

BODY AND BLOOD FOR YOU

Matthew 26:17-30

Maundy Thursday (Series A)

April 6, 2023

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Matthew*, chapter 26, verses 17 through 30. Please stand as you are able for the Gospel. From Matthew 26, beginning at verse 17, we read in Jesus' name.

¹⁷ Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Where will you have us prepare for you to eat the Passover?" ¹⁸ He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" ¹⁹ And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the Passover.

²⁰ When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. ²¹ And as they were eating, he said, "Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me." ²² And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?" ²³ He answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ Judas, who would betray him, answered, "Is it I, Rabbi?" He said to him, "You have said so."

²⁶ Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." ²⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, ²⁸ for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

³⁰ 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.

There are two gracious truths concerning the Lord's Supper that we must believe. Both of them were taught by Jesus when he instituted the Lord's Supper. And in order for us to receive this Holy Sacrament in a worthy manner, we must believe both of them. First, we must believe Jesus' words when he tells us what it *is*. It is his body and blood. Second, we must believe Jesus words when he tells us what it *does*. It gives the forgiveness of sins.

So these two truths: *what it is* and *what it does*. If you believe these two things, you may eat and drink in a worthy manner. If you do not believe these two things, it would be better to not eat and drink, for Scripture teaches that you "will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27). And "anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself" (1 Cor. 11:29).

So this is a serious matter. You should believe Jesus' teaching of what it is and what it does. If you do not believe these things, it is better to not commune.

BODY AND BLOOD FOR YOU (Matthew 26:17-30)

Or, better yet, listen to Jesus' words, take him at his Word, and then eat and drink his body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. That is the best thing to do.

On the evening before his crucifixion, Jesus celebrated the Passover with his disciples. We refer to this as Maundy Thursday. But for Jesus and his disciples, they considered it to be Friday and the very beginning of the Passover. While we officially mark days from midnight to midnight, Jews marked days from sundown to sundown. So for them a new day began at what we would consider to be about 7:00 in the evening.

That means the events we typically divide between Maundy Thursday and Good Friday all happened on the same day. The Passover meal. The prayers in the Garden of Gethsemane. The betrayal and arrest of Jesus. The midnight trial before the high priest. The trial in the morning before Pilate. The beatings. The crucifixion. The death. The burial. It all happened on the same day. It all happened before the sun set on the first day of Passover.

So when Jesus opens the Passover with his disciples by celebrating this meal, he is opening the day of his death. This is the beginning of Jesus' death day.

The highpoint of the Passover was the meal on that first evening. It was a meal that remembered God's deliverance of Israel when they were slaves in Egypt. This took place about 1440 BC. On the evening before God led them out of Egypt, he commanded each household to sacrifice a lamb, paint the blood on the doorposts of the house, eat the lamb along with unleavened bread and bitter herbs, and stay safely inside. That night, the LORD passed through Egypt and killed all the firstborn males, both of man and of beast, but he passed over every house with lamb's blood painted on the doorposts. Thus God passed over his people when he judged Egypt, and he gave them an opportunity to flee the country. The result was that the people of Israel were freed from Egypt and belonged only to the LORD. Then God instituted this Passover meal as a yearly remembrance of his deliverance.

This is the meal Jesus celebrated with his disciples on the evening before his death. But Jesus was about to give it new meaning. Or perhaps it would be better to say that Jesus was about to reveal the true meaning of it, which had always been there, though God had kept it somewhat hidden until now.

The meal was arranged in a specific order. We might call it a ritual or a liturgy. Jesus was the leader of this Passover meal, so he was guiding his disciples through each part. There were appointed times to sing certain psalms. And there were appointed times for various cups of wine or bitter herbs or unleavened bread or the lamb. And all these took place in a certain order, and the host introduced them in a certain way. But Jesus broke order and made it all about himself.

While they were already eating, and presumably already had the bread of the Passover, Jesus picked up bread again, at the wrong time, and spoke words that were not supposed to be in the Passover liturgy. This must have caught the disciples off guard. *What is Jesus doing? Doesn't he know the liturgy?*

Well, of course he does. But he is instituting a new liturgy, one that is clearly all about himself.

He took bread. After blessing it, he broke it and gave it to his disciples. And then he says the most unbelievable thing: **"Take, eat; this is my body"** (26:26). Luke's gospel adds the words, **"Which is given for you"** (Luke 22:19).

"So you're saying that this bread is your body?"

BODY AND BLOOD FOR YOU (Matthew 26:17-30)

“That’s right.”

“And you want me to eat your body?”

“Yep.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s a gift to you.”

“Okay.”

Then Jesus picked up a cup of wine. After giving thanks, he gave it to his disciples and said something that was equally unbelievable, yet also true: **“Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”** (26:28).

“Now you’re saying this wine is your blood?”

“That’s right.”

“And it’s poured out?”

“Yes.”

“It kind of sounds like you’re going to die.”

“Yep.”

“And if I drink it I have the forgiveness of sins?”

“Most certainly.”

“Okay then.”

So Jesus turned the Passover into something else. He handed his disciples bread that is his body and wine that is his blood. They ate it and drank it, and they received the forgiveness of sins. And thus Jesus instituted this Sacrament to be repeated often as a remembrance of him (1 Cor. 11:25).

Then Jesus closed the Passover liturgy with a hymn, and he proceeded with the rest of the business appointed for his death day. In order for this Sacrament to be what it is and do what Jesus says it does, Jesus had to proceed to the cross. His death is what makes all of this work.

