

HOLY (MAUNDY) THURSDAY – APRIL 14, 2022 – 1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-32

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. <sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. (1 Cor. 11:23-32 ESV). Thus far our text.

Holy or Maundy Thursday. Otherwise known as "mandated" Thursday or "commanded" Thursday. I can only think of one other Thursday that is always a churchly holiday, and that is the Ascension of Jesus (40 days after Easter), and it certainly garners much less attention than the day on which we commemorate the Last Supper in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, the night before Jesus was betrayed into the hands of sinners. These same sinners that He would later die and rise again to redeem from sin and all its stain, were the ones that were lined up to cry for His crucifixion and death. Though it was kept from them so they would go through with this dastardly deed, the religious leaders should

have known from their study of the Old Testament that Jesus' earthly life and ministry matched up perfectly with the prophecies that were given hundreds of years before His coming.

There are two points that I'd like to point out to you on this Maundy Thursday, that you may or may not have pondered before, and certainly should as we go forward with this service. First, the fact that this **IS** Jesus' body, and this **IS** Jesus' blood. Uncontrovertibly, unquestionably, objectively Jesus testifies in His Last Will and Testament, just before His earthly death, that this is not a metaphor, a comparison, or a symbol. He truly **IS** present bodily in the Sacrament of the Altar. Martin Luther, C.F.W. Walther, and the other Lutheran confessors and faithful pastors throughout the ages have held to this truth as inviolable, unable to be diluted.

Second, the fact that this Sacrament is **FOR YOU** for the forgiveness of sins. It's not to adored from afar, counted as a good work just for being present in the room when the transformation happens, or an occasional add-on to the Divine Service a couple of times a year. Rather, it is **FOR YOU** because you need what it gives – the forgiveness of sins, the strengthening of your faith and your physical bodies. In both kinds, in the Body and the Blood of Jesus, this Supper is to be celebrated until Jesus comes again at the end of time. Not just for some, that are lesser sinners than others; but **FOR YOU**, all who believe and confess the Truth of the doctrines of the church.

The early church, as recorded in Acts chapter 2, believed the Lord's Supper to be one of the key elements of their Sunday gatherings – after they gathered in the Temple, “they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42 ESV) Just as important as the Word of God (reflected in the mention of the apostles' teaching – this was the letters of Paul and other sacred writers, but also preaching and teaching) was the breaking of bread (referring to the Sacrament, to be sure). Fellowship (building one another up in the faith) and prayer were also listed as component parts. Boy, that sure sounds like a typical Sunday service, doesn't it?

Let's talk about these truths from Scripture, and jump into some of the reasons why these are so important, and how the Scripture backs up the proper interpretation that we believe, teach, and confess as believers in the truth. It's not that we are somehow better than others, that we are the only Christians that are going to be in heavenly glory; rather, it's that we know the truth from the Scriptures and the Confessions, which are totally a faithful exposition of the Word of God. Because we preach and teach the truth, we want to reach out with this truth to those within our sphere of influence, and convince them, because we already have close relationships with them, and they trust what we have to say. Even if they've strayed to other whims of doctrine, that doesn't mean that we give up on them – rather, we pray that the Holy Spirit would give us the words to say, and the right motivations to reach out to them, with the truth from God's Word.

I don't think that Jesus could have been any clearer than He was in Matthew, Mark, and Luke's Gospels, as well as Paul's account of His words in 1 Corinthians that we read this evening – “This **IS** My Body; This **IS** My Blood.” Over the course of the centuries since, devout churchmen have tried to explain and understand these words, using their own earthly wisdom. They, in so doing, cast doubt upon His original intentions – this can't be true, because we can't explain it. He must have been speaking in picture-language, they say. Or, He must have been speaking metaphorically, making a comparison between two unlike things. Whenever we substitute our own knowledge for that of the Triune God, we get ourselves into theological trouble. There's nothing to prevent God from doing whatever He wants to do, not even the “laws” of physics that govern our temporal world. The only thing that gets in the way is our sinful, human understanding – we don't have the words or the concepts to get an idea of what Jesus is referring to. Luther was committed to an understanding of the Word of God as meaning what it says, and being interpreted literally, unless there's a clear-cut reason in the text itself not to. The Greek phraseology for “THIS IS” is not used in the Bible in a comparison situation; rather, it's always used in a way that means “THIS IS!” Consequently, we take the plain meaning of the text, and do what Luther did

when he was involved in the debate with Zwingli – carve the words “IS MEANS IS” into the table, to make it clear that the Word of God means what it says.

