

1 Corinthians 11:23–32  
Maundy Thursday  
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.  
March 28, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Today is called “Maundy Thursday,” which comes from the Latin of our Gospel text: “A new commandment (mandatum novum, a new commandment) I give to you, that you love one another.” The last few years we’ve discussed the new commandment on this night, the new mandate about love. This evening, we focus on the new testament in His blood. On this Holy Thursday, we commemorate our Lord’s institution of the Sacrament of the Altar. On the night He was handed over into death, Jesus, the true Passover Lamb, gave to us His last will and testament: His very Body and Blood to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of our sins. The last will and testament Jesus gave to His disciples was passed on to the Apostle Paul and celebrated regularly in the church down through the ages. We simply continue passing on that which we have received. This evening, we focus on our Epistle Text from 1 Corinthians 11, where the Apostle Paul instructs the congregation in Corinth and all Christians about Lord’s Supper.

The congregation in Corinth, in what is today the country of Greece, was wracked with problems. Sin affects every congregation because every congregation is made up entirely of sinners, but Corinth was unique. The issues were manifold: faction fighting against faction, divisions that manifested not only in the church but in the local court, disorder, unrest, unrepentance, idolatry, insane sexual perversion, and denial of the fundamental Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the dead. The congregation in Corinth is a pastor’s worst nightmare. But at least the people cared and were open to correction. Oftentimes today,

congregations are still divided, but divisions are brushed over or people leave the moment they're told something they don't want to hear. Open sin, false doctrine, and idolatry are often ignored. There is yet something worse than all the issues at Corinth combined: and that something is apathy, indifference to the things of God. May the Lord preserve us from not caring!

The Lord's Supper is the greatest manifestation of Christian unity in a congregation, which is why Paul must address it in His letter to the Corinthians. The Lord gives us His Body to eat and His blood to drink for the forgiveness of sins, and in that forgiveness we then reconcile ourselves with one another: "forgive as you have been forgiven." If either the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ are denied or if the unity of the Body of Christ, the Church, is violated, then when we come together at the altar it is not for the better but for the worse. Paul warns the Corinthians and us about sins against faith and sins against love: faith towards God and love towards others.

Paul tells the Corinthians that when they come together, there are factions among them that those who are genuine might be recognized. Why can't we all just get along? Why are there so many denominations? Why are there so many factions? So that those who are genuine among you might be recognized. Divisions in the church are meant to lead to repentance. Divisions force you to distinguish between what is true and what is false, between what is founded and established on God's clear Word and what comes from man's fallen reason or emotions. But if divisions are allowed to exist in a congregation or in a church body while also confessing unity at the altar, then we make a mockery of the Lord's Supper. We make it not the Lord's Supper but our own supper.

One thing we have to realize from the Scriptures and in the Early Church is that the Lord's Supper was celebrated in the context of a larger meal, often called an agape meal, or a

love feast. Basically a liturgical potluck culminated in the Lord's Supper. It'd be like having our Sunday School opening liturgy, coffee hour, some Bible Study, a meal, and then the Sacrament. The problem with the Lord's Supper in Corinth was twofold. First, the potluck became immoderate, which then spilled over into the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper just became something common for them, a little extra added to the potluck. Second, the law of love was violated. The wealthy would eat, drink, and be merry, and maybe even sit in a separate room than the rest of the people. That was common in Roman Corinth. The congregation was letting the culture set the agenda for the church's practice. The poor would go hungry and miss out even on the Sacrament. The disunity of the congregation came to light in their practice of the Lord's Supper. Their lack of faith and lack of love became manifest.

Paul says: "What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not." He then goes back to the fundamentals and cites the Words of Institution in light of all the disunity at the Lord's Table. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered unto you, that our Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, 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. In the same way also He took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'" Jesus never explains His words here in a symbolic or spiritual or any other sense. Paul never explains Jesus's words in a symbolic or spiritual or any other sense. The bread is the body of Jesus given for you. The wine is His blood shed for you. Jesus could not be clearer.

