

**On the way to Calvary - Hilary McDowell  
Week  
Saturday - The Cup**



*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body."*

*Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it.*

"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many," he said to them. "Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

*Mark 14:22-25 (NIV)*

At first she did not recognise the goblet from her dream. Its simplicity belied its importance. It was no different from the others in the set, arranged around the table for every man to drink from. Nothing would have distinguished it in the washing-up bowl, but one thing placed it apart for her. At this moment it rested, firmly cupped, in her Master's hands.

Jesus had already blessed the bread as every Jew would have done before passing it to the hungry family. She hardly noticed the words he had spoken over the bread, everyone was chatting and enjoying the meal so much - although one or two glanced round slightly surprised when he said, 'This is my body.' They did not expect such a phrase in a traditional Passover feast. Still, Jesus was always more of a poet than most, and they had learnt to permit him licence. It was when he said, 'This is my blood' at the raising of the wine that a hush fell over the room. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' she heard him say clearly. Now that certainly had no part in the Passover wording.

Up until this day, each of the four cups at Passover had represented a promise of the Father to his chosen people - a promise of freedom, of deliverance, of redemption, a promise of an irrefutable relationship between God and his people. If 'blood' entered the language of this feast at all, it would have been in the context of the blood sprinkled on the doorposts of the Israelites during their preparation for escape from Egypt, and that blood was the blood of a

sacrificial lamb slain for the deliverance of the people. No wonder faces looked puzzled. How could this cup relate to Jesus? How could he say, 'This is my blood'? She wished she could discern individual conversations in the low, reverent chatter that evolved during the meal. Now and then the odd comment reached her ears. Someone whispered something about comments Jesus had made previously on his ministry travels, about his death. Others talked about the role of a Messiah. Others debated the niceties of various elements of the Passover feast itself, and there were others who relaxed and made pleasant conversation with their neighbours, as you do at family meals. From where she was sitting she could not see John's face, obscured as it was by the eager attentions of the servants as they bobbed and darted back and forth to replenish the food and remove the dirty dishes. She guessed that he was silent; she imagined that tears of bereavement would already be shining in his eyes. He stayed close to the side of his beloved Jesus throughout the meal.

Looking slowly around the room, the traveller felt a great sadness envelop her as she identified so many parallels to the 'feasting' of this sacrament in the many denominations of the Church at home, in her century. She thought of the 'babble' the people of her time made of such a simple sharing of bread and wine. This intimate family meal among trusted friends was now often an issue for controversy and debate - how it should be conducted, who administers the sacrament, the true theological meaning of the act of communion itself, the nature, size, shape and content of the elements, all debated. Even the piece of furniture that the meal rested upon, the table, had in some denominations become 'sacred' to the extent that no one dare move it six inches to the right or left without a committee first giving permission. Will the numerous denominations ever stop the 'babble' and focus on Christ? She wondered; and she prayed, 'Please enable us to look up from our individual overflowing plates and attend to his words, his actions, his presence.'

As the goblet of wine that Jesus had blessed continued to be passed around the room for each disciple to drink, Trav's eyes followed its progress in awe - not mesmerized by the cup itself but fascinated by the future esteem and mystique that would be afforded this simple piece of tableware. Here it was - the legendary 'Holy Grail', around which generations to come would spin grand tales of deeds and misdeeds and make film producers rich on the takings. How casually the disciples handled it; how significant it appeared amid the trappings of first-century Palestine. The thought then struck her forcefully; but was that not exactly how Jesus himself was being treated? Just another holy man among so many, one more good Rabbi for the learning - and soon it would be one more criminal for a cross. How she would have loved to take that goblet home

and show it to the world; to say, 'Look, here is your cherished object, but the power is not in it but in the living Christ.' She longed to be seen by him, as in her dream; to handle a cup and hold it before his eyes, saying, 'Take my life, Lord, use me as you use this cup, a willing instrument in your service.' He knows, she comforted herself. At home, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, he knows all that I would say to him. 'Thank you, Lord,' she prayed, 'thank you that you are waiting for me on my return.'

Yet, here in an upper room in Jerusalem, the Lord of the universe was gently and patiently attempting to bring men whom he had trained for three years to a deeper understanding of his mission to the earth and of their God-appointed task when he would leave them. how blind many of them were, and how preoccupied with their own concerns. The traveller knew now why she felt at home with this little band, despite her previous hesitancy on entering the room. In them she recognised familiar attitudes inherent in her generation.

Jesus was still there. His smile was being offered to all around that table, his hands working overtime to pour and to reach and to pass around the food and drink, making sure that no one went without. He knows, she thought, and the realisation staggered her. He knows how much or how little they understand, how far they are from fully comprehending what he is about to do, and he has not left the room. Not here in Palestine, two thousand years ago, nor in the hallowed portals of the many and varied gatherings of his body in her times would he ever leave the feasts - no, not until all the hungry souls were filled.

*Dear Lord,*

*Forgive our lack of understanding, and all the mixed motives that bring people to your feast. Someday, in your perfect kingdom beyond this world, our feasting will satisfy as you intended it to do, pure and undefiled. Meantime, we go hungry if we stay away. Draw us to your table; help us to celebrate.*

*Amen.*