gather he offers his body, his very life given on the cross for you. Christ enters into you, his one body making us into one body - one people.

I suppose there was nothing wrong with our Saturday night baths, or with our fine new clothes as long as all was done to glorify and honor God and not ourselves.

But God does not want us fooled by our preparations, whether physical or spiritual. Always our treasure is Christ. Always we receive him as betrayers, deserters. Always we are made one new people, one new body in him.