What are the implications of the fact that this Sacrament objectively IS Christ’s Body and Blood, whether we believe it or not, whether we can explain it or not? Paul gets at this in the second part of our text. I don’t want to dwell on this too much, because we’ve talked about this before at great length, but there are consequences to the fact that all communicants (believers AND unbelievers) receive the true Body and Blood of Christ in the Sacrament. Those who believe in the One True Faith will receive it to their benefit, and will receive the forgiveness of their sins, eternal life, salvation. They are doing so in a “worthy manner”. They will receive the strengthening of their earthly bodies as well as their eternal souls. However, those who confess another faith, that differs with this true confession, might possibly receive eternal condemnation, a detriment to their bodies in the form of sickness and disease. This Paul refers to as participating in a “unworthy manner”. Now, I’m not going to go so far to say that this definitely WILL happen, just as I cannot judge the heart and know what each and every person believes. But, we can’t water down the faith to one or two essential elements that we agree with the truth on – we must agree on ALL POINTS of Christian doctrine in order to share the same altar and pulpit.

I can echo with Paul two points from the second part of this passage. First, that everyone must examine themselves and see if they believe what is preached from this pulpit and taught from this altar. The only way to be able to examine oneself is to be taught, to learn what this church believes, teaches and confesses. Second, even though personal faith is hidden within the heart, confession of that faith is made publicly. When someone agrees to become a member of this church, they confess before God and everyone present that they agree with the public teaching and preaching of this church, as they’ve learned it in the Small Catechism of Martin Luther. That’s all that one can go on – what someone confesses. And, membership IS confession. When you’re a member of a church, you confess that that particular church teaches the truth; otherwise, why would you continue to be a member there and

partake of the Sacrament there? Here ends the controversial part of this sermon, and I only delve into the subject because the text before us is plain and clear.

The second main point that we must dwell upon tonight is that this Sacrament is **FOR YOU!** Each of you, and me as well, needs the forgiveness of sins that is given in the Body and Blood of the Savior here in the Sacrament of the Altar. Not only do we need it a couple times a year, or a couple times a month – I don't know about you, but I sin all the time, and need that forgiveness daily, if not hourly! The promise that this Sacrament is **FOR YOU** comforts you, feeds you, nourishes you. The beckoning summons of your Savior to continue to celebrate this pure gift of the Gospel again and again until He comes again at the end of time is Good News! You can continue to reap the benefits of what Christ did on the cross over and over again, and have Him cleanse your hearts and minds with His holy, precious blood, and His innocent suffering and death. Our Savior is looking out for you, and sends the Holy Spirit into your hearts as the promised Counselor. He doesn't stop at this Word of God that consoles your hearts, though. He gives you a tangible gift, in bread and wine, Body and Blood, so that you have something you can taste and see, so that you know that the Lord is good. As we learn in John chapter 6, you can have the flesh of God within you, so that you can have eternal life. No longer do we have to worry about the death and destruction that our sins deserve; rather, He has come to give life and heavenly glory to you and to me!

As we end this service in solemn silence, stripping the chancel down to bare wood and stone, without any adornment, we remember why we are doing such a demonstrative sign. Tomorrow is the day which we mark the very sufferings and death of Christ our Savior. We mourn, but not as those who have no hope. This is not a funeral for Jesus, we call it Good Friday because by these actions of our Savior, He brought about good for us His children, the salvation of our souls. Tonight, we partake and receive the fruits of His Sacrifice, in the Body given and the Blood shed for the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our bodies and souls. Tomorrow, as if there were no interruption, we continue

the celebration of the Holy Triduum (three day service) by marking all that Jesus went through to cause our salvation. There will be no benediction tonight, nor tomorrow, to point out that this is a service that continues in our hearts at home, until we return for the next installment just a few short hours later. We join with the church of the ages, that marked this sacred Triduum since the 1<sup>st</sup> Century AD, in entering into this most holy of holy seasons. However, we can rejoice that the curtain of the Temple was torn in two, so we can have access to our Savior in the Word and Sacraments, and eventually to the Father Himself in heaven when we die or when the world comes to an end, whichever comes first. Thanks be to God for causing us to have joy this day, instead of inconsolable grief. He has truly done everything for our salvation. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Savior and Lord. Amen.