

## Sermon for April 4, 2012 – Maundy Thursday

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

### Theme: Holy Communion

- 1) *With Christ*
- 2) *With each other*

*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? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*

What is the Lord's Supper? Is it merely a symbol of Christ's sacrifice for us? Is it just an act of dedication we perform to show that we are sincere in our faith?

No, Holy Communion is much more than this. Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper as a means through which we could unite with him and his salvation in a most intimate of ways. He also intended Holy Communion to be a way for Christians to express the oneness of their faith.

Because of the noblest of gifts offered to us in this Supper, Holy Communion should not be received lightly or indifferently. Because of the ongoing blessing of Holy Communion, it should not be viewed as a mere church rite that has no ongoing significance outside the confines of these walls.

This is why, with the apostle Paul as our guide, we are going to consider this evening exactly what Holy Communion is and its ongoing significance for us personally and collectively as a congregation.

### Part one: Holy Communion with Christ

Many members of the congregation to which the Apostle Paul originally wrote our sermon text, did not have a correct understanding of Holy Communion. It seems that many of them thought that the Lord's Supper was just like any other religious meal. They had no trouble partaking of the Lord's Supper on Sunday, and then partaking of a meal dedicated to a pagan god during another day of the week (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:18-21). Many of the members of the Corinthian congregation took a cavalier attitude towards the Lord's Supper. Some people went so far as to even get drunk while celebrating it (cf. 1 Corinthians 11:20-22).

And how did the Lord respond to the way the Corinthians were abusing his Supper? St. Paul tells us: *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. . . That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.* (1 Corinthians 11:27,30)

God is deadly serious when it comes to his blessed sacrament of Holy Communion. He does not want it to be abused, but used for the purpose for which it was given: to comfort the guilt-laden heart with the knowledge of forgiveness, to strengthen the faith of those undergoing any and every trial, and to build the community of Christians together - uniting them with himself and each other in the in the most intimate of ways.

Our text begins: *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?*

The cup of blessing is the wine that is distributed in Holy Communion. It is called the cup of blessing for a couple of reasons. The Lord's Supper was instituted during the Passover. It was customary for celebrants of the Passover to pass around a common cup for every one to drink from 4 times during the meal. That last cup, at the very end of the meal, was called the "cup of blessing." It seems that it was at this time Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. And how did he do it? Scripture tells us that He took bread and "gave thanks," and that he did the same with the cup. In other words, he spoke a blessing over the bread and the wine, setting them apart for the sacred use of being the vessels in, with and under which His very body and blood would be given to us. Jesus' blessing of the bread and wine makes Communion what it is, and we recall that blessing every time the words of institution are spoken before we partake of Holy Communion.

Paul says: *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?* It is from this verse that we get our term "Holy Communion." Contained in, with and under the bread and wine which is distributed and received in Holy Communion is the actual body and blood of Christ. The bread and wine are not just symbols, nor do they merely signify Christ's "spiritual presence." No, in Holy Communion we are receiving the actual, real body and blood of Christ. In a very intimate way, that defies all human understanding, we are communing with Christ himself. Jesus said it and we believe it.

What does it mean to "commune"? It means to share, participate in, and have fellowship with . . . When we go to the Lord's Supper, we "commune," or have intimate fellowship with Christ's living body and saving blood. And, as we share in Christ's body and blood, God shares with us the blessings Christ won for us when he offered his body and poured out his blood on the cross, namely forgiveness, life, and salvation

And what a blessing it is to share in and have fellowship with the body and blood of Christ! As we receive these wonderful gifts, we remember what Jesus did to win our salvation. We remember how Jesus prayed for our forgiveness as he was crucified; how he reassured the repentant, dying thief that on that day that he would be with in in paradise; how he made that triumphant cry: "It is finished," thereby declaring that all our sins had been paid for in full, that nothing more needed to be done for them to be forgiven.

What a blessing it is that at the Lord's table Jesus himself comes and makes his home with us - and not just in spirit. In some remarkable way that defies explanation, our Savior actually comes to us in peace and love to forgive and encourage us.

This Holy Communion we have with Christ is the very reason the Lord's Supper needs to be taken seriously, and not indifferently. This is why Paul tell us later on in 1 Corinthians: *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.* (1 Corinthians 11:28-29)

So how should we approach the Lord's table to receive Holy Communion? First of all, in repentance, that is confessing our total sinfulness to God and our inability to do anything to save ourselves. Together with this confession should follow trust that the Lord - out of sheer undeserved mercy and love - will forgive us for Christ's sake. And why? Because Jesus won our forgiveness by offering his body to death on the cross and pouring out his blood to pay for our sins. It is this very body and blood that we are receiving to assure us we are forgiven, loved by God, and united with Him.

And not only are we united with him. We are also united with each other as we share in Christ's body and blood together.

Part Two: Holy Communion with Each Other

Holy Communion is not merely a personal matter between God and you. Jesus instituted it when his disciples were gathered together. It has always been meant to be a family meal.

St. Paul says: *For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*

When we gather together to commune with Christ in the Lord's Supper, we also commune with each other. In a very special way that, once again, defies all explanation, we are united with each other as we share in Christ's body and blood. Our union with each other is more than just an expression of unity; it is a sacramental unity that gives public testimony to the oneness of our faith. It encourages us that we are all brothers and sisters in Christ, that we are all one body, united in one common faith.

The apostle Paul mentions the communion we have with each other in the Lord's Supper for a very important reason. As I mentioned before there seemed to have been a problem in Corinth with members going to communion on Sunday, and then joining in with pagan religious feasts other days of the week. They didn't seem to see any problem with this. But there was a problem: the Lord's Supper is a communion with those who share the same faith with Christ. Those religious festivals were a communion with those of a false religion worshipping their false god. Since we know that the devil is really the one behind every false god, it was really a communion with the devil - as St. Paul says shortly after our sermon text: *the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?* (1 Corinthians 10:20-22)

But this doesn't apply to us, does it? None of us are going to pagan festivals and having fellowship meals so as to compromise our communion with Christ, are we? No, not that I know of. But it used to be a problem in Kewaunee, back when people wanted to be both members of the Church and members of the Masonic lodge. The Lodge is incompatible with the Christian faith. It worships a false god. One cannot commune with Christ on Sunday and then go to the Lodge on Friday.

But there is also another more subtle way this applies to us, and that is false doctrine. Where does false doctrine come from? Christ? No, the devil. False doctrine, no matter how great or small, is never neutral. It never leads people to Christ. It always attempts to lead people away from Jesus and his work for us. Therefore a person who communes with Christ and a group of believers that confess the truth can not in good conscience go and commune with another group that teaches false doctrine. To do so also arouses the Lord's jealousy who hates any doctrine that takes glory away from his Son and the truth of His Word.

Brothers and sisters, the point is this: do not commune with those who teach false doctrine. Understand what the Lord's Supper is: a wonderful sharing and fellowship with Christ's body and blood and with each other who share the same faith. It is not merely some church custom. It is not a merely something that is between God and the individual. It is a family meal, meant to strengthen the faith of the weak, cheer those who are sad, encourage those who feel all alone in their struggles against this world, and give hope to the Christian tempted to despair. It is a holy communion with Christ and each other that expresses our united doctrine in Christ and encourages us to work together as one body as we share His message of salvation with the world.

Holy Communion is a wonderful means of grace, which should be honored by all of us. May the Lord lead us to see and acknowledge all the blessings of the Lord's Supper that we may come to His table often – prepared by means of proper repentance to commune with Him and each other. Amen.