

# Shepherd of the Hills

## LUTHERAN CHURCH

**GROUNDING AND GROWING – MAUNDY THURSDAY**

**THE TABLE IS SET**

**APRIL 2, 2026**

### **CALL TO WORSHIP**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Jesus gathers his friends for a final meal.

**We come to the table he sets for us.**

On the night before he suffered, he took bread and cup.

**We come to remember and to receive.**

The hour is near. The gift is given. **We come to eat and drink with Christ.**

### **WELCOME**

Tonight is a night of tables – tables God has set for God's people. We gather to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that is faithful to the long story of God's people. Across scripture, meals were often shared at moments of danger and decision: On the eve of escape, in the face of desperate hunger, in the presence of enemies, on the night before betrayal.

These are the stories that form the soil in which our own celebration of the Lord's Supper takes root. To be grounded and growing tonight is to remember that God has always met God's people at the Table in all sorts of circumstances. It is to trust that God plants courage where fear is thick; that God feeds hope where power tries to starve it out; and that God keeps cultivating blessing even when many feel exposed, expendable, or forgotten.

### **PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Tonight, we come before God with with hungry hearts and heavy hands; with fear we cannot shake and hope we barely dare to trust. We come with the burdens we carry and the burdens we have helped create. Trusting in God's steadfast love, let us pray.

*(A brief silence.)*

**Gracious God, we come to your table from a world under duress. We lament the fear that is thick in our communities – fear for our neighbors, fear for the vulnerable, fear that power will do what it always does when it goes unchecked.**

**We grieve those who are hungry and those who are hunted, those who are forced to flee, and those whose lives are treated as expendable. We lament families torn apart, truth twisted into propaganda, and the slow erosion of trust.**

**We bring our weariness, our anxious waiting, and our grief for what has been lost. We lament the ways the earth itself is being consumed – soil exhausted, waters polluted, and forests felled as if creation were only fuel for someone else’s comfort.**

**We confess that we are not only wounded by this broken world – we are also shaped by it. We hoard what we have as if we were saving ourselves. We cling to comfort and call it wisdom. We protect our own place at the table while others are left outside. We come to your feast but resist your command to love.**

**We want justice, but only if it’s not too costly. We want communion, without the hard work of community. We confess the sins we know, the sins we excuse, and the sins we barely notice. Forgive us, O Lord. Prune what is false. Plant what is true. Teach us to walk the way of Christ.**

#### **ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

Hear the good news. The God who brought a people out of slavery still breaks the chains that bind us. The God who set a table in the wilderness still feeds those who have lost their way. The God who raised Jesus from the grave still grows life out of death. Friends, hear the good news: In Jesus Christ, we are forgiven and made new. In Jesus Christ, we are not overcome.

**Thanks be to God.**

#### **SERMON**

*PASTOR JANET KETTERING*

Tonight, we come to this Table as the people of God always have – sometimes boldly, sometimes bewildered, sometimes barely holding on. We do not come to this meal from a place of comfort or ease, but under duress. We are being stretched in so many ways – uncomfortably, painfully, fearfully.

Our world is deeply troubled. Our environment is groaning under the weight of extraction and exploitation. So many live with less and less: Less hope, less freedom, less trust, less to eat and drink. Many of us arrive here bearing unseen griefs: Diagnoses, debts, disappointments, depression, anxieties we can’t name, hopes we barely dare to hold.

But we are encouraged by this: It is not the first time the people of God have come to the table in such circumstances. So tonight, for our sermon, we will hear stories from scripture – stories of meals eaten in desperation and dread.

## THE PASSOVER: A TABLE OF SAFETY

LYNN TRUMBLE

This story is about a meal eaten in haste, when the looming threat against your safety might come at any moment and you need to be ready to escape. Remember this portion of the story of God from the book that we love, found in Exodus 12.

### EXODUS 12:1-3, 5-8, 11-14

**12** The Lord said to Moses and Aaron in the land of Egypt, <sup>2</sup>“This month shall mark for you the beginning of months; it shall be the first month of the year for you. <sup>3</sup>Tell the whole congregation of Israel that on the tenth of this month they are to take a lamb for each family, a lamb for each household.

