

Sermon for April 17, 2014 – Maundy Thursday

Matthew 26:26-30 (NKJV)

**Theme: The Hidden Glory of the LORD's Supper.**

- 1) *It unites us with Christ.*
- 2) *It marks us as Christians.*

<sup>26</sup> *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."* <sup>27</sup> *Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."* <sup>28</sup> *"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."* <sup>29</sup> *"But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."* <sup>30</sup> *And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

It is said that Martin Luther, while distributing Communion, accidentally spilled a drop from the chalice on to the church floor. When he saw what happened, he put the chalice back on the altar, got down on his hands and knees, and licked up the spilled wine. After cleaning the spot with his lips and tongue, he continued distributing Communion.

Why would Luther do this? The answer is actually quite simple: he wanted to impress upon his parishioners the hidden glory of the Lord's Supper. You see, there were churches back then that taught that the bread and wine of communion only represented Christ' body and blood. Today, these same churches still teach that the Lord's Supper is nothing more than a symbolic act of dedication on your part - showing yourself to be a follower of Christ.

Calling Communion a symbolic act of dedication empties it of all its meaning and power. It twists the Lord's Supper into a deed we do for God, rather than a gift of God's grace to us. Worst of all, it encourages people to partake of Holy Communion without properly examining themselves, and thereby sinning against Jesus' body and blood.

Luther did not have to "lick up" the wine that fell on the floor, but he did it anyway. Why? To use the opportunity to impress upon his congregation the true meaning and importance of the LORD's Supper. Together with every crumb of bread and drop of wine is Christ's actual body and blood. This meal was not instituted to be a way to merely show the world that we are Christians, but rather as a means God uses to express his deep love by offering us forgiveness, life and salvation through the very body and blood he offered up for us on the cross.

When the world looks at communion, all it sees is stale bread and inexpensive wine consumed as an act of dedication. But let us consider **the hidden Glory of the Lord's Supper.** 1) *It unites us with Christ.* 2) *It marks us as Christians.*

**Part One: It unites us with Christ.**

In order to appreciate the hidden glory of Holy Communion, we should look at when and how it was instituted.

The Lord's Supper was instituted during the Passover meal, which was in commemoration of how the LORD delivered the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt - when the angel of death struck the first-born of

all the Egyptians but “passed over” every Israelite house that had the blood of the Passover Lamb painted on its doorposts. God commanded the Israelites to annually remember their deliverance from Egypt by eating a specially prepared meal with unleavened bread, bitter herbs, and roasted Lamb.

On the night Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, God was about to deliver his people from slavery yet again. This deliverance was not from a slavery to any foreign nation, but rather from their slavery to the power of the devil. Jesus was going to be sacrificed for their sins. The eternal death they deserved would pass over them on to Jesus. What a fitting time, then, for Jesus to institute a meal that would mark all believers as God’s own dear children and remind them of this great deliverance.

It was customary to pass a cup of wine around 4 times during the Passover meal. Why? In remembrance of the four fold promise the LORD gave the Israelites, recorded in Exodus 6:6,7: 1) *I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians,* 2) *I will rescue you from their bondage,* 3) *and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments.* 4) *I will take you as My people, and I will be your God.*

It seems as if Jesus instituted Holy Communion right before it was time to pass the cup around the fourth time. Why is this significant? The third passing of the cup during the Passover meal was to remind the Israelites how God redeemed them from their slavery to Egypt. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He offered his disciples the body and blood he would use to redeem all people from sin. Through faith in His sacrifice for our sins the blessing of the fourth cup would come true: *I will take you as My people, and I will be your God.*

Our text says: *And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it.* The Bible does not tell us the words Jesus spoke when He blessed the bread - and probably for good reason. We do know this: the blessing Jesus spoke over the bread and wine is what gives the Lord’s Supper its power for all time. When a pastor consecrates the bread and wine today, he is not magically changing them into the body and blood of Christ. No, he is simply recalling what Jesus did. The words Jesus spoke at this first celebration of His Supper are what causes His true body and blood to be present at every Communion meal celebrated throughout time.

