

## Sermon for May 6, 2018 – Holy Communion

1 Corinthians 11:23-28 (EHV)

### Theme: Jesus' Special Supper

- 1) It is the gift of himself, given for you
- 2) It is received in faith.

*<sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup>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." <sup>25</sup>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." <sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. <sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>Instead, let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup.*

Most of my life I have lived thousands of miles away from my parents. Visiting them was something I treasured. Leaving them was always hard. This is why my mom would make our last meals together something special. It was her way of expressing love. And, if you ever tasted my mom's cooking, you would understand how they really made me look forward to the next time I'd get to see her again.

Jesus travelled much farther than a few thousand miles to visit and save the family he would adopt. He came all the way from heaven to earth. But now the time had come for him to finish his work of redemption and return to His Father in heaven. So, what did Jesus do? He used the occasion of the Passover – the last time he would eat with his disciples before his departure – to institute a special meal: one that would express to his disciples the full extent of his love and make them look forward to the next time he would see them in glory.

And this special meal that Jesus prepared was not just meant for the disciples who sat before him on the night of his betrayal. No, he instituted it for the encouragement of his adopted family of every age after that event. He instituted it for you and me.

With the apostle Paul as our guide, let us consider the wonderful love Jesus expresses to us in Holy Communion, under the theme: **Jesus' Special Supper.** 1) It is the gift of himself, given for you. 2) It is received in faith.

### Part One: It is the gift of himself, given for you

The apostle Paul originally wrote our sermon text in response to a situation in the city of Corinth. You see, the practice of that ancient church was to celebrate Holy Communion as part of a larger

fellowship meal, instead of during the service like we do today. Unfortunately, many of the Corinthians seemed so focused on eating and drinking that they all but forgot what the Lord's Supper was about. The apostle Paul reminded them by writing:

<sup>23</sup>*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.* In other words, Holy Communion is not just some human tradition, developed over time. No, Holy Communion is a sacred meal, instituted by our Savior himself, as the apostle continues:

*The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it (so that he could distribute it to the disciples) and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*

What exactly does Jesus mean with these words? He means that, in with and under the bread, Jesus gave his disciples his actual body, which (in a few hours' time) would be offered up on the cross for their salvation.

But why would Jesus want to give his disciples his body in this sacrament? Because, in giving the disciples the very body he would offer up for their forgiveness, he would assure each individual one of them that he paid for their sins in full. This is why he adds the words: "*for you*".

Imagine being the son of a soldier, who went off to war. When your Dad comes back, he gives you his combat uniform – saying: "I want you to know, son, that when I was at war, I was constantly thinking of you. I wanted to make sure that you would always remain free and safe. The sacrifices I made on the battlefield, I made for you." That uniform would be something special wouldn't it? Even more special than that, is the love your father had for you, as you remember everything he did to keep you and your family safe.

If you can imagine a scenario like this, then maybe you can begin to understand why Jesus gives you his actual body in Holy Communion. He wants you to remember his love and sacrifice that didn't just win physical freedom, but eternal salvation from sin, death and the power of the devil. Everything Jesus endured, he did for you. His risen and living body given for you in the sacrament reminds you of this.

"But," many ask, "how can Jesus' actual, risen and living body be in, with and under the little wafer we receive in Communion?" Truth be told: no one except God can know how this exactly works. But one thing is certain: God does not lie. If Jesus promised his body in, with and under the bread of Holy Communion, we can be sure that it is present together with his actual blood.

Our text continues: <sup>25</sup>*In the same way, after the meal he also took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new testament in my blood.*

You know what a "Last Will and Testament" is, right? It is a document that bestows a deceased person's property to the heir he designates. Jesus was about to die and, by means of his death, win wonderful, costly blessings that he would pass on to his heirs. Christians are his heirs. Do you want proof? It's found in the cup where - in, with and under the wine - is the blood that Jesus used to atone for your sins.

Think of it this way. Jesus instituted the LORD's supper during the Passover meal. That event celebrated how the LORD delivered his people from the angel of death by means of a lamb, whose blood they painted on the door frames of their houses. Seeing the blood of this Lamb, the angel of death "passed over" their house, because God had made a special covenant with them.

