

THIS IS MY BODY; THIS IS MY BLOOD

Mark 14:12-26

Maundy Thursday (Series B)

March 29, 2018

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson for Maundy Thursday comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 14, verses 12 through 26. During the observance of something old, Jesus gives his disciples something new, which delivers to us the forgiveness he accomplished by his death. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Mark 14, beginning at verse 12, we read in Jesus' name.

¹² And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the Passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹³ And he sent two of his disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him, ¹⁴ and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' ¹⁵ And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us." ¹⁶ And the disciples set out and went to the city and found it just as he had told them, and they prepared the Passover.

¹⁷ And when it was evening, he came with the twelve. ¹⁸ And as they were reclining at table and eating, Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." ¹⁹ They began to be sorrowful and to say to him one after another, "Is it I?" ²⁰ He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the dish with me. ²¹ For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born."

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

²⁶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Father, these are your words. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

You may be seated.

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

Did God really say? Since the fall into sin, this has been the devil's primary strategy to tempt us and lead us away from God. He calls God's Word into question, because if he can strip God's Word from us, he can strip away everything we know about God and every gift God has promised to us.

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So Christians resist the devil's temptation by clinging for dear life to every word that proceeds from the mouth of God (Deut. 8:3; Ps. 119:9). So when it comes to the Lord's Supper and the forgiveness of sins promised in it, we cling to the words, "This is my body" (14:22), and, "This is my blood" (14:24). These are Christ's own words, and the gifts given in the Lord's Supper depend on them.

Tonight we consider Christ's institution of the Lord's Supper. And I'll give you a brief timeline of what's going on.

First, to understand some of the significance and especially the timing of the different parts of Christ's passion, it's important to recognize that Jewish days ended and began at sundown. So what we would consider the end of the day—when the sun goes down and we sit down on our couches to watch baseball—they would consider the beginning of the day. And this seems to have its roots in the creation narrative from Genesis 1, where the transition from one day to the next is marked with the words, "There was evening and there was morning, the first day" (Gen. 1:5), ... "the second day" (Gen. 1:8), ... "the third day" (Gen. 1:13), and so on (Gen. 1:19, 23, 31). Notice that the order is different than how we usually think. "There was evening and [then] there was morning." So the Jewish day has two parts: first, night, and then, day. So while we technically think of days as beginning at midnight, and practically beginning when the sun comes up or whenever we finally get out of bed, the Jewish day began at sundown and ended the following day at sundown.

The point, then, is that Jesus was crucified on the same day in which he instituted the Lord's Supper. The institution of the Lord's Supper occurs in the evening, at the beginning of the day, and the crucifixion occurs in the afternoon, at the end of the day.

So the text we read begins on what we would call Thursday. It's the first day of the feast. This is the day when all the Jews sacrificed the Passover lamb (14:12; Luke 22:7). And at evening, the beginning of the next day, they ate it as part of this liturgical meal. For us this still seems like Thursday night, but it was the Jewish Friday, although they didn't have names like Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. But for the sake of our understanding, we'll speak of it as Friday. So when the day begins on Friday evening, Jesus and his disciples eat the Passover and he institutes the Lord's Supper. Then they go to the Garden of Gethsemane where he prays and is arrested. Then they go to his first trial before the high priest. Then, when morning comes, he is put on trial before Pontius Pilate. Then he is crucified. On Friday afternoon he dies. And by sundown he is laid in a tomb. All of this happened in one day.

Our marker for what day of the week it was comes at his burial. Joseph of Arimathea is the man who buried him, and being a pious Jew, he wanted to get this done before sundown on Friday, because that was when the Sabbath—that is, Saturday for us—began (15:42-43). So we know that all these events—from the institution of the Lord's Supper to the burial of Jesus—it all occurred on the day before the Sabbath. And the events of that day, which we split up between Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, all occurred on the day of Passover that year.

So I want you to imagine these events. Jesus and his disciples are somewhere outside the city of Jerusalem—probably in the town of Bethany (14:3), which was just a few miles away. A few days earlier Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, and he spent most of that week teaching in the temple. Many of the people were believing in him, which just angered the chief

priests and scribes. They wanted to arrest him, but the only time they knew where to find Jesus was when he was teaching in the temple, and trying to arrest him there, in front of all his followers, would have caused a scene and perhaps even a rebellion. So they didn't want to do that. They needed to find a secret way to arrest Jesus.

