

Sermon for March 24, 2016 – Maundy Thursday

Luke 22:7-20

Theme: The Lord prepares a special Supper

- 1) *It is a meal of remembrance*
- 2) *It is a promise of salvation*

⁷ Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." ⁹ "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. ¹⁰ He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, ¹¹ and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹² He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there." ¹³ They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. ¹⁴ When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Why do you come to Communion? Is it merely because Christian tradition dictates it? Do you think participating in the Lord's Supper is a way you can dedicate yourself to God? Do you come merely because everyone else does?

I hope these aren't your reasons. Communion is neither an act of "dedication" nor a mere tradition of the Church. It is not something we do for God. God's word tells us that the Lord's Supper is a special meal in which Jesus offers us his very body and blood as a reminder of his sacrifice for our forgiveness. Holy Communion unites us with both Jesus and each other in such an intimate way, that we can't even begin to comprehend it.

As we celebrate Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper this evening, let us recall what we receive in it, under the theme: **The Lord prepares a special Supper.** 1) *It is a meal of remembrance.* 2) *It is a promise of salvation.*

Part One: It is a meal of remembrance.

Our sermon text begins with Jesus sending Peter and John into Jerusalem to make preparations to celebrate the Passover. "What is the Passover," you might wonder? Like the Lord's Supper it was a meal of remembrance.

This evening's Old Testament reading recounted how the LORD instituted the Passover meal. He was about to deliver his people from slavery in a most dramatic way: by sending the angel of death upon Egypt to strike down the first born of every man and animal. Only those who found refuge under the blood of the Passover Lamb would be saved. This is why He commanded each Israelite household to slaughter a perfect, year old lamb and paint its blood on the doorposts of their houses. They were to prepare the Lamb in a special meal and eat it all before morning - ready to leave Egypt at a moment's notice.

All the Egyptians lost their firstborn that night. But the LORD passed over the houses of His people that had the blood of the Lamb on them. The Lord didn't want the Israelites to forget their deliverance. This is why He commanded them to celebrate the Passover every year throughout the ages.

Even though the Passover meal was meant as a remembrance of the past, God also intended it to be a symbol of how he would deliver every believer from the threat of eternal death in the future. It was a living picture of Jesus, *the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (John 1:29 NIV84). Just as the Passover Lamb was sacrificed for the deliverance of God's people, so Jesus was sacrificed for our deliverance. Just as the Israelites found refuge from the angel of death under the blood of the Passover lamb, so we find refuge from eternal death through faith in the blood Jesus shed for our forgiveness.

This is why, while celebrating the Passover on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus instituted a new memorial meal for all future generations, which we know as "The LORD's Supper." We read: *And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."*

The first thing we notice is that Jesus, when preparing this special meal of remembrance, took bread and gave thanks. Even though the Scriptures do not record the words Jesus prayed, they were, nevertheless, very important. By the power of His prayer Jesus turned a simple meal of bread and wine into the Sacrament through which He offers believers the gift of his true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins.

Then Jesus broke the bread and gave it to his disciples saying, "Take and eat, this is my body given for you." Notice that Jesus doesn't say "This symbolizes my body," or "Think about my body." He says "This *is* my body." In with and under the bread Jesus broke was the very body that, in a few hours, would be given into death for the sins of the world. Just as the Old Testament Jews ate the Passover Lambs that were sacrificed to save them from death, so we eat the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice saves us from eternal death in hell.

Because of how absolutely essential for our salvation Jesus' sacrifice was going to be – He says, "*Do this* (celebrate this meal) *in remembrance of me.*"

Jesus always wants us to remember his sacrifice for our salvation. Why? Because, through his suffering and death on the cross, he forgave all our sins and delivered us from eternal death to

eternal life. Jesus wants us to find refuge from God's wrath in the blood he shed for our forgiveness, and we can only find that refuge through faith in him.

The devil, however, doesn't want us to remember Christ's sacrifice for our sins. By filling our minds with earthly worries and thoughts He tries to distract us from meditating on Christ's crucifixion. This is why Scripture encourages us to prepare for Holy Communion and not just treat it as something we do. And how do we prepare for Communion? By confessing our utter sinfulness to God and asking Him to forgive us for Christ's sake. This is the heart of repentance. Then God wants us to meditate on what we are actually receiving: not just bread and wine, but Jesus' very body and blood that was crucified and shed for our salvation. And as our thoughts focus on his crucifixion, Jesus wants us to remember what he cried out from the cross: "It is finished." All our sins have been paid in full. Proof of this is Jesus' resurrection.

Just think: in Holy Communion, we aren't merely receiving dead flesh and lifeless blood, but the resurrected body and living blood of Jesus. When we receive the Lord's Supper, we receive Christ himself: our almighty God and Savior. We are covered in His blood and righteousness and the threat of eternal death passes us by. Yes, the Lord has prepared for us a special meal. It is a meal remembering the sacrifice Jesus made for our forgiveness. It is a meal that promises salvation.

Part Two: It is a meal that promises salvation

Our sermon text continues: *In the same way, after the supper he took the cup. After blessing the wine as he did the bread, Jesus said. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."*

What does Jesus mean by *new covenant*, and how does it differ from the *old* one? A covenant is basically a promise to do something and (in Old Testament times) was almost always established through some sort of sacrifice involving blood.

The Old Covenant was the promise God made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai: that He would be their God and protect them as long as they were careful to obey all of his commands. As you can see, this old covenant was contingent on Israel's ability to faithfully obey his law – something neither they nor we are able to do.

This is why – already in Old Testament times – God promised to make a new, one-sided covenant with his people. In this covenant The LORD would not ask or demand anything. He would simply promise to be their God and forgive the sins of all who look to him in faith. The Old Testament prophet Jeremiah foresaw this future new covenant when he wrote: *"The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their*

hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Jeremiah 31:31-24 NIV84).

Since God's law says that there can be no forgiveness without the shedding of blood, Jesus had to shed his blood on the cross for God's new covenant to be effective. And this is what Jesus did – once and for all, for the forgiveness of our sins. The blood we receive in Holy Communion is a token of both Jesus' sacrifice and God's new covenant promise of our salvation. Through faith in Christ we can approach the LORD in freedom and confidence – knowing that we are at peace with him because his blood has atoned for our sins.

Dear Christian. Look at the special meal your Savior prepares for you. It is a meal of remembrance. It is a promise of salvation. And in this promise, this covenant, we receive Christ's very body and very blood, the price paid for our salvation, proving beyond any doubt that God has forgiven us. He will keep his promises to deliver us from this poor life of labor unto himself in heaven. Rejoice, therefore, in the Supper the Lord prepares for us! It is a meal of remembrance. It is a promise of salvation. Amen.