Even the phrase, "in remembrance of me," understood in its biblical sense, is an argument for the real presence of Christ's body and blood in the Supper, not an argument against it. The language of remembrance draws on the origins of the Lord's Supper in the Passover of the Jews,

when the people of Israel ate the slaughtered lamb whose blood had been painted over the doorframes. God said: “This day shall be for you a memorial day,” that is, a day of remembrance, “and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast” (Ex 12:14).

A “memorial” and “to remember” in the Scriptures have a different sense than the common thinking today. Biblically speaking, to remember means the event of the past is actually made present once again. In the Lord’s Supper, the sacrifice of Christ is not only remembered like a historical event, like it’s a civil war reenactment. The reality is brought to us and we are taken up into it, not by imagination, but by Christ’s institution. It’s like when the thief on the cross said to Jesus: “Remember me when you come into your kingdom,” Jesus actually does remember Him and makes Him present: “Today you will be with me in paradise.” It *is* because Jesus says it *is*.

The Lord’s Supper is also proclamation of what Christ has done: “For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.” It’s been said that the Lord’s Supper is “the pulpit of the laity.” As the pastor preaches Christ crucified from the pulpit, so do you preach Christ crucified by coming to the altar. His death becomes part of your life as you eat His body and drink His blood. Everything He won for you in His death and resurrection is imparted to you here at this altar. At the same time, you preach the unity of the Body of Christ in this congregation. Together we hold to our Lord’s Words as He has given them to us. And in receiving the Lord’s forgiveness in His Body and Blood, you live in forgiveness for one another because you are one body in Him.

Paul then addresses the reverse of this, the implications for when Christ’s body and blood are received not in faith but in unbelief, not in unity but among festering divisions. “Whoever,

therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.” The “body” here cannot refer only to the Church as the Body of Christ because the guilt is not only in relation to the body but also to the blood. Those who eat unworthily are guilty concerning the body and blood of Christ. It is as though they are crucifying again the Lord of glory because they don’t trust His words. They don’t recognize our Lord’s Body and Blood in this supper, and so they don’t receive it for the better but for the worse. They make common bread and wine of our Lord’s very body and blood. It is bread and wine, but it’s also more than bread and wine because Jesus says it is. Not to recognize this is to receive unworthily.

“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on Himself.” This is where pastoral care comes in. Paul is addressing the congregation in Corinth as their father in Christ (1 Cor 4:15–16). He’s guiding the congregation in their examination as I’m doing right now. A pastor is a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God (1 Cor 4:1), a steward of the Word and of the Sacraments. As a pastor, Paul is admonishing the congregation to examine themselves. Do you believe this bread to be the body of Christ? Do you believe this wine to be the blood of Christ? Do you recognize your sins and do you seek the forgiveness Christ offers here in His body and blood? Do you live in that forgiveness by forgiving those who have hurt you? Do you forsake all others for the sake of this confession and for the sake of this life in Jesus Christ in this congregation and in this church body? Pastors are responsible for making sure you examine yourself lest you eat and drink judgment upon yourself.

Paul says not discerning the body leads to judgment in very particular ways: “That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” The judgment of God stands against those

who alter, neglect, or despise this Sacrament and the unity it entails. “But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.” Worthy reception of Christ’s body and blood can only happen when we recognize our unworthiness in light of God’s Word. “When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” Many receive Christ’s body and blood with little or no thought about what they’re receiving and unto what end. The LORD seeks to correct this as a father correcting His children.

Recognize your sins and your unworthiness. Recognize that the bread is the actual body of Christ and the wine actually is His blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins. In turn, live as the Body of Christ. Forgive those who sin against you. Flee from the wisdom of the world and from all who teach something other than God’s clear Word. Live at peace and in harmony within the body of Christ, in faith toward God and in fervent love towards one another. Receive your Lord’s Body and Blood often as a sign of His unchanging will towards you. Remember that Jesus remembers you and He welcomes you into paradise, where you eat and drink from the Tree of Life. Here He brings you the fruits of His passion, His suffering and death, for your forgiveness, life, and salvation. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We stand for the Offertory.