

Text: I Corinthians 11:23-26

Date: March 28, 2024 Maundy Thursday

Theme: Receive Jesus' Promises in Holy Communion

In the Name of Jesus, whose blood was shed and whose body was pierced for our salvation, Dear Christian Friends,

The events of the last week of Jesus' life are well documented in the pages of Holy Scripture.

- On Monday and Tuesday Jesus taught in the temple courts of Jerusalem.
- On Wednesday, he sent Peter and John to Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover meal while he stayed away from public gatherings.
- On Thursday Jesus celebrated the Passover meal in the upper room with his disciples. When the meal was finished, Jesus and a few of his disciples left the upper room and went out to the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus prayed that the will of his heavenly Father be done. Shortly thereafter he would be betrayed by Judas and arrested by the mob. All these events took place as Jesus had foretold them to his disciples. These events would be punctuated by his crucifixion on Friday, the very next day.

Lent is a time when we turn our attention to our Lord's passion. This week is Holy Week, and Thursday—Maundy Thursday—is the day we set aside to mark the institution of the Lord's Supper—Holy Communion. The Apostle Paul reminds us that the Lord's Supper is directly tied to Jesus' death on the cross when he wrote in our text for today: **WHENEVER YOU EAT THIS BREAD AND DRINK THIS CUP, YOU PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH UNTIL HE COMES.** As we gather on this Maundy Thursday and partake in the Lord's Supper, we hear again of the spiritual promises that Jesus gives us in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

- Jesus' first promise is that he gives us his real body and blood with the bread and wine in Holy Communion.
- Jesus' second promise is that he gives us the forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

1. Jesus Promises His Real Body and Blood With the Bread and Wine

Remembering the Passover

God commanded his Old Testament people to hold a festival every year to commemorate the great deliverance from slavery in Egypt from under the heavy-handed rule of the Pharaohs. That festival of commemoration was called *The Passover*. For some 1500 years, God's people had been remembering the great deliverance in Egypt by celebrating this Passover meal. In keeping with God's command, Jesus was sitting celebrating that Passover meal with his disciples like he had done so many times before. In the words of our text the Apostle Paul recounts for us what Jesus said at the Passover meal: **THE LORD JESUS, ON THE NIGHT HE WAS BETRAYED, TOOK BREAD, 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.'** Jesus then continued by taking the wine set out in larger cups and said: **THIS CUP IS THE NEW COVENANT IN MY BLOOD.**

Something Different

While Jesus and his disciples had celebrated the Passover meal many times before, this night it became something different. Jesus made something new and changed the celebration. He took the unleavened bread from the table of the Passover meal, broke it apart, and distributed it to his disciples and said, *"Take and eat, this is my body."* Then Jesus took the wine from the Passover table and passed it on to the disciples and again said, *"Take and drink, this is my blood."* This command from Jesus was different from anything else the disciples had ever heard him teach. From that moment, these Jewish believers would no longer eat the Passover meal as they had done for centuries. Now there was a new dimension to the blessings that God wanted his people to receive. While the Passover meal was intended to remember God's blessing of the past, this new command of eating and drinking was to be a blessing for God's people until Jesus returns again on Judgment Day.

Real Presence

We can well imagine the change that must have taken place in the minds and hearts of God's people. Previously, the focus of Passover meal was unleavened bread and wine as God's people remembered his great deliverance in Egypt. Now the emphasis of this meal had turned to Jesus as he simply picked up a piece of bread and gave it to his disciples. When Jesus' friends took the unleavened bread and placed it into their mouths, they tasted unleavened bread. And when they raised the cup to their lips and drank, they tasted wine. **The bread did not cease to be bread, nor did the wine cease to be wine.** As Jesus picked up the bread and gave it to his disciples he said: **THIS IS MY BODY.** And again, picking up the wine and giving it to them, he said: **THIS IS MY BLOOD.** Together with the bread and the wine in this special sacrament Jesus promises his disciples that they are receiving true body and true blood of Jesus himself. We call this promise of Jesus the *"REAL PRESENCE"* in the Lord's Supper. Jesus' body and blood are really present with the bread and the wine in the sacrament of Holy Communion. The promise of Jesus is clear. Bread and wine, along with the body and blood of Jesus - all four elements - are present and received in the Lord's Supper.

