

LIVING THE LAST SUPPER

by Teryl Cartwright



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Living the Last Supper

A Maundy Thursday pairing
of drama and art

by Teryl Cartwright

With special thanks to Faye

CAST LIST

You will need five speakers. They may be male or female.

Narrator

Friendly with strong voice

Peter

Blustery, argumentative character

John

Timid, younger character

Nathanael

Scholarly, older character

Matthew

Humble, yet strong character

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PRODUCTION NOTES

Costumes

While the Narrator may wear dress clothes, the others may be dressed alike in robes or biblical costumes if sitting apart or regular dress clothes if seated among the audience/congregation.

Set Design

If you are having a meal in a room, arrange the tables and chairs into a large connected semi-circle/open-ended rectangle with an empty table and chairs in the center. Put a picture of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* in the center and Communion elements on the table, whether in the sanctuary or in an "Upper Room."

The actors should be seated among the people. They come forward during their time to speak, pushing chairs in at the empty table to symbolize their particular seat. If you are using soloists instead of the audience/congregation to sing, the singers should present the music from a different location than the speakers.

Props

You will need at least one large picture of Da Vinci's *The Last Supper* centered on a table or altar. If you cannot find a poster of this painting, you may use a smaller picture on the program or bulletin.

SAMPLE ORDER OF WORSHIP

This is an especially powerful program if the congregation is asked to maintain silence the entire time. The singers and readers are the only voices heard when the lights are lowered. Whether the play is used for a meal and program or as a worship service, please include Communion, and consider allowing the four actors who play the disciples to help serve it.

Although several hymns are suggested, please feel free to substitute different hymns or appropriate contemporary songs.

Welcome

Prayer

(Optional) Small sacrificial Passover/Seder style meal for congregation/group

Program: *Living the Last Supper*

Narrator

Song: "Here, O My Lord, I See Thee"

Peter

John

Song: "Ah, Holy Jesus"

Nathanael

Matthew

Song: "Come, Sinners, to the Gospel Feast"

Communion

Song: "All Glory, Laud, and Honor"

Benediction

1 NARRATOR: What do you think it was like to sit and eat
 2 with our Lord? What do you see when you read about
 3 the Last Supper? Some pieces of artwork, like Da Vinci's
 4 *The Last Supper* scene, have almost become real pictures
 5 to us, wordless images that come to mind when asked.

6 Yet Da Vinci's depiction was not always the picture
 7 people had of this event. Unlike this painting, (*Gestures to*
 8 *poster or front of program/bulletin*) the earlier paintings of
 9 the disciples were not a confused muddle of humanity,
 10 they were separate and almost static.

11 The painter changed our image of this solemn night
 12 by grouping the disciples in sets of three. He based his
 13 picture on the moment Jesus announced he would be
 14 betrayed. Da Vinci tried to capture four different
 15 emotions exhibited by the disciples, emotions that we
 16 might feel if Jesus told us that one of us sitting here in
 17 this room with him was his betrayer.

18 We can imagine what those four emotions might be.
 19 From denial to consternation, from disbelief to
 20 confusion, four separate reactions mirror the responses
 21 of all humanity when we are faced by his announcement
 22 of our betrayal. Which emotion would you have if you
 23 had been in the Upper Room at that moment?

24 However, we must acknowledge that this artwork
 25 doesn't focus on humanity and our reaction to the
 26 Savior. Jesus is in the center of the picture. He knows
 27 who his betrayer will be and yet faces forward toward
 28 us, as if we are part of the picture too, as if we are living
 29 the Last Supper even today. Jesus' eyes are lowered to
 30 the meal he has set before us, serving even those who
 31 betray him.

32 His hands are spread in invitation, despite the
 33 knowledge that he will eat with sinners who do not
 34 understand what he offers and will later reject and
 35 betray him too. His hands are spread in invitation,

1 despite the fact that his hands will soon be spread upon
2 the cross.

3 Jesus is in control. The disciples are focused on who
4 the betrayer is, but Jesus is focused on redemption. He
5 is the suffering servant who calls us to serve. To follow
6 him, even where we don't want to go. To see what we
7 don't want Jesus to point out. To listen to things we
8 don't want to hear.

9 The Psalms that each of the disciples will quote are
10 part of the Psalms that have always been sung at
11 Passover. Yet let's hear these Scriptures again and
12 remember our Passover redemption too. We can be
13 grateful that the Last Supper was not truly Jesus' last.
14 He has called us not only to take part in, but to actually
15 live the Last Supper. Let's join the disciples in
16 communion, thanksgiving, and service, and may the Last
17 Supper be everlasting to you. (*PETER enters and stands by*
18 *a chair at the empty table.*)

19 PETER: Not me! No, never... it cannot be me! I would *never*
20 betray my Lord. As Jesus announced that his betrayer
21 sat among us, I knew that it was someone else, that it
22 *had* to be someone else.

