

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Holy Thursday
April 2, 2026
Sermon by Pastor Jon D. Buchholz
Jesus is the host. Jesus is the feast.

—1 Corinthians 11:23-28

It was time. The day had come when the Passover lamb was to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to prepare the Passover. When the hour had come, Jesus reclined at the table with his twelve apostles. He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you, I will not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:14-16).

For over 1,500 years the Passover had been celebrated around Jewish tables. The Passover meal celebrated and commemorated God’s deliverance of the Children of Israel out of the land of Egypt many centuries before. At the very first Passover, while the Israelites were still slaves in Egypt, Moses gave instructions to the people: Each household was to take an unblemished one-year lamb or goat. They were to slaughter the lamb at sunset on the fourteenth day and take the blood from the animal and paint it on the doorposts and crossbeams of the house. Then they were to roast the animal and eat the meat with bitter herbs and unleavened bread. At midnight, the angel of death swept across the land of Egypt, and the firstborn in every Egyptian household died. But at the homes of the Children of Israel—the homes that had the blood painted at the entrance—the angel of death *passed over*. After the plague upon the firstborn, the wailing and mourning in Egypt were so great that Pharaoh told the Israelites to get out as quickly as possible. Finally, Pharaoh was ready to listen to God’s command to let his people go, and the Israelites were set free from slavery in Egypt. Every year the Jews ate the Passover. Every year they remembered God’s deliverance. The Passover was the covenant meal between God and his people.

Over the last three years, Jesus had eaten many meals with his disciples. But this meal was different. This Passover not only looked back and remembered. This Passover brought fulfillment. You see, the Passover didn’t just look back and remember God’s salvation centuries earlier. It also looked forward to a greater salvation in the future, deliverance not from slavery in Egypt but from slavery to death and damnation. This deliverance was coming from a greater and more perfect Lamb. The Passover not only looked back, it looked forward to the arrival of the Messiah, the Chosen One of God, who with his own blood would rescue his people from sin. And now, at this Passover, at this table, the Messiah was here. It was the perfect fulfillment of everything God had promised. It was time!

Jesus, the eternal Passover Lamb was about to be sacrificed. The Old Covenant was about to be fulfilled in its perfection. It was time for a New Covenant to be put in place and sealed with the blood of a new Lamb. So at this Passover on this night, the Son of God himself hosts the meal. And as this Passover of Passovers draws to a close, Jesus initiates a New Covenant. He takes unleavened bread, and he says, “Take, eat, this is my body, given for you.” He takes the cup of wine and says, “Take, drink, this is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” That night a New Covenant was put in place, and from that night the followers of Jesus have followed his instructions: “Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Brothers and sisters, tonight Jesus invites us again to the table. Jesus is the host, who spreads the feast before us and says, “Come to the feast!” He prepares the feast for you. It’s a feast for the hungry, who crave forgiveness for your many sins, who want to be unshackled from the burden of guilt and shame, who want to be refreshed and restored. It’s a feast for you, a pilgrim in a parched and dreary land, wandering in a desert in which we have no permanent home, through a country where we have no lasting citizenship. Your host says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). “Blessed are you who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for you will be filled” (Matthew 5:6). Come to the table! Receive his gifts in the feast Jesus has spread for you. Forgiveness and freedom are yours. Come, dine with Jesus at the banquet! Come enjoy a little taste of heaven!

But when you come to the meal that Jesus himself hosts, come prepared. That means come with an appetite! Come recognizing how much we, as sinners, need this meal. Come repentant, with a spirit of sorrow for sin and trusting Jesus for forgiveness. Come joyful! This is the *Lord’s Supper*; Jesus invites you to have supper with him. He prepares the table for you. Come with a craving to be filled, to receive his forgiveness, joy and peace.

