

SAVIOR SERVANT FRIEND

SERMONS FOR HOLY WEEK



Palm Sunday
KING



Maundy Thursday
SERVANT



Good Friday
SAVIOR



Easter Sunday
REDEEMER

SAVIOR SERVANT FRIEND

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SAVIOR SERVANT FRIEND

SERMONS FOR HOLY WEEK
MAUNDY THURSDAY:
SERVANT

SERMON

¶ Jesus gathered with a small group of friends. They were in an upper room in Jerusalem. There in that place, Jesus showed what a servant he is as he washed his friends' feet and gave them his body and blood in bread and wine. This meal—this Last Supper—was fraught with tension as human betrayal, arguments and denial were met by divine love, service and sacrifice.

Before we get to that meal, let us first consider another meal. Unlike the Last Supper which was a real historical event, this other meal comes to us from a classic work of fiction—Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. At a point in the book, readers hear about two of the Karamazov brothers sitting down for a meal at a restaurant. They were brothers; yet, they were far from friends. Their relationship was marred by betrayal, arguments and denial. Their family was a mess. And it had been a mess for some time. As a result, the relationship between these two brothers was a complete mess.

However, that night was different. That night they were making small—but important—steps toward reconciliation. That night they were doing something they hadn't done in a very long time: Sitting together at a table, sharing a pleasant meal and having a conversation together as if they were friends.

It began with awkward—somewhat forced—conversation about what to order. They conversed about menu options. After a while, the pleasantries gave way to a deeper conversation. Amid

all the family drama, these brothers also had deep ideological differences. The older brother was an atheist, while the younger brother was a Christian. This topic came up nearly every time they talked with one another.

“I must make one confession,” the atheist older brother said. “I could never understand how one can love one’s neighbors. It’s just one’s neighbors, to my mind, that one can’t love, though one might love those at a distance.” The younger brother argued to the contrary, “...But yet there’s a great deal of love in mankind, and almost Christ-like love. I know that myself” (Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Book V, Chapter III).

Dismissing what his younger brother had said, the older brother continued his argument: “To my thinking, Christ-like love for men is a miracle impossible on earth. He was God. But we are not gods...One can love one’s neighbors in the abstract, or even at a distance, but at close quarters it’s almost impossible.”

Love at close quarters. This is exactly what Jesus did that night in the upper room with his disciples. Jesus sat down—or, more accurately, Jesus reclined on his left arm—for a meal with his disciples. This meal was not at a restaurant; instead, it was in a large upper room at a house in Jerusalem. Jesus was surrounded by his disciples as they celebrated the Passover meal. Unfortunately, this meal did not go so well.

The meal began with a bombshell: “And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, ‘Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me’” (Mark 14:18). Jesus told them that one of them would betray him. He went on to tell them more: “It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me” (Mark 14:20). Jesus made it painfully clear that one of them—one of the people there that evening at the table eating from the bread and the bowls amongst them—one of them would betray him in the worst possible way.

As if this impending betrayal was not bad enough, an argument then arose at the table: “A dispute also arose among them, as to which of them was to be regarded as the greatest” (Luke 22:24). Sharp tongues. Clenched fists. Glaring eyes. The disciples spoke to one another with contempt: “I’m the best!” “No, I’m the best. He asked me to secure the room for tonight’s meal! He never asks you to do anything!”

Betrayal. Arguments. It’s hard to imagine this meal going any worse than it was going. And it’s hard to imagine that the tension and angst at the table could get any greater. And, yet, it did. Jesus turned to Peter and told him, “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31-32). Simon Peter denied that he would ever deny Jesus. He told Jesus, “Lord, I am ready to go with you both to prison and to death” (Luke 22:33). And to this, Jesus responded: “I tell you, Peter, the rooster will not crow this day, until you deny three times that you know me” (Luke 22:34). Betrayal. Arguments. And denial. All of it happened that evening there in an upper room.