

I.N.I.

Maundy Thursday
April 2, 2015
Luke 22:19-20

In Christ Jesus, who instituted His Holy Supper for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What was Holy Week like for Jesus? After the events of Palm Sunday Jesus went to Bethany and then on Monday and Tuesday He taught in the temple of Jerusalem. On Wednesday, He stayed away from public gatherings. He sent Peter and John back into Jerusalem to prepare for the Passover meal. On Thursday He quietly reentered Jerusalem with His disciples. Together they would celebrate the Passover in the upper room. When the meal was finished late in the evening, they left the upper room and walked to the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus would be arrested. All the events Jesus had foretold to His disciples would then begin. Those events would end with His crucifixion on the next day.

But before they left the upper room Jesus did something new, something different. He instituted a whole new meal. At the end of this feast, the Passover, 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 and then when Jesus declared that one of them would betray them, their minds were filled with questions and doubt and wonderment about who it was and what Jesus meant.

The institution of this new meal was so simple, that it would have been easy to pass by and treat it as though it were nothing. Without grandiose theatrics; without any flashes of light or puffs of smoke, Jesus took bread and wine and gave them this most special meal. As we heard this evening the apostle Paul reminds us that this meal we call the Lord's Supper is tied to the cross of Jesus. He wrote, **FOR AS OFTEN AS YOU EAT THIS BREAD AND DRINK THIS CUP, YOU PROCLAIM THE LORD'S DEATH TILL HE COMES.** (1 Co 11:26). So we are to see the cross when we come together to receive the Lord's Supper.

SEE HIS CROSS! RECEIVE THE BLESSINGS OF THE CROSS!

I. JESUS TIED HIS BLESSINGS TO THE SACRAMENT OF THE ALTAR.

The Passover meal was an important event for devout Jews. God commanded His Old Testament people to hold this festival every year in order to commemorate their deliverance from Egypt. Each feature of the meal was to remind them of the events of that great deliverance from the bondage of slavery. They purged the house of all leaven, or yeast, in preparation of the festival. Removing yeast was a reminder that the Jews left Egypt in a hurry and could not wait for their bread to rise. The meal included bitter herbs, such as horseradish, to remind the Jews of their bitter sufferings. A lamb was killed and eaten reminding them of the lambs that were sacrificed whose blood was spread over the doorposts assuring them of being spared from the angel of death passing over them. Wine and unleavened bread are significant parts of the Passover meal, which Jesus and His disciples celebrated in the upper room.

The Passover meal begins with a blessing over a glass of wine and ends with another blessing over wine. Jesus and His disciples ate this Passover meal, but on this night Jesus made something new. He took the unleavened bread from the table, broke it, and distributed it to His disciples. Then Jesus took the wine from the Passover table and passed it on to the disciples. These two acts were new and different for all of them, and they realized that what they witnessed and received was different and new.

From that moment, these Jewish believers would not eat the Passover in the old way any longer. Certainly they may have celebrated the Passover, but it would always have a new dimension and new reference point in Jesus, the Messiah. After Pentecost, the believers used this new command of Jesus as part of their worship. The book of Acts tells us that these disciples **CONTINUED STEADFASTLY IN THE APOSTLES' DOCTRINE AND FELLOWSHIP, IN THE BREAKING OF BREAD, AND IN PRAYERS.** (Acts 2:42). The apostle Paul, as we read this evening, gave directions to the Corinthians concerning the Sacrament too. It has remained an important part of Christian worship since the moment Jesus instituted it.

Jesus made something new on that Maundy Thursday when He tied the unleavened bread and wine to His cross. He said, **THIS IS MY BODY WHICH IS GIVEN FOR YOU.** The disciples had grown accustomed to seeing Jesus. He had a human body just as they did. He was born of the virgin Mary. Jesus was a human in every way. That body He had would be given for them. Jesus knew what that meant; the disciples didn't fully understand it at that moment, but they would soon understand. In just a few hours, Jesus would be arrested and beaten by soldiers. When He was turned over to Pilate, His body would be beaten again, whipped, and then crucified.

His body was given for them and for all humanity. He endured all these things because He took our place and suffered what we deserved to suffer for our sins. He was innocent of any sin, but He assumed our sins and the sins of all the world. **GOD MADE HIM WHO KNEW NO SIN TO BE SIN FOR US, THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.** (2 Co 5:21). Isaiah had seen it long before it happened: **BUT HE WAS PIERCED FOR OUR TRANSGRESSIONS, HE WAS CRUSHED FOR OUR INIQUITIES; THE PUNISHMENT THAT BROUGHT US PEACE WAS UPON HIM, AND BY HIS WOUNDS WE ARE HEALED.** (Isa 53:5). Yes, His body was "given for you." By that, Jesus clearly meant it was given for the disciples in the upper room and for you and me here today.

