

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod

Holy Thursday

April 6, 2023

Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl

It is the Lord's Supper

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood. ²⁸ Instead, let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For if anyone eats and drinks in an unworthy way because he does not recognize the Lord's body, he eats and drinks judgment on himself.

—1 Corinthians 11:23-29

Just look at how highly Jesus esteems the sacrament we call "the Lord's Supper." He is just hours away from the greatest injustice this world has ever seen. The perfect Son of God will be crucified on a cross and deemed the worst of criminals. Jesus knows very clearly what will soon transpire. His disciples will make some lofty promises that they will never abandon him or betray him or deny him. But they will. They will. Jesus knows all of that so clearly. And yet just hours before it happens what does he do? He takes bread, the simplest kind of bread, and says, "**This is my body, given for you.**" And then he takes the cup with wine and says, "**This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.**" Just ponder that. At the most crucial time of Jesus' life here on earth, he is not thinking about himself. He is thinking about his disciples. He is thinking about you. And he gives us the best gift we could ever receive: himself. Jesus holds this sacrament with the highest regard.

And it wasn't just that first night. Twenty-six years later, the apostle Paul is writing a letter to Christians in the city of Corinth. And with the same dignity and high esteem he teaches the Corinthians. "**For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**"

Paul takes us back to that night when Jesus was with his disciples. Jesus himself later taught Paul exactly what took place in that upper room on that Thursday of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Jesus speaks so clearly, so simply, so there is no doubt as to what he gave them. With simple bread in his hand, he says, "**This is my body.**" And with wine in the cup, he says, "**This cup is the new testament in my blood.**" No doubt. No confusion. No riddles. No parables. He speaks so simply and so clearly.

And that's exactly what he gives to us every single time we join in the Lord's Supper. May we also hold with the highest esteem the gift we receive in the Lord's Supper. What the Lord Jesus has prepared for us here tonight is no different than when he was with his disciples or when Paul was writing to the Corinthians. "**This is my body. This is my blood, given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins.**" The words are so clear, and the miracle is so certain. The very body that Jesus offered on the cross and the very blood that he poured out to cover sins are really present with the bread and the wine in this Supper. How can it be? It is the *Lord's Supper*, that's how. Since Jesus serves us, what he says is true.

Look at what is happening when you and I receive the Lord's Supper. Paul says, "**For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**" Every time we receive the Lord's Supper, we are proclaiming who it is that comes to us in these simple elements of bread and wine. This is the Lord. This is "**God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God**" according to the Nicene Creed. This is the eternal Son of God who was confined in the womb of a virgin for nine months. This is the almighty God who opened the eyes of the blind so they could see. This is God's Son who is the crucified and risen Christ.

We get to proclaim *who* he is when we receive the Lord's Supper. And we proclaim *why* he came. He came to die. He came to give us the benefit of his death. He came to give us forgiveness, life, and salvation in this Sacrament. That's what Paul means when he says, "**For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**"

So, it's no wonder then why Paul would give us a warning, right? This is the Lord's Supper. Jesus and Paul hold it with such honor and high esteem. It's no wonder why Paul would warn us to hold this Supper with the highest esteem:

“Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord’s body and blood. ²⁸ Instead, let a person examine himself and *after doing so*, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For if anyone eats and drinks in an unworthy way because he does not recognize the Lord’s body, he eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

Paul wants to impress on us the importance, the value, and the beauty of the Lord’s Supper. God wants us to examine ourselves and make sure we are prepared for what Jesus is giving us in his Supper. How do we do that? Remember this is the *Lord’s* Supper. The Lord’s Supper is all about calling to mind our desperate need for Jesus and for the forgiveness he has won for us. The Lord’s Supper is all about remembering his promise to satisfy our desperate need in this gift of himself for our salvation. The Lord’s Supper is about Jesus serving us with his very body and blood for the forgiveness of our sins. This is not just a picture or a symbol of that. No, the Lord’s Supper is for sinners who need Jesus forgiveness. The Lord’s Supper is for believers who hold on to every word that Jesus gives and trusts that word even though we can’t fully understand it.

So, Paul cautions us. If you do not think you need forgiveness, stay away from the Lord’s Supper. If you openly live in sin and defend your sin in impenitence, keep away from the Lord’s Supper. If you do not recognize Jesus as the God and Lord who has spoken the truth in all of his Word, do not come to the Lord’s Supper. If you are a member of a church that does not hold on to the entire Bible as God’s holy Word which centers on Jesus Christ, then do not receive the Lord’s Supper. If you do not think Jesus was serious when he said that he is present with his true body and blood in this Sacrament, then do not draw near to the Lord’s Supper. For we proclaim his death there. We proclaim who he is and all he has done for us by his death there in the Lord’s Supper.

Jesus esteems his Supper so highly that he expects faithfulness to all that God has said. Jesus esteems his Supper so highly that he condemns any departure from his Word. Take to heart Paul’s caution and examine yourself. It is the Lord’s Supper. How can someone examine himself as Paul says we should, if that person denies some of God’s Word? How can someone, in the receiving of the Sacrament, properly proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes if he does not know who Jesus is and why he came? How can someone properly proclaim the Lord’s death if he denies any part of the purpose of this death or of God’s will for us as he has given it to us in his Word?

So, examine yourselves. If you do not know or believe what Jesus gives to us in his Word, then stay away from the Lord’s Supper. Oh, but someone will object that if we keep people away from the Lord’s Supper, then we are judging. Of course, we are! Oh, we are *not* judging a person’s faith. Only God can do that for he is the only one who can see if faith is there. But we do judge a person’s *confession* of that faith. God wants us to do *that*. He wants us to look at the fruit of a person’s faith. A person’s confession of faith is made known by what he says. Or a person’s confession is made known by what membership or organization that person is aligned with. If you are aligned with an organization or a church that denies any part of God’s Word, then do not come to the Lord’s Supper.

Far be it from us that we should invite anyone to the Lord’s Supper who, even unknowingly, supports those who teach contrary to the Word of God. We heed Paul’s warning. **“For if anyone eats and drinks in an unworthy way because he does not recognize the Lord’s body, he eats and drinks judgment on himself.”** The Lord’s Supper is just that important! And our love for people is just that important. After all, it is the *Lord’s* Supper.

But again, Paul’s caution is not intended to scare us away from the Lord’s Supper. His warning is intended to encourage us to approach the Lord’s Supper with deep reverence and sheer appreciation for what Jesus gives us. We come together and proclaim the Lord’s death and all that means to us. It is the Lord’s Supper, and he invites us to come together to receive the benefit of his death for us as we proclaim that death. It is as if together, we say one to another: *“See, here is Christ who died. He is here for me and for you with his true body and blood. This is the Lord’s Supper. He serves us with his true body and blood given and poured out for you and for me for the forgiveness of our sins.”*

So, with repentant hearts, my brothers and sisters, come with joy and thanksgiving to receive the Lord in this Supper. Come at his most generous and gracious invitation. Come in the assurance that he has invited you and intends for you to receive him and all that he has won for you. Come knowing from his presence and from his Word of promise that as the Father looks down on you, he sees Jesus who is forever with you. Come and receive the Lord’s Supper. For he who is the host is himself the meal. It is the Lord’s Supper given for you. Amen.