

Repent: Turn to Jesus for the Holy Supper He Offers

- I. What this Supper is
- II. What this Supper Gives

*(1 Corinthians 11:23-28) For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, {24} 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." {25} In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." {26} For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. {27} 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. {28} A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

Just for a minute, I want you to picture this scene. Before church started, we had a potluck dinner. But instead of serving milk and coffee with our meal, we served wine. I mean, lots of wine. To the point that by the time church started, there were people who were in various stages of intoxication. When the time comes for the Lord's Supper to be served, people are pushing and shoving to get to the front of the line. Some people are going up multiple times; others are being skipped over all together. And worst of all, the entire congregation is split into factions. Some insist that they be served communion by the senior pastor, others regard one of the younger pastors as "their guy." The congregation is hopelessly divided. Tell me, can you imagine something like that ever happening in a Christian congregation?

Actually, that's not just an imaginary situation. That's exactly what was happening in the Christian congregation in Corinth. It's one of the reasons why St. Paul writes this letter to them, to basically rebuke them for turning what was meant to be a love feast into an excuse for infighting, drunkenness and debauchery.

And yet before we point too many fingers at the Corinthians for their misuse of the Lord's Supper, maybe we need to take a little closer look at the attitude we bring to the sacrament of Holy Communion. Where are our hearts as we prepare to receive the meal the Lord has prepared for us? When we gather at the Lord's Table, will we be eating and drinking in a worthy or unworthy manner? On this Maundy Thursday, we turn our attention one last time to the theme of our Lenten services this year. Today, God invites us to:

Repent, that is, Turn to Jesus

In this case, Turn to Jesus for the Holy Supper he Offers.

Today, we'll focus on two things:

- What this Supper is
- What this Supper gives

First, what this supper is. If we were to have a first-time worshiper with us here today, and I were to ask that person, "What do you think we're offering people to eat and drink up here?" chances are, they'd say, "I think you're offering bread and wine." And of course, if they looked a little closer, if they sniffed the cup and took a bite of the bread, they would say, "I'm sure that is what is being served in this meal. It is bread and wine." And if they happened to come from one

of the non-denominational churches, they might add the thought: "That bread and wine represents Jesus body and blood. It's a reminder of the body and blood Jesus offered on the cross." But if you were to ask that person, "When you eat that bread and drink the wine, are you actually receiving Jesus body and blood?" I expect that person would say, "No, Jesus' body is in heaven. Jesus' body is at the right hand of God. Jesus' body is not in a little round wafer that comes in a cellophane package. C'mon. Let's be reasonable."

So, what about you? What do you think? When you come to the Lord's altar, what will you be eating? Will you be eating Jesus' body? Or will you be eating unleavened bread? And more importantly, how do you know? How do you know what this supper really is? You might say that there's only one way to know what it is. And that is by letting God's Word tell us what it is. But that's not entirely accurate. There are actually two ways to know what the Lord's Supper is. One way is by means of your sense of taste and touch and sight and smell. And those senses will tell you that, this is unleavened bread; and this is grape wine. (Mogan David, if I'm not mistaken.) But there is another sense that comes into play here. It's your sense of hearing. Your ears allow you to hear what Jesus says about that bread and wine. What Jesus said to his disciples on that first Maundy Thursday, St. Paul passes along to the Corinthians and to us here in our text. How does St. Paul put it? *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you.* Jesus' words are clear. "This (this piece of unleavened bread which was part of that final Passover meal, this Jesus tells his disciples) is my body. Take and eat it." And lest we think that this was kind of a one-time thing for just his disciples, what does Jesus say? *"Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."* Or as St. Paul explains, *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes.* In other words, this Sacrament which the Lord's instituted was not intended for only Jesus' first disciples. It was intended for believers down through the centuries—people who would hear and believe those same words of Jesus, "Take and eat. This is my body. Take and drink. This is my blood."

In fact, you realize, that's why the men who administer the sacrament here at Mount Olive keep saying the same thing over and over again. "Take and Eat. This is true body of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." Why do they keep saying that? Because that's the only way you can know what you are eating. All your other senses tell you, "It's bread and wine. But your heart tells you, on the basis of Jesus' unbreakable promises, that this is something more. This is bread and wine AND body and blood. In faith, you cling to the Real Presence of Jesus' body and blood. That's what this Holy Supper is.

And yet, even more important than I. What this Supper is, is II. What this Supper gives. In other words, what benefit does a person receive through the sacrament? Well, doesn't Jesus answer that question for us with the words recorded in Matthew 26:28? *"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."* Through this Sacrament, God grants to us the forgiveness of our sins.