23 Jesus has called me "The Rock." The foundation of his
24 church. *I* was the first one among us who said he was
25 God's son. *I* walked on water. Why, *I* was the only one
26 to get out of the boat. *I* am the fisherman who fishes for
27 men.

28 Look around this room. How could any of us betray
29 him when so many others deny him? We have stayed
30 with him throughout everything. Forsaking family and
31 home, we have followed him here to this Upper Room.
32 We are the few who remain.

33 Why aren't the Pharisees or priests to blame instead
34 of one of us? They deny who he is. They deny his
35 miracles and his words. They would betray him, but not

one of us, not his own followers, his own family. He called all of his believers his family, even over his own mother and brothers. We are closer to him than anyone on earth, so surely it is not one of us.

Not me! *I* would defend him with my life. I could not be the betrayer, because I would not deny him.

Haven't we talked of his miracles? Weren't we sent out to minister before we barely knew him? Haven't we brought others to hear Jesus, as my brother Andrew did for me?

There are all kinds of denial. Why aren't they also considered betrayal? Remember the rich young man who refused to sell all and follow? He walked away from my Lord. He literally told Jesus, "Not me." But *I* dropped everything when Jesus called. I followed him. I did not deny him — so I would not betray him.

There were so many times Jesus heard others deny him or his will. Even Jesus' own cousin tried to deny him when Jesus asked for baptism, though John's reasons seemed sound. He basically told Jesus, "No, not me." He didn't want to baptize Jesus in the river of repentance.

But Jesus would not be denied. Jesus waded into the flood of our punishment. He was submerged into our suffering. And when he came out, the Spirit landed on him.

It was just like the dove that came back to Noah's ark because there was no dry land. The dove came to Jesus as if he were the only dry ground in a sea soaked with sin. He's our ark of salvation, our ark of the covenant. How could anyone betray him? No, not me!

Now I know that you're thinking of the time when Jesus said he would die, and I rebuked him for it. I denied his words by saying this could never happen to him. It was just an impulsive mistake, and I am wiser

1 now. I would never deny him. It would never happen
2 again.

3 Think about it. The betrayer could not be me. I had
4 been one of the three chosen to see Moses and Elijah. I
5 was always the one chosen by Jesus.

6 Why, even this week I was one of two chosen to follow
7 the man with the water jar to find this Upper Room.
8 Perhaps following the very water that was used to
9 cleanse like baptism. The water Jesus used when he
10 stooped to wash our feet ...

11 Not me. Please, please not me. Yet I admit that even
12 tonight I had already told Jesus, "Not me."

13 I said, "No, Lord, you must not wash my feet."

14 But Jesus would not be denied. He would have no
15 part of me unless he could serve me — unless I could
16 accept his service. My master showed me what I should
17 do. He bent to wash my feet when I should have done
18 so for him. I should have washed *his* feet, like the
19 woman with her perfume did.

20 Jesus served his servants. *The Lord* knelt at my feet,
21 and he did what I could not do. Has anyone received
22 such "room service" as this?

23 Even then he mentioned that someone was not clean.
24 He knew one of us would betray him. But he washed
25 that person's feet as well. He served us all. He was
26 there — for us all. He told us of his mission and ministry
27 to the world. And then he showed us what the King of
28 Kings was here to do.

29 Not me! But then this moment is not about me. Jesus
30 knew his betrayer even before he spoke. Yet Jesus
31 treated us all the same. He bent down to cleanse us all.
32 He loved us all. And he told us at this supper to serve
33 as he has done. What incredible love he has for us!

34 And what an awesome task he has set before us, to
35 follow his example and serve as he served us. An

1 everlasting servant, Jesus was faithful to every last one
2 of us.

3 As the Passover Psalm proclaims, “Not to us, Oh Lord,
4 not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your
5 love and faithfulness” (Psalm 115:1). (*PETER returns to his*
6 *seat in the audience. JOHN enters and stands by a chair at*
7 *the empty table.*)

8 **JOHN:** Is it me? Lord, please — say it isn’t me. I know I have
9 not always done my best, but I hope I could never
10 betray you.

11 I’m known as the beloved one. I was the one who was
12 called a “Son of Thunder.” I was one of three that saw
13 the Transfiguration and a little girl raised from the dead.
14 I am an insider — one part of the innermost circle.