The Lord’s Supper is not a magical “hocus pocus” event where the incantation of certain words magically makes our sins disappear. It works because of the cross. It delivers to us personally, the body and blood of Jesus that was crucified and risen. That is why it forgives sins. The power is not in the words alone, but in the cross. The words are powerful because they bring the sacrifice of the cross to you.

And this must be received in faith. In order to receive this sacrament in a worthy manner, there are certain things you must believe.

Every time we participate in the Lord’s Supper together, we begin the Lord’s Supper part of the liturgy with an exhortation, that is, instructions of what we must believe and do in order to receive it in a worthy manner.

And it’s easy for us to treat those words as a mere formality and not really listen to them. But they are not a mere formality. Nothing in our liturgy is a mere formality.

Now, I am fully aware that our communion services can become quite long. And if we could think of something that doesn’t really need to be there, we would get rid of it. But when we look at each part, we say, “No, that part is worth the time it takes.” And the exhortation is one of those things. It takes a few minutes. It pushes everything back. But it’s important for us to hear it, because the stakes are so high.

The exhortation includes some very important instructions. In fact, Scripture warns that if you ignore those instructions, the Lord’s Supper could actually be harmful to you (1 Cor. 11:27-30). In order for the body and blood of Jesus to give you what Jesus promises, you must receive

BODY AND BLOOD FOR YOU (Matthew 26:17-30)

them in a worthy manner. To eat and drink in an unworthy manner only causes further judgment to come upon you. And we don't want judgment to come upon anyone, so we tell you, in the clearest way we know how, what you must now believe and do in order to receive this Holy Sacrament in a worthy manner.

So what does it mean to receive it in a worthy manner? Does it mean I have to do certain things in order to become worthy? Does it mean I have to clean my act up first? What if I am too sinful to deserve this Holy Sacrament? What does it mean to receive it in a worthy manner?

First, it does not mean that we ourselves are worthy. We are *not* worthy. None of us deserve the Lord's body and blood. That's the whole reason why we need it. If we earned or deserved forgiveness, it wouldn't be forgiveness. But forgiveness, life, and salvation are given to unworthy sinners when they eat and drink in a worthy manner. So it's not the person who is worthy; it's the manner in which the person receives it that is either worthy or unworthy.

So in order to receive the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner, there are two things you must believe. And then there are two things you must do.

We'll start with what we must believe. First, we must believe that it is what Jesus says it is. That is, we must believe that it is the true body of Jesus and the true blood of Jesus.

Sometimes we get funny looks when we try to explain this to other Christians. They might say, "So you actually believe you are eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood?"

And we would say, "Yes. That's what Jesus says it is. So we take him at his Word."

And if they say, "But that's not possible," then we say, "Well of course it's not possible. But that's not the point. It's also not possible for the whole deity of God to take up residence in human flesh. But he did (Col. 2:9). We call it Christmas. And if he can do that, then he can also do this."

We still might have all sorts of questions about how this works. And that's okay. We should be so captivated by this mystery that we want to know all about it. But at some point we just stop and take Jesus at his Word. His bodily presence in the Sacrament is a miracle. And no one knows how miracles happen. They just happen. That's why they're miracles.

It is Jesus' body and it is Jesus' blood, because Jesus says it is.

It doesn't mean we eat him up like cannibals. We don't destroy Jesus when we eat his body and drink his blood. He is alive forever, and he cannot be destroyed. And when you take the piece of bread in your hand, it's not a tiny piece of Jesus' body. It is his body. And it's still bread at the same time. When you eat the bread, you receive all of Jesus' body that was given for you. And when you drink the cup, you receive all of Jesus' blood that was poured out for you. It's not like you get a little piece of Jesus. You get all of Jesus. And with him, you get all his benefits.

So this is the first truth that you must believe: *It is what Jesus says it is.*

And here's the second truth you must believe. You must believe that it does what Jesus says it does. That is, it forgives your sins. Again, we are simply taking Jesus at his Word. Concerning the bread that is his body, he says, "**Given for you**" (Luke 22:19). And concerning the wine that is his blood, he says, "**Poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins**" (26:28). It's simply a matter of taking Jesus at his Word.

When we receive his body and blood, we receive everything he accomplished with his body and blood when he was sacrificed for our sins. Right after instituting the Lord's Supper, he went and gave his body into death for us. And he poured out his blood for the forgiveness of our sins. That is what he did to give this supper the power of forgiveness. He went to the cross. The

BODY AND BLOOD FOR YOU (Matthew 26:17-30)

Lord's Supper works because it takes that body and blood that was crucified and risen and gives them to us.

When we look at the cross, we are reminded of what Jesus did on his death day. That cross is a symbol that reminds us of his crucifixion, and not just the crucifixion, but also his betrayal, his trials, his beatings, the mockery, the death, the burial, and even the resurrection. It is a symbol that reminds us what Jesus did to accomplish our salvation, and this is good. But it is not the real cross. It's just a symbol of the one Jesus died on.

However, on that altar, the one you're looking at right now, we will find the true body and the true blood of Jesus Christ. And through that bread and wine, God forgives our sins. We believe this, because we take Jesus at his Word. That's all there is to it. The Lord's Supper is what Jesus says it is. And it does what Jesus says it does. Those are the two things we must believe about the Lord's Supper.

And then Jesus gives us two commands. But do not worry. These are not burdensome commands. They are the most gracious commands you will ever hear. The first one is, "Eat." And the second is, "Drink." That's all. Jesus has prepared this feast of salvation, and he invites you now to come and receive everything he has accomplished for you.

This is his body, given for you. This is his blood, poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. Come; eat, drink, and live forever. Amen.

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