

His Final Steps Led to the Upper Room ¹

- ✦ A room where his disciples carefully prepared for the Passover.
- ✦ A room where God's Lamb carefully prepared to die.

In the name of Jesus, our ever near, ever dear Savior, fellow disciples reconciled:

When we visited Israel in 2014, Cindy and I got to see the room called the *Cenacle*, Latin for “dining room.” But I only learned that word today. I didn’t realize that Christian pilgrims have visited for 1,600 years the Cenacle, on what today is called Mount Zion, Jerusalem’s western hill. The Muslims have made that room into a mosque, and the Jews believe King David’s tomb is in the lower level of the building which they use as a synagogue. But most certainly the room was built by Crusaders with soaring Gothic ribbed vaults about A.D. 1200, in a different part of the city, to many times destroyed and rebuilt since Jesus **Final Steps Led to the Upper Room.**

And yet, what difference does it make that thousands of religious pilgrims visit the Cenacle each year? In May 2014, Pope Francis capped his pilgrimage of the Holy Land by celebrating a Mass there. He said in his homily, “Here the church was born, and was born to go forth.” Christian tradition puts the disciples in the Cenacle for Pentecost and other events in Acts. Tonight our quiet Holy Thursday pilgrimage of faith is guided directly by the dear Holy Spirit speaking to us through His Gospel writers, especially Mark. Our Savior’s inspired tour guides tell us **His Final Steps Led to the Upper Room...**

- ✦ A room where his disciples carefully prepared for the Passover.

Normally we love to visit the upper room to see the Last Supper. To hear the Lamb’s gracious command: “**Take, eat, this is my body. . . . [Take, drink,] this is my blood of the new testament, which is poured out for many.**” (Matthew 26:26; Mark 14:22-24) We long to hear how Jesus gave this visible gospel as a gift for believers of every age to taste and see that the Lord is good, to smell and touch this Good News so personally. Here at Holy Communion a weight as heavy as hell is lifted off our shoulders by our Savior’s assurance. The Lamb’s Supper servant stands before our eyes and speaks to our hearts this guarantee of the Lamb’s own blood shed on his cross: “**for you for the forgiveness of sins.**”

Tonight’s entire Holy Thursday service—its liturgy and hymns—is centered on the Supper: on preparing for it properly with our heartfelt confession of sins, followed always by our Savior’s powerful Absolution. Bible readings teach us about the Supper – the centuries of Old Covenant Passover preparation that enabled the leaders of God’s people to see His feet, but not His face. New Testament / New Covenant readings show us “**the glory of God in the face of Christ**” (1 Corinthians 4:6) who washed His disciples’ feet and commanded us to “**love one another as I have loved you.**” (John 13:34) This visible Gospel powers up our new and holy life of the Lamb given for us all!

Some of you shared in the careful preparation of the Seder and its celebration on Palm Sunday evening. You shared special dishes like *matzah*, *maror*, and others I’m not sure how to pronounce. It is a solemn meal with scripts passed down through the generations, teaching how the Lord freed his people from bondage in Egypt...1500 years before **his disciples carefully prepared for the Passover.**

The upper room had to be ceremonially swept the day before to make sure every last crumb of yeast was cleaned out of every nook and cranny! So when Jesus told Peter and John to go into the city to find “**a large upper room, furnished and ready**” (14:15), the disciples must have been glad for careful

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preparations already done! But these also included the lamb, the centerpiece of Passover! It could not have eaten for several days in order roasted whole according to Moses' law. The sacrificial lamb had to be purchased at inflated prices, inspected by the temple priests, slaughtered early that same Thursday afternoon at the temple, and then it was roasted carefully before the evening meal. So much preparation – not like modern chefs with a microwave and an extra minute for a slice of pizza.

Under the circumstances, there was something more. Jesus needed a secure, quiet upper room away from the crowds. Josephus the historian says Jerusalem's population swelled to 2M+ pilgrims during Passover. Everybody was looking for a quiet upper room in the city, because the Jewish *Mishnah* (commentary) forbade carrying a lamb slaughtered in the temple outside the city walls! Large upper rooms, big enough for Jesus and his apostles, were hard to find. Furnished and ready? Impossible!