The second part of this special new meal involved the wine. Jesus also tied that to His cross. He said it is **MY BLOOD, WHICH IS SHED FOR YOU.** In the events of the next day, Jesus certainly would bleed. The whippings opened wounds on His back. It was a cruel and bloody punishment. The soldiers beat Jesus and made a crown of thorns for His head. Then they mocked Him and beat the thorns of that crown into His head. Blood flowed down His face from those wounds Good Friday morning. And, of course, nails pierced His hands and feet. Then after He died, the soldier pierced Jesus' side with his spear and out of that gash came blood and water. Jesus was dead.

His blood was shed for us. These words of Jesus tied this part of the Sacrament to His cross and His suffering. He would bleed for these disciples and also for us. The bread and wine Jesus took from the Passover table now were filled with new meaning and significance. He tied them to His cross. Make no mistake about that.

Jesus also indicated that this was not a onetime symbol or word picture. He said, **DO THIS.** The disciples of Jesus were to do it after this night with Jesus. And they did. And we do too. We do it as Jesus directed: **DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.** We remember His body and blood. We go back to the cross and think of what He accomplished there. His body and blood earned for us forgiveness. When we come to the Sacrament, we remember the great sacrifice Jesus made for us: His pain, His suffering—giving His body for us so we might be forgiven, shedding His blood for us so that we might be cleansed. "Come," Jesus invites us. "Do this. Eat My body with the bread and drink My blood with the wine. Do it in remembrance of Me." This Sacrament is indeed tied to His cross for you and for me.

II. JESUS GIVES YOU THE BLESSINGS OF HIS CROSS.

We are to do this in remembrance of Jesus and His crucifixion on the cross. But it is not simply a memorial meal for us to remember His cross. Another essential feature of the Sacrament is, it is His body and blood together in, with and under the bread and wine.

Jesus said, **THIS IS MY BODY**. The words are clear. He has tied the unleavened bread to His body in a way we do not fully understand. It is not a symbol of His body or a representation of His body. It **IS**," He said—His **BODY WHICH IS GIVEN FOR YOU**. When we come to the Lord's Table, we receive, in a supernatural way, the body of Jesus that was beaten and crucified for us. Because we receive His body given for us, we receive the forgiveness He has gained for us. In the same way, He says that the wine is His blood—the blood shed for you on the cross. It is the blood shed to win forgiveness. It's not a symbol of His blood. It is His blood. That's what Jesus said, and we have no right or reason to change His words.

Even though we don't comprehend how this can be, we take Jesus at His word. Consider the events in the upper room. Jesus was with His disciples at the end of His public ministry. He would die in less than a day. This was the last moment He spent with His disciples before His death. What Jesus did was institute something new, special and different. It is His last will and testament. Just as we do not change anyone's last will and testament, we do not change Jesus' words even if we do not fully understand them. Jesus knew exactly what was waiting for Him. His words are all clear, including His words about this Sacrament meal. Why would we change His words? Remember that Jesus' words had healed the sick and raised the dead. No one could understand those things either; they were miracles. This is no less a miracle—a repeating miracle every time we **DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE** of Him. Our human minds are too small to grasp it fully, but the Sacrament does not depend on whether we understand fully. It depends on the words of Jesus and His power in our hearts.

For us, this Sacrament is a special assurance of our forgiveness. Jesus was thinking of us on this night in the upper room. He knew that we would need the assurance of forgiveness on our journey through life. How often haven't we struggled with questions and doubts about so many things? Think about the challenges you have faced or are facing now. What pains! What heartache! What worry and anxiety! What fear of the future! What guilt nags at your heart! What anguish over past events and past sins!

Jesus understood all of those human challenges. He was thinking of all of our challenges when He told his disciples, **THIS IS MY BODY . . . THIS IS . . . MY BLOOD**.

He knew that in times of doubt, fear, and anguish, we would need the assurance of His words to give us comfort and encouragement. But He also knew that we would sometimes need more than just words. So He gave us this Sacrament! It is words, and each time you receive the Sacrament, you hear those words: given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. But it is also His true body and blood under the bread and wine to assure us that we are included in His deep love for sinners like us and that we have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation.

The Sacrament takes us back to the cross of Jesus in a most wonderful and comforting way. We receive His body and blood and with it the forgiveness of our sins. The Sacrament calls us back to the cross each time we come to the Lord's Supper. It draws us together as His believers here in this chaotic life and centers us on what is most important: Jesus suffered and died for me! I am forgiven. What blessings from His cross for our daily struggles in life! Amen.