

I.N.I.

Maundy Thursday
April 13, 2017
Matthew 26:26-29

In Christ Jesus, who gives us His body and blood in this simple, yet also majestic meal of His Supper, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Most all of us know the words of institution by heart; if not because you have heard them so many times in church, then maybe because you were assigned to learn them in Confirmation Class. Let's listen to those words again. Note both the simplicity of the words and of the actions and note as well the splendor and their glory. We read from Matthew 26:26-29:

AND AS THEY WERE EATING, JESUS TOOK BREAD, BLESSED AND BROKE IT, AND GAVE IT TO THE DISCIPLES AND SAID, "TAKE, EAT; THIS IS MY BODY." THEN HE TOOK THE CUP, AND GAVE THANKS, AND GAVE IT TO THEM, SAYING, "DRINK FROM IT, ALL OF YOU. FOR THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT, WHICH IS SHED FOR MANY FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS. BUT I SAY TO YOU, I WILL NOT DRINK OF THIS FRUIT OF THE VINE FROM NOW ON UNTIL THAT DAY WHEN I DRINK IT NEW WITH YOU IN MY FATHER'S KINGDOM."

We have entitled our theme this evening:

THE SAVIOR'S FEAST!

I: THIS IS A FEAST WHICH IS SO SIMPLE THAT WE MAY MISS ITS GLORY.

Could anything have been more simple? The disciples and Jesus have come to celebrate the Jewish festival of the Passover. It no doubt was a special night, but it was also a night that had been celebrated by the Jews for almost 2,000 years. Passover was the central festival of the Jewish calendar. Everyone looked forward to celebrating it, including Jesus' disciples. It was a yearly celebration and remembrance of Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt. It was a night that celebrated the glory of God's deliverance of those who had painted their doorposts with the blood of the lamb they had sacrificed so that the Lord would "pass over" their houses, but inflict death on the firstborn of every household in Egypt that did not have the blood of the lamb on their doorposts. It was a great feast!

But this night was different. Yes, the Passover was special but at the end of the Passover celebration, quietly, and with no fanfare at all, Jesus did something new, something different. At the end of this ancient feast He instituted a whole new feast. At the end of this feast which was one of the centerpieces of God's Old Covenant, Jesus instituted a "New Covenant." Jesus did this so simply that you have to wonder if at that time the disciples fully understood the significance of what was happening.

Probably not! For earlier they had been arguing over who was more important in Jesus' kingdom and then when Jesus declared one of them would betray them, their minds were filled with questions and doubt and wonderment about who it was and what Jesus meant.

As we said the institution of this new feast was so simple, that it would have been easy to pass by and treat it as though it were nothing special. Without grandiose theatrics; without any flashes of light or puffs of smoke, Jesus took bread, the plainest bread possible---the unleavened bread used in the Passover--broke it and gave it to His disciples to eat. He declared as He did so: **"THIS IS MY BODY."** He didn't explain it. He didn't say that it was a symbol for His body. No, the words are plain and clear: **"THIS IS MY BODY."** He didn't tell them either to save it up or to hold it up and worship it. He just said, **"TAKE, EAT."**

And then with equal simplicity, He took a cup of wine; the cup also used in the Passover celebration, and simply said, **"DRINK FROM IT, ALL OF YOU. FOR THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE NEW COVENANT, WHICH IS SHED FOR MANY FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS."** Again He makes no further explanation of what He means. He does not have to. The words are plain and clear. **"THIS IS MY BLOOD,"** He declared. Jesus didn't say that it was a symbol for His blood. Neither did He say that it was something to be worshiped and adored.

No, just **"DRINK FROM IT, ALL OF YOU."**

Yes, it is all so simple that we may also miss the glory in it. For it has glory; glory beyond our understanding. Here is the Lamb of God, the One whom all those thousands of years of Passover Lambs had pictured and pointed to. This Jesus is the Lamb whose blood takes away the sins of the world (**John 1:29**). And now Jesus comes in this new feast to give forgiveness. That's what He said: **"THIS IS MY BLOOD . . . FOR THE REMISSION OF SINS."** Here is the Lamb who gives Himself as food for eternal life, not merely as paint for the doorpost to save physical lives.

But so many miss the glory of God in this simple meal. The very fact that we see this feast celebrated not just on this night but many times during the year may also cause us to think that it is nothing special. Over the years we may forget the true significance and meaning of this feast, this gift that Christ has given us in the Lord's Supper. There is no outward glory. Yes, it is all so simple that we could easily treat it like an empty ceremony whose purpose we have forgotten long ago. Why are we coming tonight? Is it because every good Lutheran goes to Communion on Maundy Thursday? Is it because it has become a habit?