After giving that most wonderful blessing, Jesus broke and passed the bread to his disciples, saying: *“Take, eat; this is My body.”* Notice that Jesus does not say this symbolizes my body, but this **is** my body. In some miraculous way that we cannot even begin to fathom, Jesus adds his own true body to the bread we receive in communion.

But why would Jesus want to give us his true body and blood to eat and drink? In order to remember his sacrifice for our sins. St. Paul wrote: *For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.* (1 Corinthians 11:26 NKJV) In a just a few hours, Jesus would be offering up his body and blood on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

The Bible says that: *God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us,* (2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV). In other words God placed all our sins on Jesus to such a degree that when God looked at him, He saw us and all the evil we ever committed. The Lord so intimately united us with Jesus’ death that it can be said when He died, our sins died with him. When Jesus rose from the dead, He rose with your forgiveness, and you are united with the forgiveness every time you partake of His body and blood, which was given and shed *for you.*

Just think: every time we take communion, Jesus makes his home in us to reassure us of our forgiveness – not just spiritually, but actually, in some miraculous way that defies all logic. Communion with Jesus – this is the hidden glory of the Sacrament. Let us know see how it marks us as His dearly loved people.

Part Two: It marks us as Christians.

Our text continues: *Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."*<sup>28</sup> *"For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*

Do you remember what I said about the fourth cup during the Passover meal, and how it was in commemoration of God's promise: *"I will take you as My people, and I will be your God"*? This was in remembrance of the covenant (the sacred promise) God made with the Israelites at Mount Sinai, after He delivered them out of Egypt.

But now Jesus was instituting a *new covenant* – one that would be sealed with his blood. This new covenant (this new sacred promise) would make us as God's people. How? By giving us the forgiveness of sins we so desperately need.

But why did Jesus have to institute a new covenant? In order to understand that, let us review a little Bible history.

The old covenant that God made with Israel was based on obedience to God's commandments. We read in Exodus: *Then [Moses] took the Book of the Covenant and read in the hearing of the people. And they said, "All that the LORD has said we will do, and be obedient."*<sup>8</sup> *And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, "This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words."* (Exodus 24:7-8 NKJV) The blood of bulls poured on the Israelites that day marked the Israelites as God's people.

Unfortunately the Israelites broke the covenant they made with God at Mount Sinai and it became clear that no one could be saved by obeying the law. All people are too helplessly sinful to keep it the way God demands. This is why the LORD promised: *"Behold, the days are coming . . . when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah-- not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them," says the LORD. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days," says the LORD: "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. . . For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more."* (Jeremiah 31:31-34 NKJV)

And just as every covenant had to be sealed with blood, so also would this one. Jesus would pour out his blood for us – to save us from the hell we deserved, as God the Father said to His Son: *Because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit.* (Zechariah 9:11 NKJV)

Do you see what Jesus is doing when he gives us the Lord's Supper? He is pouring his blood upon us - marking us as recipients of the forgiveness of sins. He is marking us as God's own, dearly loved people, who will inherit eternal life. Through the Lord's Supper we have communion with Christ and are united with God himself. Being covered with Jesus' precious blood we look forward to the day Jesus spoke about, when He said: *But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.*

Now, it is certainly true that Jesus is with us every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, but he himself will not eat it until we partake of it with him new in his Father's kingdom. With these words Jesus points us ahead to the end of the world, to the time when all the elect will have been saved, and we will be delivered

to the perfect paradise that Jesus is even now preparing for us. On that day we will visibly sit down and eat with Jesus – and remain with him, for all eternity. What a glorious day that will be.

But until that day comes, we eat by faith – knowing that Jesus is with us, even though we don't see him. His body and blood forgives our sins and marks us as God's dearly love children. Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper we are truly united with Christ: He lives in us and we in him. This is the hidden glory of Holy Communion. Amen.