God has made a special covenant with you. Jesus is your Passover Lamb. Because He shed his blood for you on the cross, God's wrath passes over you. And in giving you his actual blood in, with and under the wine of Holy Communion, Jesus also gives you all the benefits the shedding of his blood has earned: the forgiveness of sins, life and eternal salvation. When God looks at you, he sees his Son – with whom you have been united in a very unique way in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

*"Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."* When Jesus said this, it was as if he was saying: "Do in the future what I did for you now. Take bread and wine and speak the words I spoke when I distributed them to you. And, whenever you eat the bread and drink from the cup, remember that my body and blood is actually present. Remember the blessings I came to win for you through my perfect life, innocent death and glorious resurrection – blessings I truly convey to you in this Sacrament together with my body and blood. Through this special meal I convey my love to you. Receive it in faith."

*"<sup>26</sup>For,"* St. Paul continues, *"as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."* Do you remember me mentioning the "last meals" my Mom would make for me before I needed to travel back home? Those meals were both a celebration of the time we shared together and a foretaste of a future meeting. The celebration of the Lord's Supper accomplished the same thing. As we partake of Holy Communion, we proclaim the LORD's death – remembering with joy the wonderful forgiveness, life and salvation Jesus won for us through his cross, which are specially conveyed to us through this sacrament. But that is not the only thing we do. Having been refreshed with this forgiveness, we look forward to the grand wedding feast Jesus promised to prepare for us at his reappearing.

Part Two: It is received in faith.

Because of all the special blessings offered in Holy Communion – the foremost being the actually living body and blood of our LORD himself, St. Paul warns:

*<sup>27</sup>Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner (that is to say, "without proper preparation") will be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood.*

I think we all understand that special meals often require special preparation. For example, if the President of the United States invited you to a formal state dinner, you probably wouldn't show up all dirty– wearing smelly, ripped clothing that you usually wear on cleaning day. No, you would take a shower, get your hair done, rent a tux, or buy a new dress. Given the importance of your host, you would spend time preparing for the meal, so as not to cause an offense.

If this is true regarding a mere state dinner, than how much more should we prepare to meet our God in Holy Communion! But how, exactly does God want us to prepare to meet him? Does he want us to take a shower, rent a Tux, or buy a new dress to partake of the LORD Supper in a worthy manner? No, *“Instead,”* the apostle Paul writes: *“let a person examine himself and after doing so, let him eat of the bread and drink from the cup.”*

Instead of clean bodies, the LORD wants us to have clear consciences: hearts that readily confess their sins, trust in Jesus for forgiveness and have the desire not to sin again. Simply put, God desires hearts that look to him in faith and believe all his promises - including the ones he made about His actually body and blood being present in the sacrament of Holy Communion.

Regarding the LORD, king David once wrote: *“You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it. You do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices God wants are a broken spirit. A broken and crushed heart, O God, you will not despise.”* (Psalm 51:16-17 EHV) Yes, all the bodily preparation we might make for Holy Communion (like taking a shower or wearing nice church clothes) are meaningless, if we don't prepare our heart through repentance.

And why is such preparation important? Because, whether a person realizes it or not, impenitence and unbelief make a mockery out of the LORD's supper and the sacrifice Christ made on our behalf. How so? By abusing and belittling God's gift of forgiveness.

Let me illustrate what I mean: imagine a prince offering a woman an engagement ring, which she readily receives, only to find out that she was planning to cheat on him! What is the woman doing other than making a mockery out of the prince and his love? The same mockery is made by the person who comes forward to receive the pledge of Jesus' forgiving love, unwilling to repent of his ways.

Or let's imagine that the same prince spends almost all his money on the most beautiful engagement ring he could find, only to have the woman say to him: *“I know that there is no possible way that the diamonds in this ring are real, but I will accept this ring from you anyway.”* Imagine her telling her friends how much she proved her love for the prince by accepting his fake ring? How does such an act not insult the prince who paid so much for the ring? So, we also insult our Savior when we question the presence of his body and blood or any other promise He made in connection with the Lord supper.

But the woman who happily accepts the prince's precious ring in love and faith will have the pleasure of becoming his wife. She will be loved by him and receive much more than she could have ever imagined.

May the LORD ever make us like that woman by working in our hearts a genuine repentance over our sins and trust in Christ's his promises. Then we will leave the communion table with something very special: the pledge of our Savior's salvation, as we walk away from the supper united with Christ's living body and blood. Yes, we will leave the communion table as Christ's

own bride, for whose sake he promises to return soon so as to take us with him into his kingdom forever. May this truth sustain us through every difficult day of our life, as we look forward to the great wedding feast that Jesus is even now preparing for us in heaven. May the pledge of Jesus' love ever move us to pray: Come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.