Jesus makes the purpose clear. And Jesus shows us the glory that is here. Listen to what He said. Let the words be inscribed on your heart. Write its holy truth in your memory and never let it go. Jesus said this on the night of His betrayal, on the way to the cross. Jesus said this as His last will and testament, **"THIS IS MY BODY, GIVEN FOR YOU, THIS IS MY BLOOD SHED FOR YOU FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS."**

THE FEAST OF JESUS!

II: THIS IS A FEAST THAT IS ITSELF THE PRICE OF OUR SALVATION.

Think about that. This was Jesus' last will and testament just before He died. He gave no stocks or bonds. He had no family silver or gold to bequeath, no family china, no land, no home. We heard last Wednesday even the last things He owned, His clothes, were taken from Him when He died. There is nothing in Jesus' estate at all that is worth talking about—except, Jesus Himself! And so in His last will and testament He gives Himself! **"THIS IS MY BODY, THIS IS MY BLOOD GIVEN FOR YOU,"** He declares.

And who is the **"FOR YOU"**? It is each of you; it is me! On this night when there was so much on Jesus' mind; on this night when the whip and the crown of thorns, when the nails and the cross were already clearly before His eyes; He thought about—YOU and me! He spoke His last will and testament, and He made you and me His beneficiaries. Having nothing else to give us, He gave Himself to us and for us.

Look at this feast. Listen and wonder at its glory. **"THIS IS MY BODY; THIS IS MY BLOOD."** We do not eat and drink a symbol in this feast. No, it is the real, the true, the living Son of God and Mary's Son in and with the bread and wine. It is the same Jesus who spoke that night and who on the next day offered Himself—His body and blood—as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. It was in anticipation of His death on Good Friday that Jesus instituted this feast and said these words on Thursday.

Yes, it is the same Jesus who was still thinking about you and me on the next day when He cried out from the cross, **"MY GOD, MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?"** And the answer, of course, to this most painful question is this: God forsook Jesus because God planned our salvation that way. God forsook His own Son because Jesus in obedience wanted to suffer the torments of hell itself on the cross for you and for me. All around Him the people cried out, **"IF YOU ARE SON OF GOD, COME DOWN FROM THE CROSS."** Why didn't He?

Because the night before, He had willed and bequeathed Himself to you and to me. He had declared in His unalterable will that He would never be separated from us. And the only way that that goal could be reached, the goal that we be forever united with Him in this sacred supper, was for Him to be abandoned by the Father. The only way was for Him to pay for the sins that separated us from God and endure the torment of hell on the cross as our Substitute.

The world passes the Lord's Supper by with confusion and disdain. They question our faith in this sacrament, "How can Jesus really be present in the bread and wine?" They insult us as

primitive, even at times in history as “cannibalistic” for eating the flesh and drinking the blood of our God. In fact, a great many *Christians* are confused by the Lord’s Supper. They too doubt the reality of Christ’s body and blood in the bread and wine and many dismiss it as unimportant, not really worth bothering with. Many people in our community probably don’t even know what Maundy Thursday is; much less understand the true significance of the Lord’s Supper.

But we see our God and His glory in this meal and in the cross. Ordinary food and drink have, by God’s design, the ability to preserve our bodies and to give them strength. But look what is in this food and drink! It preserves the soul for life eternal. For here is Jesus the living bread from heaven. Here is Jesus the cup of salvation. Here is Jesus, who now gives us the very price that He paid for our salvation—His true body and true blood. He declares that it is given for the forgiveness of sins. That’s why He came down from heaven in the first place, to earn our forgiveness. That’s why He suffered and died on the cross, to earn our forgiveness. Here is glory worth more than all the wealth of the world; glory more precious than all the medicines in the world; glory that lasts for eternity. For Jesus, our God and Savior, is here. Jesus is here with Himself as the medicine that gives eternal life; for where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.

Therefore, come with hearts that are broken because of your sins and guilt and shame.

Come with souls that are starving for food that will strengthen you for the ongoing battle with the devil, the world, and your sinful nature.

Come with hearts that are parched with a thirst for salvation.

Come eat and drink the price of your salvation in this feast.

Then go. Go and hold fast to Him who had nothing else to give to us than Himself.

Go and hold fast to Him who, on the night in which He was betrayed, had no one He would rather think about than you.

Go and never forget Him, who in His last will and testament made us for all eternity His heirs of the riches of heaven.

Go with the gift of His body and blood that strengthens and preserves us for life here and for life hereafter in eternity.

Amen!