As luck would have it—though it didn't really have anything to do with luck—one of Jesus' twelve disciples came forth and offered to betray Jesus (14:10). This could work. It would cost thirty pieces of silver (Matt. 26:15), but the betrayer—Judas—would help the chief priests and scribes find Jesus when there wasn't such a great crowd.

Jesus knew about this betrayal, because he is God, and he knows what is in a person (John 2:24). So he kept the location of his last Passover meal hidden from Judas.

It was the first day of Unleavened Bread—that is, the first day of the Feast of Passover—and Jesus sent two of his disciples into Jerusalem to prepare for the meal. We know from Luke's Gospel that these two disciples were Peter and John (Luke 22:8). Jesus apparently knew the place, and he probably could have just said to Peter and John, "Go to so-and-so's house and prepare." But he didn't want Judas to know, and he didn't want to out Judas as the betrayer yet, so he uses this covert prophetic scheme to get Peter and John to the right house. He tells them they will see a man carrying a jar of water. They should follow him. This man would lead them to a house where they would eat the Passover. And apparently this man was familiar with Jesus, because all the disciples have to say is, "**The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?**" (14:14). And the man shows them a large upper room that is furnished and ready. So it seems like the man was expecting them. Perhaps Jesus had already made arrangements with him. But the point is the secrecy. Judas can't know where they are going until they get there. Jesus will allow this betrayal to occur, but not during the Passover meal, because Jesus has something special planned for the end of this meal.

So in the evening—that is the beginning of the next day, the day we would call Friday, and the day on which the Jews ate the Passover—Jesus and the twelve disciples came to the house.

And during this meal, Jesus reveals that one of the disciples is a betrayer. Judas, of course, knows what Jesus is talking about, but the other eleven are clueless. They are also quite concerned. They each think to themselves, *Surely, it couldn't be me*, but they know that Jesus must be telling the truth, and I suppose they can't imagine any of the others betraying him either, so they all ask, "Is it I?" (14:19) Or, more literally, the question is, "Surely, it can't be me, right?" They don't think they will be the betrayer, but they can't help but wonder, so they press Jesus for more information. And Jesus apparently doesn't give them the information they desire. He simply confirms that it is one of the Twelve—it is one of those at the table sharing the Passover with him. This is the ultimate betrayal.

It's tragic and confusing how this could happen, but Jesus insists that this is what must happen. This is what had been written concerning Jesus in the Scriptures. He says, "**For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.**" (14:21) So even though Jesus is betrayed, it's not really because of the betrayal that he goes to his death. Judas' treachery simply fits into the eternal divine plan that was prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. Jesus could stop this from happening if he wanted to, and he has escaped danger before, but now he intends to submit to it, because this is the right time to make the sacrifice.

And Jesus uses this Passover meal to teach his disciples about his sacrifice and give us a lasting remembrance of it.

The institution of the Lord's Supper came toward the end of the meal. The Passover meal had a specific liturgy to it. There were different cups of wine and specific places for dipping bread in herbs, eating the bread, and eating the meat of the Passover. And all of these things occurred in a certain order. There was a structure to it, just like we have a certain structure to our order of worship. And throughout the whole thing, the host of the meal would explain the significance of each part. It was liturgical, and there were specific psalms they would sing. In fact, the psalm we opened our service with (Ps. 116) was part of the hymn Jesus sung with the disciples at the end of the meal, just before departing for the Garden of Gethsemane.

So the Passover meal was as much a worship service as it was a dinner. And Jesus was guiding them through it as usual. But he added something. Toward the end of the meal, Jesus instituted something new—something that he intended to stand on its own. He went off script. "As they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, 'Take; this is my body'" (14:22). Now this was a weird thing to do.

I've often wondered why Jesus used bread for his body instead of the meat of the lamb. I mean, the lamb was clearly the central part of the Passover meal. It was also a prophetic foreshadowing of Jesus. And it seems like meat would be a better representation of Jesus' flesh. Wine fits pretty well with Jesus' blood, and if I were running the meal, I would have chosen the meat for Jesus' body. It would also make our observances of the Lord's Supper a bit tastier.

