

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Maundy Thursday
March 29, 2018
Sermon by Pastor Daniel Pautz
I come, O Savior, to your table
—Mark 14:12-26

There was nothing like it. My Mother's home cooked meals on the farm. I can still smell the roast beef dinners she would make. And then later after farm life my parents owned and operated what I call a Ma and Pa Café in Green Bay – and their living quarters was attached. It was not a fancy place but the food was superb. When my family would visit from Arizona, my Mom would say that she had to make something special for us. But I said, "No, you don't have to do that. Let us order from off the menu. My Mom's homemade soups were the best around, better than any costly restaurant could serve. Her homemade pies were out of this world. My dad had the best fish in the world – Lake Perch and walleye. The only match he has is my brother who had worked for awhile in the restaurant and who to this day catches perch and walleye out of Green Bay or one of those cool pure lakes in Upper Michigan.

But there is even another meal which is better. Well, it is not really a meal at all although it is called a meal. It is called Supper, the Lord's Supper. A hymn refers to it as the Lord's Table. We sing, '**I come, O Savior, to Your Table**'. It is really the best of all because of what it really is and because of the blessings that the Lord gives through it.

We often refer to it as communion, the Sacrament of the Altar, and sometimes the Lord's Table, but the Lord's Supper is another good name. It is called Supper because it was in the evening, Maundy Thursday evening, that this came about and also because the Lord and his disciples had gathered that evening in the Upper Room to eat the Passover meal. It is called the LORD'S Supper because our Lord instituted it. When you come forward for communion, remember that this is something that the Lord himself has established. This is special, very special, and to be respected. It is from the Lord.

The Lord tells us what it is. **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,"** Do not lose that sense of awe when you come to the Lord's Supper. Yes, you are receiving a wafer of bread, unleavened bread that was also used in the Passover meal. You are receiving a sip of wine - and wine also was used in the Passover Meal. But you also and miraculously are receiving the true body and the true blood of Jesus. How can this be? Remember with the Lord all things are possible. He who made this world instantly and out of nothing. He who walked on water and raised people from the dead, has no difficulty in giving us his body and blood in communion.

The Gospel writer Mark says, **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many."** Outside of Lutheranism, Protestant churches and those community churches that I am aware of teach that their members do not really receive the body and blood of the Lord, maybe mystically but not really. Many would reword Christ's words to say, This represents my body, this represents my blood. But Jesus used the word 'is'. **"This is my body, this is my blood."**

489 years ago in 1529, Martin Luther met with Swiss reformer John Zwingli at Marburg, Germany. There was some agreement in doctrine but certainly not on the Lord's Supper. Luther taught 'Real Presence' meaning that the body and blood of the Lord are really present in communion. Zwingli objected saying that such a teaching was unreasonable. Luther agreed that the teaching of Real Presence might sound unreasonable but the Lord used the word IS. **This is my body, this is my blood.** Luther stood on the ground of the Bible, not on frail human reason.

Jesus used the word covenant. Luke records Christ's words, "**This cup is the new covenant in my blood.**" Covenant means an agreement, a testament. It is like a person's last will and testament. One does not use misleading or ambiguous words in a last will and testament. You say what you mean and you mean what you say. Jesus called the Lord's Supper a covenant. In about 12 hours from the time Jesus instituted communion he would be nailed to the cross, in about 18 hours he would be dead. His language in the covenant would not be misleading or ambiguous or have to be subject to human interpretation. **"Take it; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many..**

When you come tonight to the Lord's Table tonight, come with a sense of awe of what you are receiving. 1 Corinthians 10:16 (NLJV) puts it this way, **"The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"** You receive not only two things – the bread and the wine, but four things – the body and blood of the Lord. Receiving the Lord's Supper is not a casual thing. A nearby community church simply passes out the elements of communion in the pews and whoever wants to take it can, including little children, unbelievers, impenitent, and those who know little or nothing about the Lord's Supper.

*Human reason, though it ponder,
Cannot fathom this great wonder
That Christ's body must be boundless
Since the souls it feeds are countless,
And that He His blood is giving
With the wine we are receiving.
These great mysteries unsounded
Are by God alone expounded.*

Many of us know by heart the refrain from the hymn I Come, O Savior, to Your Table. **"Lord, may your body and your blood Be for our souls the highest good."** And indeed they are for your highest good. The greatest and most needed blessing of all is the forgiveness of sins. Notice the words of communion. **This is my body given for you** (for your benefit) **This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.** (Matthew 26:28) The new covenant. There was an old covenant. Sometimes we feel that things of old are better than new things. Not too long ago someone said, "I don't like the TV programs today. Remember those days of old when we had programs such as Johnny Carson and the Carol Burnett show and I Love Lucy and 'Father Knows Best.' Those shows from of old were the best!" But even today many new things are much better than the old. Think of trips to the dentist office years ago with the slow speed drills and the pain of it all if you had a cavity. You almost prayed the Second Coming of the Lord would happen before the next dental appointment. But the dentistry today that I have experienced is far different and better than the old. The same is true with the new covenant spoken of by Jesus. It was not that the old covenant was bad but it could not take away sins. The new covenant does.

This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Something wondrous and fabulous happens when you come to the Lord's Table. Not only do you receive the body and blood of Jesus but also you receive it for the forgiveness of your sins. You know not only in a general way that you are sinful but also you are aware of specific sins of thoughts and words and deeds. You know of things that you should have done but did not, of things you ought not to have done but you did. You confess your sins and repent of them. And through the Lord's Supper your sins are forgiven. Luther's Catechism puts it this way:
What blessing do we receive through this eating and drinking? That is shown us by these words, "Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." Through these words we receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in this sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

But you might ask, "Don't I as a repentant believer already have forgiveness before coming to the Lord's Table?" And the answer is yes. But in the Lord's Supper you receive added assurance. Jesus tops off the knowledge of your forgiveness by giving you the very body and blood He sacrificed for you. And being assured that our sins are forgiven is the same as being strengthened in faith. And who of us does not need to have a continued strengthening of faith. At times our faith might flicker like a candle. It runs low. It needs to burn brightly again. Come to communion for the strengthening of faith.

As our faith is strengthened, so is our will and ability to face temptation. It is a tough world out there. So much unbelief and often that unbelief is in the hearts of people who are friendly and nice to us. SO much temptation to not be happy with the possessions God gives us, with life in general. So many temptations and allurements to lust and to envy. That old beast of our sinful nature sin within us can cause so many problems for us. There are the temptations to misuse alcohol, to be poor managers of the money God has entrusted to our care. We need strength to resist temptation and to live God-pleasing lives.

Ever feel worn and down? The personal problems and troubles of our lives can become heavy burdens. It might be things such as sickness in family, our own body wearing out, the challenges at work, and difficult decisions that we have to make. As our cell phones need to be recharged regularly so also our spiritual life needs recharging. The Lord does that through his Word and through the Lord's Supper.

*I come, O Savior, to your Table,
For weak and weary is my soul;
O Jesus, you alone are able
To satisfy and make me whole:
Lord, may Thy body and Thy blood
Be for my soul the highest good!*