15 Oh, how I am filled with dismay and sadness. I don’t
16 want it to be me. None of us do. I do not want to be the
17 son of Adam betraying the son of God.

18 So I had to know. I asked. I was the one who asked
19 him who it was.

20 It was horrible. He didn’t call his betrayer by name —
21 as if somehow we could all be the one. We all could still
22 be the one. He said it was the one who dips bread with
23 him, just like the Scriptures foretold in the forty-first
24 Psalm.

25 Do you know how offensive this betrayal had to be to
26 Jesus? Think about it. The one honored to take the
27 bread from his hand was actually the betrayer. You see,
28 dipping bread together was symbolic of deepest, truest
29 friendship. It meant that the person taking the bread
30 was trusted by Jesus. *Was* trusted.

31 To be given the dipped bread was the same as saying,
32 “You are my friend” — saying you would never hurt or
33 betray me. He was giving the highest honor to the one
34 who reached into the bowl with him.

35 Imagine. To take food offered by Jesus, our Messiah.

1 And to also be the betrayer.

2 And the betrayer would eat, as if the Lord didn't
3 know what was going to happen, as if he couldn't see
4 into the act. The betrayer would look into the eyes of
5 Jesus and still go ahead.

6 Like Adam choosing to eat forbidden fruit, he would
7 give in to the temptation of trying to take something
8 from the Lord and then use his trust against him. He
9 would try to satisfy a hunger that would instead
10 consume him.

11 And I worry that it is me. Please, please, say it isn't
12 me, because I've thought of something else that frightens
13 me even more. Jesus' words came back to me again,
14 echoing as if the moment were frozen in time by a
15 picture in my mind.

16 Jesus used the present tense. He said the one who
17 dips bread with me. Doesn't that scare you? It is as if the
18 betrayal could happen again.

19 Have I ever broken bread with the Lord, only to
20 betray him later? How many times have I called him my
21 closest friend and brother and then acted otherwise?
22 How many times have I feasted upon his hospitality only
23 to insult this generosity later by what I have done to
24 him?

25 Is it me? Is it? I have been guilty of many things, after
26 all.

27 (Pause) I wish I had not spoken earlier tonight. I wish
28 I had not argued with my brother James. Maybe it could
29 be me.

30 Remember? We argued over who was the greatest
31 among us. We did this in Jesus' presence. We wanted to
32 be next to him, to be like him. My brother and I, and
33 even our mother on our behalf, had even asked Jesus for
34 places in heaven at his right and left hand.

35 We wanted the privilege, the honor, the power. A

1 chance to thumb our nose at the Pharisees and priests.
2 It would be our way of saying that we had chosen better
3 than they did, our ambitions fully fulfilled. It was to be
4 our revenge for all the mockery and grief others gave us
5 for following Jesus. We wanted to show them. Even show
6 the other disciples who thought they were better or first
7 among us. We wanted to be the greatest. We were
8 arguing again on this special night with our Lord. Of all
9 things, we were debating about who was the greatest
10 among us.

11 Jesus took time during this supper to tell us that the
12 greatest among us is the one who serves. He rebuked us
13 and humbled us. How embarrassing to think of our
14 childish desire for recognition when he freed us so we'd
15 be children of God.

16 He told us to serve and be a servant. He showed us
17 his service by washing our feet, and then we betrayed
18 him by arguing that others should serve under us. I hope
19 someday I can serve him — even to the point of serving
20 others in his place. Treating everyone like my mother
21 and brother, as he has treated me.

22 Is it me? What a betrayal, that we argued about
23 greatness among us when he sat with us and told us to
24 serve. The greatest servant is Jesus, and I feel like a fool
25 for misunderstanding what true greatness is.

26 Please, please, don't let it be me. I hope I can live the
27 Passover Psalm we'll sing tonight after supper. It says,
28 "O Lord, truly I am your servant, the son of your
29 maidservant; you have freed me from my chains" (Psalm
30 116:16). (*JOHN returns to his seat in the audience.*
31 *NATHANAEL enters and stands by a chair at the empty*
32 *table.*)

33 **NATHANAEL:** Not you! Jesus, you cannot be betrayed! Not
34 you. You are the one who sees everything. Surely you
35 could avoid this. You are the one who drives out

1 demons. You walk through crowds ready to kill you
2 without being touched. You are the one who has an
3 answer for any who question your authority. Not you!
4 Lord, surely not you.

5 I don't believe it. I have seen too much of what you
6 have done; we all have seen what you've done. And now
7 you say one of your devoted followers will betray you?