In the city of Corinth, the Apostle Paul had to admonish the Corinthian Christians because they had become careless and complacent about Communion. He says, “In giving you this next command, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. When you come together in the same place, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat” (1 Cor. 11:17, 20). In Corinth the Christians had something called an “Agape Meal,” a “Feast of Love,” that had turned into something other than the Lord’s Supper. The Agape Meal had turned into more of a fellowship potluck—but with some flagrant abuses. Some people were overeating, while others went hungry. Some people were actually getting drunk at these church gatherings. The Agape Meal had strayed far from what Jesus had

instituted his Lord's Supper to be. So this is the whole purpose of this section in 1 Corinthians 11: The Apostle Paul needs to teach the Corinthians, to instruct them about the Lord's Supper, so they could get away from the abuses that had entered the church and get back to what Jesus had instituted.

So Paul takes the Corinthians back to the words of Jesus, the words we still use today when we celebrate the Lord's Supper: *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."* In returning to the words of Jesus and the real meaning of Holy Communion, the apostle makes it clear that Jesus is not only the host who spreads the feast, he's not only the host who invites us to the feast. Jesus himself *is* the feast!

"This is my body. This is my blood." In this meal, Jesus serves us himself. Not in a representative or symbolic way. Jesus doesn't say, "This *represents* my body," or "This *symbolizes* my blood." No, he says, "This *is* . . .). In Holy Communion we eat and drink bread and wine, and in, with, and under the bread and wine we eat and drink Jesus' true body and blood. In Communion we receive Jesus. We eat and drink his body and blood in a wonderful, sacramental way. It's the same body and blood once offered on the cross for the forgiveness of the world; here it's offered to us personally for the forgiveness of our sins. But it's not dead flesh and blood; Jesus is alive, raised from the dead, seated at the right hand of the Father, glorified forever.

But someone says, "I don't get it. I don't understand how this can be Jesus' true body and blood. I don't understand how Jesus can *be* the feast." Yeah, well, I don't understand it either. But this is what Jesus says, and we're going to take Jesus' words at face value, and we know that Jesus' words have the power to make things be what he says they are. When he says, "This is my body," it *is* his body. It *is* his blood. When we receive the Holy Sacrament, we receive Jesus, not just as a reminder, not just as a memorial snack, but his true body and blood given and poured out for the forgiveness of our sins.

In the Gospel of Luke chapter 14, Jesus tells the parable of the wedding banquet. "A certain man made a great banquet and invited many people. When it was time for the banquet, he sent out his servant to tell those who were invited, 'Come, because everything is now ready.' But they all alike began to make excuses" (Luke 14:16,17). Jesus' parable is about the greater invitation to trust in him and find a home in the kingdom of God, but we see the same response when Jesus spreads the feast of Holy Communion. "I have more important things to do than gather in God's house to be served by Jesus. I know all those things already. I watch church online." The excuses all reflect the same spirit: "I'm not hungry for Jesus' body and blood. I don't crave him. I don't feel the need to have my burden of guilt lifted. I don't need the assurance of forgiveness." God, be merciful to me in my weakness and unbelief! Do not cast me away from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and renew a right spirit within me (Psalm 51).

In response to all our sins and excuses, Jesus' continues to hold out his invitation: Do this, as often as you eat and drink, in remembrance of me. He continues to spread the banquet for us, and he continues to offer life and peace and freedom and joy and forgiveness and eternal life. He continues to offer himself to eat and to drink in the Sacrament. Jesus is the host. Jesus is the feast.

It was time. The Passover feast was fulfilled. The Old Covenant was completed, wrapped up. The Messiah was here, reclining at the table with his disciples, to institute a New Covenant. "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." The Passover recalled deliverance from slavery in Egypt. Holy Communion recalls deliverance from slavery to sin and Satan. Whenever we dine at the Lord's Table we look back at the great sacrifice that Jesus made for us on the cross, and we look forward to the banquet in heaven. And there in heaven, too, Jesus is our host, and Jesus is our feast. Amen.