But not for the Lamb who later ***“reclined at the table with the twelve apostles.”*** (Luke 22:14) Not for the Lamb who said, ***“I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”*** (Luke 22:15f) Not for the Lamb who knew how vital the upper room was in God's plan to save you and me. So God's Lamb sent Peter and John into Jerusalem with directions that were fail-safe and secure. No street address or names for officials to raid and arrest: ***“Go into the city, and there a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him.”*** (Mark 14:13) Like a blaze orange hunting jacket, with targets painted front and back, a man carrying water in that culture, could easily be seen among the millions. ***“Wherever he enters, tell the owner of the house that the Teacher says, ‘Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”*** (Mark 14:14f). The owner must have been devoted to Jesus to ***“the Teacher”*** in need.

No accident that **His final steps led to the upper room.** Preparations in time by the disciples were preceded in eternity by God for the Lord's Lamb as **His Final Steps Led to the Upper Room...**

✦ **A room where God's Lamb carefully prepared to die.**

A pastor planning to preach at a prison asked the guard why one of the chairs was draped in black. “The inmate who sits there for your sermon tomorrow will be executed tomorrow night. That will be the last sermon he ever hears. What if this was your last to hear or my last to preach?”

It's almost as if a death shroud covered our Savior who reclined at the table with his apostles in the upper room. Jesus must have shocked His disciples with his warning, ***“Amen I tell you: One of you will betray me, one who is eating with me.”*** (14:18) How shocking our Lord's references to his coming slaughter as the Lamb of God. In the Supper itself: ***“This is my blood of the new testament, which is poured out for many. Amen I tell you: I will certainly not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”*** (14:24f) In his stern warning: ***“This night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written, ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”*** (Matthew 26:31) And His anguished warning to Peter: ***“Amen I tell you: Today—this very night—before the rooster crows twice, you will deny me three times.”*** (Mark 14:30) Can you see how Jesus loved you and me and all His disciples as **God's Lamb carefully prepared to die ?**

All our Savior's words so graciously, skillfully preserved for us in the pages of John's gospel! The Lamb's legacy, the Lamb's last will and testament! Life-changing words when you can't tell where you belong: ***“In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you. I am going to prepare a place for you.”*** Life-giving words when you can't tell who to believe: ***“I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.”*** Life-saving words for times when you hear such trouble words from doctors, parents/children, spouses, bosses, teachers: ***“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.”*** (John 14:2,6,27)

The Savior knew why **His Final Steps Led to the Upper Room.** He knew he needed a secluded spot, where **God's Lamb carefully prepared to die**—a safe place, hidden away from the crowds and

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unknown to his enemies, where he could enjoy a few final hours of fellowship with the Twelve one last time before his cross. Knowing all things, Jesus could see the man fetching water who in turn would lead them to an owner who needed to hear nothing more than, ***“The Teacher says, ‘Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ ”*** (Mark 14:14). An upper room, furnished and ready, fit for the King of kings who became the servant of all! In Matthew’s record. Listen closely: ***“My time is near. I will observe the Passover with my disciples at your house.”*** (Matthew 26:18) ***“My time is near.”*** The chosen time! The appointed time! The time our Lord had set from eternity itself was now at hand.

We need this Holy Thursday message so personally. The same Savior could peer into a city of two million gathered for Passover and pick out a man carrying a water jug and an owner who would open up his home because, ***“The teacher says . . . my time is near.”*** This same Savior hung on the cross, because He peered down the corridors of time to see me in my house too often hunkered down in frustration, feeling too much myself and not enough of my Lord’s loving kindness and tender mercy. My Savior could see that my life is not a string of endless ***“Hallelujah,” “Praise the Lord,”*** or ***“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.”*** Instead, He see worry, even weeping in fear, those flitting seconds of questioning my Father’s plans and maybe flashes of anger. In my house as in my heart and yours is a squatter, a trespasser. It will do no good to call the sheriff to throw him out, because it is that sinful nature, never converted, always selfish and alarmed.

When we can get on each other’s nerves, testy, crabby, a little worried, and fearful – remember that God’s Lamb knew all that about you and me. And still Jesus pressed on as ***His Final Steps Led to the Upper Room.*** The body and blood given countless times in His Holy Supper since then, are the same body and blood that paid for all of that too. Nothing takes our Lord by surprise. Nothing, no one, not death, not even the gates of hell can undermine His plans – exactly as planned. Mark matter-of-factly reports: ***“His disciples left and went into the city and found things just as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover. When it was evening, he arrived with the Twelve.”*** (14:16f)

The next day ***His Final Steps Led to the Place of the Skull,*** exactly as planned. Amen.