But now someone might say, "Wait a minute. You are telling me that I need to go to communion in order to have my sins forgiven? I thought that Jesus already paid for all my sins on the cross. Why do I need to go to communion to get what Jesus has already won for me?"

To answer that question, we need to distinguish between what Jesus did on Calvary to pay for the sins of all people, versus how God takes that forgiveness and applies it to our individual accounts. Or to put it another way, we need to distinguish between how God earned our salvation and how God, in turn, transmits or distributes that salvation.

It's kind of like the difference between the water tower on the hill and the faucet in our house. On the hill of Calvary, Jesus filled the tower with enough forgiveness to pay for every sin that would ever be committed. But somehow God has to transport that forgiveness to individual hearts and lives. So God, in effect, created two pipelines. One pipeline is his Word. How do you personally know that Jesus paid for your sins on Calvary? Well, God tells you as much in his Word. In his Word, God says that: *Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 2:2)*. In his Word, God says that: *If we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9)*. A few moments ago, you heard me transmit that same message of forgiveness through the words of the absolution, "I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit."

But that pipe line of God's Word is only one of the means or instruments that God uses to transmit his forgiveness. The other pipeline is created when God attaches his Word to an earthly element like water or bread and wine to create a Sacrament like Baptism or Holy Communion. But the purpose is exactly the same: it's a means to distribute God's forgiveness. Same water tower, different faucet.

In fact, you might say that in Baptism and Holy Communion the faucet becomes just a little more individualized. On the corner of Florida and Doris Lane, there is a fire hydrant. It's there for the benefit of everyone in the neighborhood. If someone needs water to put out a fire, it's there for them. But the faucet in my bathroom isn't designed for everyone in the neighborhood. It's not even designed for my wife and I to use at the same time. It's designed for one person at a time.

Well so it is with the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. In the sacrament of baptism, we don't hose down the whole congregation. No, its water and the word applies to one individual. "*I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" Isn't the same thing true of the Lord's Supper? Even though there may be a number of people up here at once, that wafer you eat is going only into your mouth. You personally are the recipient of Jesus' body and blood, and with it the personal pledge of forgiveness. In fact, that's why Jesus calls it a covenant. It's not a multi-party agreement. It's a one-on-one contract. You bring your sins and Jesus gives you his forgiveness. That forgiveness is not something you earned; it's not something you deserved. It's purely a gift of God's grace.

The only question is, does that mean that everyone who partakes of the Lord's Supper automatically receives forgiveness? The answer is, no. While it's true that anyone who comes to this communion rail will receive Jesus's body and blood, the fact is, some may receive it not for their benefit, but rather for their judgment. In other words, this meal has the potential to do someone more harm than good. How could that happen? St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 11:29. *Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats & drinks judgment on himself.* In other words, if someone comes to our altar and doesn't believe that he's receiving Jesus' body and blood—in other words, if he believes that the bread and wine just represent Jesus's body and blood, he would be guilty of drinking judgment on himself. That is one of the reasons we practice close communion—so that we can try to prevent people from hurting themselves with this Sacrament.

And yet, even if a person recognizes that Jesus body and blood are truly present in the Lord's Supper, there is still the danger of sinning against Jesus' body and blood. St. Paul says as much here in our text, doesn't he? *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.* The question is, what does it mean to eat and drink in an unworthy manner? Let me tell you what it doesn't

mean. It doesn't mean that before you can come to the Lord's Table, you need to be a "worthy" person. You need to be good enough to earn a spot at the Lord's Table. No, it's not the lack of sin that qualifies you for the Lord's Supper. Rather it's your sorrow for sin that qualifies you—which is why Saint Paul says what he does here in our text. *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

So what does that mean for your life? Well, ask yourself, when you look into my heart what do I see? Do I see the filth of my own sin? Do I feel the guilt of repeatedly failing to live up to God's standards? Can I say with a psalmist, *For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me* (Psalm 51:3)? Secondly, when you hear Jesus' words, *"This is my body and this is my blood,"* do you believe what Jesus is saying? You believe that when you receive these earthly elements, you are also receiving Jesus' body and blood in, with and under the bread and wine? And most importantly, when you hear Jesus words, "given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of your sins," do you believe Jesus? Do you believe that even if you were the only person in the world, still Jesus would have given his life for you? Jesus would have shed his blood for you? If you believe these things—if God has worked that conviction in your heart—then be reassured that Jesus has a very special meal prepared just for you. Come and eat. Come and drink. Be refreshed. Be recharged. And know that God's Holy Supper is for you. To God be the glory. Amen.