

Maundy Thursday; April 14, 2022
1st Corinthians 11:23-26
“Jesus’ Body and Blood is For You”

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night when 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.” In the same way, after the meal, he also took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new testament in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

There is a time to use figures of speech. Jesus uses figures of speech often when he is teaching his disciples. He speaks in parables, which are extended figures of speech. He speaks with metaphors, calling himself the Vine, the Good Shepherd, and the Gate. But that is when he has the luxury of time. And that is when he is speaking in mixed company, teaching his disciples right alongside his enemies. That is the time to use figures of speech: when he has time to explain himself, when he wants to mask his meaning from his enemies.

But Maundy Thursday is not the time for figures of speech. On Maundy Thursday, Jesus’ disciples are experiencing an all-out spiritual crisis. Satan is trying to sift Jesus’ disciples like wheat. Peter is boasting that he will never betray Jesus, but as we know, his faith is not nearly as secure as he supposes. On this night Jesus’ disciples will hightail it, not to catch up to their Lord and protect him, but to get away from him. Another disciple, before this night is over, will dangle from a noose that he himself ties. This is not a time for figures of speech. This is a crisis. This is a time for straightforward, unmistakable speech.

Also, on this Maundy Thursday night, the clock is ticking loudly. It is ticking down to the moment when Jesus will be nailed to the cross – now less than twenty-four hours away. He knows he is about to die. So he does what dying people do. He leaves his will. He leaves what he has to the people he loves the most. When people draw up their last will and testament, they do not use figures of speech. Wills do not say things like, “I hereby bequeath my chrome chariot to the apple of my eye.” No, wills say this: “I hereby bequeath my 2016 Buick Lucerne to my son, David.” Wills do not say, “I hereby bequeath my castle to my better half.” No, wills say this: “I hereby bequeath my home at 458 E. Main St. to my wife, Beatrice.” The whole point of a will is to be as clear and unmistakable as possible, so that no one can dispute it.

As Jesus makes out his will for his followers, he has no homestead, no ranch, no stables, no gold or silver. So he leaves his followers, the people he loves, what he does have. It is the only valuable thing he has. And it’s the most valuable thing imaginable. He leaves them his own body and blood, which he will use to pay for their forgiveness. It’s no figure of speech. It’s his last will and testament. This is a time for straightforward, unmistakable speech.

So we know that the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper are exactly what Jesus says they are. Jesus takes the unleavened bread of the Passover, gives thanks, and tells his disciples in no uncertain terms: **“This is my body, which is for you.”** If he wants to say something different, he can say it that very night. If what he says does have some figurative meaning, the rest of God’s Word would clear that up for us. But the rest of God’s Word takes Jesus’ words literally. Considering the gravity of the moment and the weakness of his disciples’ faith, Jesus makes his language simple and plain.

This account of the Lord’s Supper goes on: **In the same way, after the meal, he took the cup.** What’s in the cup is what’s in the cup at every Passover: grape wine. So Jesus does not stop with calling the bread his body. He also says of this cup, holding wine: **“This cup is the new testament in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”** The wine is also his blood, poured out for them and for us the next day.

With all that said, our flawed human reason breaks in like a rude child with objection after objection. “How can he give his body and blood when he hasn’t even died?” Then our snobby reason pulls out a measuring tape for Jesus’ height and waist size and says, “How can he give this to every believer? It wouldn’t last one single Sunday.” Under the guise of civility reason objects and says, “This is disgusting! The idea of eating someone’s flesh and drinking his blood. Do we really have to be savages?”

Like a rude child, our sinful human reason needs to be held in check and taught some lessons. If you want to take exception to the Lord’s Supper because it is illogical or distasteful, prepare to walk away from most of what God tells you in his Book. In God’s Word there are a thousand other teachings and statements equally illogical to our sinful human reason. Just how can Jesus be true God and true man at the same time? How can a virgin give birth? How can God be three separate persons in one single being? How could God hide all his power and grace behind something as repulsive as a cross?

If we want to become the teacher and have the Holy Spirit sit at a desk and take notes from us, eventually we will dismiss most of God’s Word, and all of his saving gospel. And we will call our Savior, who speaks clearly and unmistakably on this night, a liar.

So instead, let’s sit at the Spirit’s feet, and trust the holy Word of our Savior: **“This is my body, which is for you...This cup is the new testament in my blood.”** Here your Savior gives you a gracious invitation to receive what he gave to forgive you. Here he fills you with confidence that your sins are forgiven. At this feast you see the door to heaven’s eternal feast standing wide open.

Martin Luther once said that if we were handing out gold coins at the altar, the balcony would collapse under the weight of people standing in line to get there. He said, in the days before political correctness, that if money were handed out at the altar “men without arms would swim across rivers” to get there. But what Jesus gives us is better than gold. The treasure that is handed out at the Lord’s Supper is much better than gold. It is the body and blood of our perfect brother, which rescues us from the guilt, rule, and punishment of sin.

Notice that in these verses St. Paul does not merely quote Jesus’ words from the Lord’s Supper as they are recorded in Matthew 26, Mark 14, or Luke 22. Paul received his instruction on the Lord’s Supper straight from the source, Jesus. He says, **For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you...** And Paul wrote this letter a full thirty years after the first Lord’s Supper. So here he reminds a straying, troubled congregation that Jesus’ Supper is still meant as a comfort for them. The Lord’s table remains set throughout every generation. It was not just for the first disciples. Or just for the Corinthians thirty years later. It is for all believers of all ages. We receive this gift, and all its blessings, this very day.

But sadly, some think the gift is not really so great a gift. If I have God’s promises in his Word, why do I need them also in a physical form at the Lord’s Table? It is true, God’s Word is sufficient. And if he wanted to give us only his Word, it would be everything we need. But he loves us so much, and knows us so well. Your Creator made you with five senses. And the forgiveness offered you at Jesus’ Supper fills all your senses with this new life. The Lord attaches his promise of forgiveness to an act of eating and drinking. As we do it, we hear his promise, **“given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** At the very same time, his grace meets our eyes and touches our lips. We literally **“taste and see that the Lord is good.”** Even our sense of smell is filled with his divine assurance. After a week of struggling with sin, what more intimate way could God assure you that what was done on Calvary is still for you today!

I wonder if, on non-Communion Sundays, after the pastor forgives sins “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” – I wonder if some people who hear those words might be thinking, “That’s nice for the other people. But if he knew what I did this week, he wouldn’t be so ready to forgive *my* sins.” But when the Lord Jesus places his body and blood into your mouth, there can be no mistake about whose sins he is forgiving.

In his Supper Christ says, "I mean **you** when I say '**Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.**' And you know it's true, because I place my body and blood into **your** mouth, for the forgiveness of **your** sins."

Let us embrace with confidence the sure promise that our sins are forgiven in this wonderful Supper. Then we will soon see that this banquet spread before us is a preview of the heavenly one. Amen.