8 How could any one of us have the gall after what you
9 have done for us? How could anyone have the nerve to
10 stand against you, knowing your power? How could any
11 of us betray you when you are our hope and salvation?

12 I remember when we first met. I didn't believe in you
13 then. I said to Philip, "Nazareth! Can anything good
14 come from there?" (John 1:46).

15 But I came to see you anyway. I walked away from
16 my reading to see you. And you told me that you saw
17 me under the fig tree, studying. You told me that I am a
18 true Israelite in whom there is nothing false.

19 But I still don't see how you can be betrayed. You can
20 see and do anything. Why would you let this happen?

21 You know all of us. You saw me sitting under the fig
22 tree when I could not see you. You knew me. I am the
23 scholar, yet you knew who I was before we met. I spent
24 my life studying the Scriptures, and now I came to study
25 you, the Word made flesh.

26 Remember what you told me then? You said that I
27 had believed from such a little thing, and that I would
28 see much greater things when I followed you.

29 It's true. I have seen much greater things, Lord. I have
30 followed and seen everything. I have seen you confound
31 the wisdom of the rabbis. I have seen the fig tree wither.
32 I have seen and believed, so forgive me if I cannot
33 believe that you would be betrayed. I believe in you. We
34 all do.

35 You can stop this. You've overturned tables in the

1 temple. How can you look so calm about someone selling
2 you out when you were so furious at the merchants
3 selling out the holy ground? You are holy, more holy
4 than the temple. You are our holy ground, so why don't
5 you stop this?

6 I have seen you overcome disbelief. When you told us
7 to feed the thousands and we said there was not enough
8 food, you fed the crowds bread, the manna they needed.
9 Many walked away from you when you explained that
10 you were living bread, but we didn't. You said you were
11 the bread, and now we sit and you serve us bread.

12 Again, you tell us to eat of your body. You are serving
13 yourself to us? I am a learned scholar, and yet my mind
14 cannot fully grasp this. Here is where faith must go
15 when understanding does not. Where I must believe
16 what I cannot see.

17 Not you, Lord! Why should you allow yourself to be
18 betrayed? You are asking me to eat this supper with you
19 on this Passover. And still, I cannot pass over this idea
20 that I *must* believe you because you are who you say you
21 are. I have to believe even when this need not happen
22 to you — and yet you say it will. I'm struggling to
23 believe.

24 Not you! You say you do this for me, but giving your
25 body is too much for me. As the man who cried out to
26 you once, I cry aloud too — Lord, I believe. Help my
27 disbelief.

28 Lasting words, lasting meal, lasting bread. You fed
29 thousands, and now you personally serve me bread,
30 your body, living bread. I have eaten, though I feel a
31 fool. You have filled me, and I ponder on your words,
32 tasting them and seeing that they are good. You have
33 served us like a servant and now serve us like a host.

34 And so, like my disciple brothers, I, too, sing one of
35 the Psalms I have always sung at Passover, this time

1 with a new and clearer voice. Asking that you, Lord,
2 would help my faith be stronger than my own wisdom.
3 “For you, O Lord, have delivered my soul from death, my
4 eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling, that I may walk
5 before the Lord in the land of the living” (Psalm 116:8-9).
6 (*NATHANAEL returns to his seat in the audience.*
7 *MATTHEW enters and stands by a chair at the empty table.*)

8 **MATTHEW:** Is it you? Are you to be betrayed after all the
9 great things you have done? You are the one who heals
10 and helps others. How can you be betrayed? You are the
11 one who touched the untouchables and reached out to
12 those who are not clean. You are the one who looked for
13 the lost and lonely and told us, “Blessed are the meek”
14 (Matthew 5:5). How can you be betrayed?

15 I am so confused. I sat on the edges of the community
16 all my life. I am the outsider looking in. And I am the
17 sinner looking for you, cleansed by you. So I have to ask
18 again.

19 Is it you? Are you the Messiah and yet speak of dying
20 and betrayal, of crosses and blood? Are you the one who
21 raised Lazarus and yet will not protect yourself? Are you
22 the one who takes away our sin and yet lets us sin
23 against you?

24 I am the most uneasy of the disciples. They have not
25 always let me belong, and I am sure they will look to me
26 as your betrayer: The tax man. The immoral one. A
27 cheat. The one with a past.

28 But you chose *me* as a disciple. You came to my home
29 and sat at my table and ate with my friends and me.
30 That is how I am best known, and I am humbled by the
31 honor. You came in and ate with sinners then. You came
32 to help and heal and cleanse from sin. And you eat with
33 us now, even serving us when you know our hearts and
34 hidden sins.

35 I can never repay you for being with me, but I have



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