But Jesus chose bread. And the best reason I can come up with is because he is instituting a *new* meal. He's not changing the Passover. He's doing something new. He's instituting a new meal that will stand on its own. And I suppose that's why none of the four accounts of Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper include any of the details of the Passover meal. He's not *changing* the meal. He's giving something *new*. And so he doesn't institute it as something to be done just once a year at the Passover. He intends it do be observed often. In fact, until recently—and by "recently" I mean the last few hundred years—Christians have observed the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

Then, after the bread, Jesus institutes the wine. "And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank it. And he said to them, 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.'" (14:23-24) When we read this carefully and notice the order in which Jesus did this, it comes across as a bit funny. Notice when they drank the cup and when Jesus told them what it is. First he has them all drink it. Then it's like, "Oh, by the way, that's my blood you just drank." And I want you to notice how difficult this must have sounded to the disciples. It's almost like going to a dinner party, and the host has some "interesting" punch, so you ask, "What's in it?" And they say, "A few different things, but the secret ingredient is my blood." "What? You let me drink that?"

And I suppose this difficulty is why Jesus had them drink it *before* telling them what it was. Jews, especially, would have had major reservations about drinking another person's blood. It was against the Law to consume *animal* blood, let alone human blood. Even a medium-well steak was off-limits to them. So you can imagine what kind of reservations they would have had if Jesus had told them *beforehand* what they were drinking. But Jesus wants them to drink it, because eternal life is in this blood.

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Now it's not like the molecular structure of the liquid was identical to Jesus' blood, just like it's not for us. We're not going to find Jesus' DNA in either the bread or the wine. That's not what we confess. The elements do not cease being what they are. But they are what Jesus says they are. They are his body and blood. We believe this, not based on the material evidence, but on the authority of Christ's words. We don't try to explain how this occurs. We simply take Jesus at his word. So his bodily presence in the Lord's Supper is a supernatural, mysterious, and sacramental reality.

And you may be aware that many Christians do not believe Jesus' body and blood is actually present. They see the Lord's Supper as merely symbolic. They say, "It's just not possible for bread and wine to be Jesus' body and blood." And we agree; it's not possible. That's why we call it a miracle. But we take Jesus at his word when he says, "**This is my body ... This is my blood.**"

And it's not the first time God has taken up residence in something physical. If we have a problem with the bodily presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper, we would have the same problem with Christmas. God is infinite. It's simply not possible for the whole fullness of deity to dwell in bodily form, but that's exactly what God did when Jesus was conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary (Col. 2:9). Somehow—miraculously—God managed to stuff his entire divinity into a baby—even a tiny embryo—when the angel announced this to Mary. And if God can do that, then there really isn't anything too difficult about taking up residence in the forms of bread and wine.

So based on Christ's own words, we know the "what" of the Lord's Supper. It is Jesus' own body and blood. We don't really know the how. That's a mystery known only to God, and that's okay. It is enough to believe the truth of what it is. And, perhaps, of even greater importance is the "why." Why has Jesus given us his holy body and blood?

None of the four accounts record Jesus' words exactly the same. To be sure, they are all consistent with each other, but each one includes a little something extra. When we mash them all together, we come up with the words we use during our observance of the Lord's Supper: "**This is my body, which is given for you,**" and, "**This is my blood, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.**" And here we find the "why" of all this. This is the "why" of the Lord's Supper, the "why" of Judas' betrayal, and the "why" of Jesus' death. It is "**for you**" (Luke 22:19; 1 Cor. 11:24) and "**for the forgiveness of sins**" (Matt. 26:28).

So when you come and kneel at this altar this evening, and every time you receive this divine gift, remember this reality: this is Jesus' true body and blood, which was given into death for you and for the forgiveness of your sins and which has been raised from the dead.

Did God really say? Yes he did. These are faithful words to rest our faith upon, because in this gracious gift, God grants us the forgiveness of all our sins. And "where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation" (*Small Catechism*, "The Sacrament of the Altar," II). Amen.

Now may the peace of God, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus (Phil. 4:7). Amen.