<sup>5</sup>Your lamb shall be without blemish, a year-old male; you may take it from the sheep or from the goats. <sup>6</sup>You shall keep it until the fourteenth day of this month; then the whole assembled congregation of Israel shall slaughter it at twilight. <sup>7</sup>They shall take some of the blood and put it on the two doorposts and the lintel of the houses in which they eat it. <sup>8</sup>They shall eat the lamb that same night; they shall eat it roasted over the fire with unleavened bread and bitter herbs.

<sup>11</sup>This is how you shall eat it: your loins girded, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand, and you shall eat it hurriedly. It is the Passover of the Lord. <sup>12</sup>I will pass through the land of Egypt that night, and I will strike down every firstborn in the land of Egypt, from human to animal, and on all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord. <sup>13</sup>The blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you live: when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague shall destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt.

<sup>14</sup>“This day shall be a day of remembrance for you. You shall celebrate it as a festival to the Lord; throughout your generations you shall observe it as a perpetual ordinance.

*(Silent Reflection)*

## ELIJAH AND THE WIDOW OF ZARAPHETH: A TABLE OF PROVISION

KELLY MAURER

This story is about a small family – poor and starving – seemingly outside the boundaries of God’s blessing, preparing a meager meal with no hope for the next. Remember this portion of the story of God from the book that we love, found in 1 Kings 17.

### 1 KINGS 17:8-16

<sup>8</sup> Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, <sup>9</sup> “Go now to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and live there, for I have commanded a widow there to feed you.” <sup>10</sup> So he set out and went to Zarephath. When he came to the gate of the town, a widow was there gathering sticks; he called to her and said, “Bring me a little water in a vessel, so that I may drink.”

<sup>11</sup> As she was going to bring it, he called to her and said, “Bring me a morsel of bread in your hand.” <sup>12</sup> But she said, “As the Lord your God lives, I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil in a jug; I am now gathering a couple of sticks so that I may go home and prepare it for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die.”

<sup>13</sup> Elijah said to her, “Do not be afraid; go and do as you have said, but first make me a little cake of it and bring it to me, and afterward make something for yourself and your son. <sup>14</sup> For thus says the Lord the God of Israel: The jar of meal will not be emptied and the jug of oil will not fail until the day that the Lord sends rain on the earth.” <sup>15</sup> She went and did as Elijah said, so that she as well as he and her household ate for many days. <sup>16</sup> The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail, according to the word of the Lord that he spoke by Elijah.

*(Silent Reflection)*

## THE SHEPHERD PSALM: A TABLE SET AMONG ENEMIES

CAROLINE MICHALAK

This story is about a meal eaten in the midst of people who have shown no care or compassion for you or your loved ones, people who speak against you, people who have not acknowledged the pain they have caused. Remember this portion of the story of God from the book that we love, found in Psalm 23.

### PSALM 23

<sup>1</sup> The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

<sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;

<sup>3</sup> he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

<sup>4</sup> Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.

<sup>5</sup> You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

<sup>6</sup> Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long.

*(Silent Reflection)*

## THE LAST SUPPER: A TABLE OF BLESSING, BETRAYAL & LOVE

REV. PHIL KETTERING

This story is about a master and his friends gathering for one last meal. The friends are eager and devoted; the Master is patient, even knowing that betrayal looms and death is at the door. He wants to give them a gift that will last. Remember this portion of the story of God from the book that we love, found in John 13.

### HOLY GOSPEL: JOHN 13: 1-5, 12-15, 21, 26B-27A, 30-31, 34-35

**13** Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that His hour had come that He would depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end. <sup>2</sup> And during supper, the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, to betray Him, <sup>3</sup> Jesus, knowing that the Father had handed all things over to Him, and that He had come forth from God and was going back to God, <sup>4</sup> got up from supper and laid His outer garments aside; and He took a towel and tied it around Himself.

<sup>5</sup> Then He poured water into the basin, and began washing the disciples' feet and wiping them with the towel which He had tied around Himself.

