

Title: New Normal

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Text: [Luke 22:7-21](#)

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I don't particularly like the expression "new normal." Does anyone else feel that way? Actually, I'm not being honest. I hate it. I'm sure that it will be at the top of Merriam-Webster's list for 2020. You know, they always have a list of buzz words for the year. Quid-pro-quo and exonerate were at the top of the list for 2019. New normal is

actually two words but quid-pro-quo is three. I'm expecting it to be at the top and I won't like it.

I don't like it because there is nothing about how we are living right now that feels normal. New normal somehow implies that this is the way we are doing business from now on. I don't want that. I don't like that. I'm not planning on this being the new way of life. But if you listen to epidemiologists, they warn that a return to pre-pandemic life won't safely happen anytime soon. And some ways of life, which we took for granted, will be permanently changed. They will be a new normal.

When I hear it, when I say it, I cringe. It is human nature not to understand when things are different or when things have to change, to protest, to misunderstand or even miss the point when a new normal arrives. That said, we come tonight to experience the new normal.

The disciples were the first to experience it. You might not have understood the story this way. But with a little background, it will become clear. You heard, in our first reading that on "...the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover meal" (Luke 22:7-8). Luke wants us to be absolutely clear that Jesus is celebrating the Passover. Passover for modern-day Jews began last night. The timing is pretty close to the timing of the Last Supper. With that little verse, Luke is telling us a lot. A lot is simply left out of a Bible because everyone knew exactly what went on to prepare and experience the Passover Feast. It was normal for them to gather together and remember in a very specific way. There was a set menu of lamb, not just any lamb but a year-old lamb

without blemish. With the lamb, bitter herbs, unleavened bread and four cups of wine. All of this was normal. All of this took place behind the scenes and it was taking place around the city. It was the way you celebrated the Passover. It was normal.

Luke says that "When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you." (Luke 22:14-15a) and then he picks up a cup and blesses it. Not the cup of blessing which Jesus will use later but the cup of sanctification. Jesus was beginning the Passover meal the same way every Passover meal had begun for centuries; the way people celebrating Passover last night began their meal. The Passover always begins with a cup of sanctification and the Kiddush, the traditional blessings which everyone knew. That's what Luke is indicating that is going on.

Luke leaves out what happens next but it should sound familiar to you. They washed their hands. Ritualistically washing your hands may be a new normal for you but it wasn't for them. It was a normal part of the Passover. Then, the meal progressed as a way of telling a story about redemption. Scripture was read. Psalms were prayed and sung. All of this was happening as a way to remember the most important redemptive event in the life of the Hebrew people. There is this incredible ritual that is going on that isn't described for us. It's not that the gospel writers were hiding something from us. It was simply understood because it was the normal way of sharing a Passover meal.

The Passover is the moment and time when the Jewish people came together to celebrate their most defining story, God's redemptive act born out of not one plague but ten. It was remembering the way God liberated the Hebrews from captivity in Egypt. And it was a meal mandated by God. Every year, God said, "I want you to go to this table and remember that once you were slaves but I delivered you. By my mighty outstretched arms, you were made free. This is meant to define you.

Mysteriously, then and now.... behind every Passover table is a mural. On one side you can see the pyramids, captivity, sickness, death, and protection.....you can see people sheltering-in place behind a door that has been washed with the blood of the lamb. On the other side of the mural, there is a Promise Land, a place of freedom and new life.¹

The Passover meal was meant to take you back to that moment, so you experience it, you taste it, you feel it, re-live it and it was their normal way of remembering. And that's what they got that night, what they

experienced. Then, Jesus makes a new normal. He changes the meaning of the meal. It surprises and confuses them.

The disciples had no idea that Jesus is to be arrested that night, that he will be crucified tomorrow. He's tried to tell them, prepare them. But they don't understand. That's why he is giving them a new way of remembering, a new normal.

So after the normal meal is complete, he takes a piece of the unleavened bread and the cup of blessing, both of which they've already used in the normal way of remembering God's gift of redemption, and he offers them saying, take, eat, drink, this is the new normal, the new way to remember. Every time you do it, remember me, remember everything that is about to happen, remember until I come again.

It's as if mysteriously that mural is suddenly repainted. On the one side, you see a picture of disease, suffering, and death on a cross. And then, on the other side, a garden, an open grave, and resurrection. And Jesus says, I want this to become the new normal, the new way you remember God's redemption love for you.

In just that simple act, Jesus declares his mission. He recaps the last three years and tells them what is to come over the next three days. Jesus says, "Because of God's love for you, God sent me. I came to show you how you live. I came to offer you my footprints. I came to show you that you are broken and in need of grace. I came to lay down my life for you. I came to offer myself as a sacrifice for you, to atone for your sins. I came to show you the depths of God's love for you as I stretch out my arms on a cross for you. I came to show you the promises of eternal life by defeating the grave. Now, every time you eat this meal, remember me. Every time you gather around the table, you will be taken back, to this room to tomorrow suffering on the cross and then, to a garden and the empty tomb.² This is the new normal. THIS, IS THE NEW NORMAL. Or at least it should be."

But of course, you know the story about the first time the new normal was experienced. Some were resistant to the idea, maybe even hated it. It wasn't just their denials of betrayal and Peter's protest. Jesus said it plainly. "But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table." (Luke 22:21)

It is easy to lay that verse squarely on the shoulders of Judas. But I'll confess something to you. When you just let it stand on its own, consider that it might well be applicable today, it makes me want to be sure that I'm careful where I place my hands. It might make you happy you are

worshiping online and not standing here, at this table where your hand could accidentally reach out and rest on it.

But it does. It's there wherever you are. As important as this meal is to all of us, as important as the truths of the new normal is for our lives, we resist it as readily as we resist that expression about our culture today. How? We need this meal more than anything else in our lives and we act like we don't. That's how we lay our hands on the table. That's how we come to eat with Jesus and we are like Judas. That's how we are like Peter, like all of the disciples who will desert Jesus tonight.

There are so many other things that we make more important. We should be able to see that right now in a way that we don't normally see. One of the most important gifts that any crisis can give values clarification. What's really important? What are you missing the most? What are you most concerned about? How have you acted in the last few weeks when your way of life has dramatically changed and been threatened. What's most important? As much as we all hate COVID-19 and the new normal, it does help us see our priorities and point out our shortcomings. Yes, our hands are on the table.

Here is the Good News of this story. Jesus comes to this table knowing that he is eating with sinners, with those who will deny him, who will desert and betray him, knowing that every hand is on the table. And he still offers them bread and wine so that they can experience the new normal.

The Passover was the moment and time when the Jewish people came together to celebrate their most defining story, God's redemptive action, a meal to take you back as if you are there. The new normal is our defining story about God's redemptive action. It's designed to take you back to that moment, so you experience it, you taste it, you feel it, re-live it, as if you are there with Jesus.

Every time we eat this meal, we are taken back. We are one of the disciples around the table. We are those who will desert and deny. We are one of the followers watching his suffering death on a cross. We are heartbroken, finding ourselves by an open tomb and then garden, who discover the wonderful news of his resurrection. That's the new normal and it's a new normal you can love.

It's our truth to experience tonight, our story to live tomorrow and our promise for eternity.

¹ Wiesel, E. The Passover Haggadah. Illustrated by Mark Podwel. Simon and Shuster, 1993.

² Hamilton, Adam. At this Table. April 5, 2020 @ Cor.org.