Beyond Human Reason

Many have asked and many continue to ask, “*How can this be?*” According to human reason it seems impossible for Jesus’ body and blood to actually occupy the same space and be received at the same time as bread and wine. Bread and wine human reason can understand. Bread and wine can be seen and felt and tasted. But human reason cannot understand how we can receive Jesus’ true body and true blood along with the bread and the wine. Following the thread of human reason, some Christians have theorized that this bread and wine are only serving the purpose of representing Christ’s body and blood so as to remind us of his suffering and death. But the simple words of Jesus teach us otherwise. Jesus says, “*Take and eat, this [this bread] is my body....take and drink, this cup [this wine] is my blood.*” The simple words of Jesus teach us that this bread is the very body that was crucified on Calvary’s cross for our sins. The simple words of Jesus teach us that this wine is the very blood that was poured from our Savior’s bloody body. It is not a representation. It is the real deal. Jesus doesn’t want us to miss the meaning of his Holy Sacrament. Jesus’ words are unmistakably clear, “*This is my body. This is my blood, given for you, given for the forgiveness of sins.*”

Only by Faith

What human reason cannot grasp, faith in the promises of Jesus can and does believe. We believe that in this sacrament we receive Jesus’ body and blood because Jesus said so. Human reason cannot grasp the miracles of Jesus healing the sick and raising the dead, but because the words of Jesus say so, we believe these miracles to be true. The miracle in the Lord’s Supper is no different. It’s a matter of faith in the words and promises of Jesus. Faith takes God at his word whether we can logically understand it or not. Only by faith can we trust in the real presence of Jesus’ body and blood.

Trust in the Promise Over the Centuries

Just as believers of old celebrated God’s great deliverance in Egypt for centuries thereafter, so also God’s people over the centuries have believed these words and promises of the bread and the wine really present with Jesus’ body and blood in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. As we come forward tonight to receive the bread and the wine, we too believe that Jesus is giving to us his very body and his blood, the very body that was nailed to the cross of Calvary and the very blood that came from his nail-pierced hands and feet. **By God’s grace, you and I hear the promise of Jesus in the Lord’s Supper and we believe every word to be true.** We know and believe that every promise the Lord gives us is trustworthy and true, including Jesus’ promise that in this Holy Meal his true body and his true blood are present with the bread and the wine.

2. Jesus Promises the Forgiveness of Sins

When God’s Word gives us the promise of Jesus’ body and blood given along with the bread and the wine in Holy Communion, he links that promise to another promise. When Jesus ate his last Passover meal and instituted Holy Communion, he made this promise, “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin*” (Matthew 26:28). It was on the cross that Jesus gave his body and poured out his blood as the price for the forgiveness of sins.

The Forgiven Servant

Let’s think about the word “forgiveness” for a moment. In the Greek language, the English word “forgiveness” literally means to be released from an obligation or a debt. During his ministry Jesus explained this truth as he spoke about a certain servant who owed his master such a large debt that no lifetime was long enough to repay it. It was a hopeless situation. The debt was so large and so great that the servant would have been burdened with it his entire life. In mercy, however, the master released the servant from the entire obligation of debt. The servant never paid the debt because the debt was cancelled. The debt was forgiven!

Our Debt Cancelled

On the night when Jesus announced to his disciples that his body and blood were being given to them for the forgiveness of their sins, Jesus released them from their obligation, their debt, their sin. And Jesus does the same for us! Imagine the scene on Judgment Day. What a dreadful sight for the unbeliever it will be to stand before the Judge of all and have evidence of an entire life of sin presented in an instant and to know there are no excuses for sin! Can you begin to image the dread of those who have to stand before a holy God and recognize that the wages of sin is eternal death in hell? What a horrifying obligation! But in Holy Communion we, God’s people by grace, have Jesus’ promise that we have been released from this obligation, that our every sin against God has been forgiven and forgotten. On Judgment Day it will be announced for all to hear that our debt of sin has been forgiven and we will be welcomed into God’s heaven to live with him forever.

Jesus invites us to eat the bread and drink the wine as we receive his true body and true blood for the promise of sins forgiven. This is not a make-believe meal where bread and wine only represent the body and blood of our Savior. But in this Sacrament is real power to release us from the obligation of our debt to God and forgive our sins because the real body and blood of Jesus were given and shed. By Jesus’ suffering and death on Calvary’s cross, he took our every sin upon himself. **He took upon himself our obligation, our debt, our sin. And he paid for it in full measure.**

So, my dear Christian friends, receive with believing hearts the real body and the real blood of your Lord Jesus Christ along with the bread and the wine for forgiveness of all your sins. Amen.