<sup>12</sup> Then, when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done for you? <sup>13</sup> You call Me 'Teacher' and 'Lord'; and you are correct, for so I am. <sup>14</sup> So if I, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. <sup>15</sup> For I gave you an example, so that you also would do just as I did for you.

<sup>21</sup> When Jesus had said these things, He became troubled in spirit, and testified and said, "Truly, truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me."

<sup>26</sup> "That man is the one for whom I shall dip the piece of bread and give it to him." So when He had dipped the piece of bread, He took and gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. <sup>27</sup> After this, Satan then entered him.

<sup>30</sup> After receiving the piece of bread, he left immediately; and it was night. <sup>31</sup> Therefore when he had left, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in Him;

<sup>34</sup> I am giving you a new commandment, that you love one another; just as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all people will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

*(Silent Reflection)*

## THE TABLE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

*ERIC & EVERETT PEARL MICHALAK*

Tonight, we have heard stories from scripture of meals eaten in desperation and dread:

The Israelites, sandals on their feet, staffs in their hands, go-bags at the ready, eat unleavened bread in haste, as death passes over.

A widow who prepares a last bit of bread for herself and her son, expecting it to be her final act.

A psalmist dares to face enemies, even as a feast is prepared in their presence.

Jesus gathers with his friends for one final supper, knowing that betrayal is near and that death is stalking.

Still, they eat; and, still, we eat, because this meal is not about control or safety. It is about God's strange and saving presence in the very midst of danger, grief, and need.

This meal defies despair. This meal remembers the past, confronts the present, and offers a taste of the promised joy to come.

So let us come now to the table. Let us rehearse how God feeds God's people, even here, even now.

## THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

Lift up your hearts! **We lift them to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks and praise to the Lord our God.

**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

It is right and a good and joyful thing to give thanks to you, Almighty God, Creator of heaven and earth.

You hear the cry of the enslaved and set a table on the night of escape. You feed a widow in famine and keep a jar from running dry. You prepare a feast in the presence of enemies – even yours. You restore the weary soul.

From the first waters of creation to the deep waters of deliverance, you have planted your promise among your people. You have rooted them in mercy, watered them with grace, and fed them with bread from heaven.

Holy are You and blessed is your Son, Jesus Christ. When the powers of this world closed in, when fear and betrayal shadowed him, Christ did not turn away from his friends. He gathered them at the table and lifted bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to his friends, saying, "Take and eat. This is my body, given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way, after supper he took the cup and said, "Drink of this, all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this in remembrance of me."

Pour out your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts of bread and wine. Make them be for us our communion in the body and blood of Christ. May we be for the world the body of Christ, redeemed by his love.

Plant your life deep within us. Grow your mercy in hard soil. Make us a people who remember your deliverance, who trust your presence in the night, and who feed one another on the road.

### **INVITATION**

This is the table of Jesus Christ. It is the table that feeds people on the run, that sustains those with little to spare, that offers grace even to enemies, that offers abundant life where the ground is thin.

This is not a table for the strong, but for the hungry; not for the certain, but for those who trust; not for the deserving, but for those who know their need. Come, you who are weary. Come, you who are afraid. Come, you who long for a different world. Here is bread for the journey. Here is a cup of hope. Come, for all is ready. The gifts of God for the people of God, who gather and pray as he taught us:

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us;  
and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

**For Thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.**

### **SHARING THE MEAL**

This is the body of Christ, broken for you.

This is the blood of Christ, shed for you.

### **POST-COMMUNION BLESSING**

#### **PRAYER AFTER COMMUNION**

**Faithful God, you have met us at your table in the midst of a world that is anxious and afraid. You have fed us with the bread of mercy and the cup of hope, reminding us that you do not abandon your people on the night of danger, in the hour of betrayal, or on the long road toward freedom. Send us now into the darkness of these next days with courage to follow, with humility to serve, and with trust in your saving love. Ground us in your grace. Grow us in your love. Lead us in your way. Amen.**

*(WE LEAVE IN SILENCE...)*