



SERMON RECAP

MARCH 1, 2026

Second Sunday of Lent

The two cups

Matthew 26:26-56

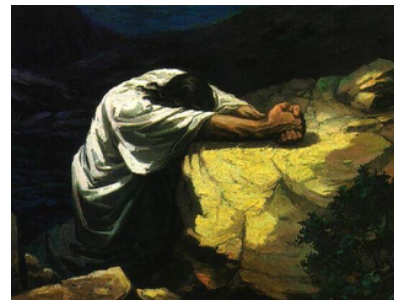
As the Gospel of Matthew shares the story of Jesus' last day on earth, he tells of a Passover meal that Jesus and his disciples share. The Passover is a foundational part of Jewish faith. The first night of Passover includes a highly symbolic and holy meal. The dinner is meant to remember the story of salvation. Exodus 12 tells the people to only eat unleavened bread, slaughter a lamb, and use its blood to mark their door. That night, the Angel of the LORD passed over the homes of the Hebrews and spared their children.

In other parts of the Old Testament, the people are told to remember the Passover with a week of unleavened bread, with the first night being particularly important. The week of the Passover commemorates the people being delivered out of Egypt, passing through the sea on dry land, and coming to the Promised Land as a free people. It is a story of pride, redemption, and thanks to the LORD for deliverance and salvation.

This year Passover seder meals will take place on the evening of April 1. At these meals, there is a series of highly symbolic foods and four cups of wine. The four cups are consumed at different times during the meal, helping to relive the story of the promise of freedom, the plagues upon Egypt, the release of the people, and rejoicing in praise.

Much has been made of Jesus taking the cup after the meal, and saying that it is his blood of the New Covenant for forgiveness. Many Christian pastors have claimed that Jesus was transforming the third Cup of Passover, the "Redemption Cup," but this claim is not supported by history. The tradition of the four cups did not start until after the destruction of the second Temple when Rabbinic Judaism grew across the diaspora. The multi-layered symbolism of today's Passover meals was probably not known by Jesus and his disciples.

In my research, I found it particularly interesting that this meal is still evolving. Today, many Conservative and Reform Jews have added an orange to the meal to represent an attitude of welcome to the marginalized people of the LGBTQ community. There is also Miriam's Cup, which is used to represent the empowerment of women and the inclusion of diverse gender identities.



A Breath Prayer

INHALE:
Sometimes God can't

EXHALE:
Because there are some things love won't.

Jesus did however, have a second cup. After he shared the Cup of Forgiveness, he went to Gethsemane (only John calls this place a garden) and prayed. There, he faced a metaphoric cup - the Cup of Agony, which he begged to be taken from him.

This act was a disgrace to many early critics of Christianity and remains puzzling today. Many philosophers denied Jesus could be the Messiah if he struggled in this moment. Modern alpha-male theo-bros bristle at this too because it showed a moment of weakness. Why would Jesus - the Son of God - struggle with what he had to do? The simple answer is: he was human, and he recognized the pain that was surely coming. But bigger questions remain, Why didn't he call down angelic forces to defeat his enemies? Why didn't he turn and go into hiding so he could keep teaching and gather more followers?

How could the Will of God not be what Jesus wanted? Why would he ask God to take the cup from him? My answer: because God didn't put it there. God did not give Jesus the cup of suffering, human fear did. Jesus suffered because he threatened power. He suffered because of people's fear of "the other" and love of cruelty. He suffered because the love and community he was building could not survive a society built on Roman imperial, alpha-male insecurities and fear of scarcity. God did not put the cup there, so God could not take it away.

Sometimes God can't do something, because there are some things love won't do. Love wouldn't turn away. Love wouldn't call down armies. Sometimes God can't take away the suffering because love means that there is vulnerability, and vulnerability means that sometimes we get hurt. Love will not exploit or coerce. Love will not dictate or exclude.

Love is patient. Love is kind. Love delights in the truth, and in that moment, Jesus could not turn away from the truth of his mission. Jesus wasn't sent to die, he was sent to love even to the bitter end. Human fear, love of power, and addiction to violence put the cup of suffering in front of him. Jesus begged God to take the cup from him, but God didn't put it there.

Sometimes God can't because love won't.

NEXT WEEK:

"I don't know the man" Matthew 26:57-75