

PASTOR'S NOTES. A MESSIANIC PASSOVER

When the hour came, He took his place at the table, and the apostles with Him. He said to them, "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."

Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks He said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

Then He took a loaf of bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." And He did the same with the cup after supper, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood."

Luke 22:14-20 (NRSV)

For the last couple of decades, the churches that I have served have participated each year in a "Messianic Passover Seder."

A number of churches have done Passover Seders in recent years, and some people have written articles objecting. It is not hard to see that this could be considered offensive to Jewish people. No doubt there are churches who have done a Passover Seder as a way of trying to appear inclusive and progressive. No doubt some have done them with the idea that for any Jewish tradition, Christians can do better. Many may claim to celebrate a "true" Passover while treating callously what is for many Jews a sacred tradition.

None of these are reasons why I have led Seders over the past 20 years and encourage others to participate. While in school over 35 years ago, I was invited by Jewish friends to join them in their Passover Seder. I found the Seder interesting and educational; it was a window into another culture, and a way for these friends to share something deeply personal and important to them.

Thirty years ago (and a few times since) I met persons who were Messianic Jews. Messianic Jews are Jews who have come to believe that the Messiah has come in the person of Jesus Christ. Many of us would simply call them Christians. But these persons realized that while most people today see Christians and Jews as different religions, it was not always that way. In fact, the early Christians were Jews. Jesus, His disciples, and the apostle Paul never stopped being Jews. Likewise, Messianic Jews realized that when they accepted Christ, they did not have to stop being Jewish and abandon their family traditions. So they continued to follow Jewish traditions at home, while also attending Christian churches. In many places now, their numbers have grown so that they have built Messianic Jewish synagogues and temples.

These new friends invited me to Messianic Passover Seders. While in some ways, this too, was like a window into another culture, and a friend's personal sharing, but it was also something else. I wasn't just learning someone else's tradition, I was learning an older version of my own. They encouraged me to go on to lead a Seder, not so that I and others could "play Jewish,"

but because this is the closest we have to an accurate Last Supper between Jesus and His disciples. It is actually more like the original communion than the way we have learned to celebrate communion in the church.

So what I have been leading is not a traditional Jewish Passover; I am not qualified to do that. But a Messianic Passover, which seeks to be as close as possible to the Passover Jesus celebrated with His disciples, is what I have been taught to do. And it is not perfect; more than likely, over the centuries some minor parts of the tradition have changed. But this is our best guess today on what the experience was like.

If you read the scripture passage above carefully, you'll notice that Jesus passes a cup (of wine) twice. We do not do that in our current communion service, but in the Passover the cup is passed four times. You will also notice that in between the two times the cup is mentioned, there is a supper. That part is also missing in our current communion service.

The Passover of Jesus' time included four cups of wine, a supper, hymns, and the lesson about how God rescued the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt. Not just the bread and the cup, but the whole of the Passover testifies to Jesus in a way that most of us miss in our shortened version that includes only one piece of bread and one drink from the cup.

Then He took a cup, and after giving thanks He gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly 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."

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

Mark 14:23-26 (NRSV)

After having participated in the Passover I am convinced that it is no accident that Jesus chose this tradition to explain His ministry. For me, it has changed how I see communion, and how I see Jesus' whole ministry. You can experience this for yourself: there are Messianic Passover videos on YouTube. Also, you can check out the videos on the church website and you'll find my family's Messianic Passover from last year. Finally, you can join us in person on **April 14, at 6:00 p.m.** in the Maple Street church basement.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rami', written in a cursive style.