

GIVEN AND SHED FOR YOU

Mark 14:12-26

Maundy Thursday (Series B)

March 28, 2024

Trinity Free Lutheran Church, Grand Forks, ND

The gospel lesson comes from *The Gospel According to Mark*, chapter 14, verses 12 through 26. 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.

Dear saints, we have a marvelous gift before us this evening. In a few moments we will have the privilege to come and eat the body of Christ and drink the blood of Christ. It is the same bread and cup that Jesus served to his disciples on the evening before his crucifixion. It is the same bread and cup that the first Christians received. It is the same bread and cup that our ancestors in the faith ate and drank. It is the same bread and cup that millions of Christians around the world are partaking of this night. It is the same body and blood of Jesus that was crucified and poured out as an atonement for our sins and raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). It is a marvelous gift that delivers the salvation of Jesus Christ to us and binds us together with one another and with all Christians.

And I know, this might be hard to believe. To our eyes and to our tongue it seems to be nothing more than bread and wine. But why would we think that's all there is? Let me ask you this: Are there things around us that we cannot sense? Just because we can't sense something does not mean it's not there. I suppose the thing is that we don't really expect miracles or the supernatural, myself included. Ever since the so-called "enlightenment," we've been trained to think that what we experience with our five senses is all there is, and that there must be a natural explanation to everything. This is a godless way of thinking. And humans have not always thought this way. And in many parts of the world, humans still don't think this way. If we recognize that we are not the highest beings, that there is a God above us, we should expect the presence of things in our world that we cannot see. There are angels and demons. These beings are often or constantly around us, but we rarely sense their presence. Our Lord Jesus is with us always. But we rarely sense his presence. If we believe there is a God above us, and if we believe that he is personally involved in our lives, we should expect that there are things around us that we cannot sense. And we should be open to miracles that transcend what seems to be the natural order of things.

Now, we should not invent unseen realities by speculation or imagination. Rather, we should listen to what God's Word teaches about unseen things. How do we know about things we cannot sense? Only if God reveals them to us.

According to the Word of God, the Lord's Supper is more than bread and wine. We should take Jesus at his Word when he says, "**This is my body**" (14:22), and, "**This is my blood**" (14:24). The Word of God does not treat the Lord's Supper as a symbol or a metaphor. It speaks of it as a reality.

In the epistle lesson we read from 1 Corinthians, the apostle Paul says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (10:16-17). These words are the basis for why I said that the bread we eat and the cup we drink is the same bread and cup Jesus served to his disciples that holy evening. It is the same bread and cup that Christians have eaten and drank for millennia. It is the same bread and cup that millions of other Christians around the world eat and drink this night. The apostle Paul says, "There is one bread." Therefore, all who eat that bread in faith are one body in Jesus Christ. And it's because the bread is not mere bread. It is more. If it were just bread and wine, it would be different than the bread and cup other Christians partake of. The elements on this altar would not be one with the elements on some other altar a thousand years ago, not unless there is something more that binds them together. What binds them together is the real presence of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. If, when these elements are consecrated with the Word of God, they are the body and blood of Christ, then they are one with all the other breads and cups. And when we eat and drink them, we are one with all Christians, because we are one with Jesus Christ. When we eat the bread, we are participating in the body of Christ. When we drink the cup, we are participating in the blood of Christ.

How is this true? We do not know. It is beyond the natural order of this world. But if we believe there is a God above us, who is personally involved in our lives, we should expect that there are things around us that we cannot sense. As we sit here, pondering God's Word together, there is more around us than we can sense. Jesus is present here, probably angels too. When we go home, when we sit in our chairs, and when we lie in our beds, there is more around us than we can sense. And when you come to this altar, there will be more here for you than your eyes can see or your tongue can taste. Jesus will be here with his body and blood.

We should believe this. Why? First, and most simply, because Scripture teaches it to us. And second, because it is a great gift. It's not just that we should believe it as a matter of obedience to our God. That should be enough for us. But we should also believe it, because there is a great benefit in it. Here, in the Lord's Supper, Jesus gives to you the very body and blood that was sacrificed for your sins and raised for your justification. When you eat the bread, that is, when you eat the body of Jesus, what do you receive? You receive everything Jesus accomplished when that body died and when it was resurrected. When you drink the cup, that is, when you drink the blood of Jesus, what do you receive? You receive everything Jesus accomplished when that blood was poured out for our sins and when it began to flow again through his body. We receive forgiveness of our sins, incorruptible life, and eternal salvation. Jesus promised us this before he died. He said, **“Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him”** (John 6:54-56). As you partake of that body and blood, you receive everything Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection. We are united with him in his death and resurrection.

We sometimes wonder about worthiness. Since the Lord's Supper is such a great gift, who is actually worthy of it? Do I deserve such a great gift? If Jesus is present here, am I worthy to come forward and receive him?

In his Small Catechism, Martin Luther asks, “Who, then, receives this sacrament worthily?” He says, “Fasting and bodily preparation are indeed a good outward discipline, but that person is truly worthy and well prepared who believes these words: ‘Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.’ But anyone who does not believe these words or who doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words ‘for you’ require truly believing hearts.” And we read a little bit already from 1 Corinthians 10 about how we partake of the body and blood of Jesus. Then in chapter 11 Paul goes on to say, “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. 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” (11:27-29).

There is an unworthy and a worthy manner of eating and drinking. Worthiness is not a matter of how good you are. It's not a matter of how mature you are in the faith. We often feel that if we can improve ourselves, then we might be more worthy. *If I can do a few more good works and commit a few less sins, perhaps then I will be more worthy of God's grace. Perhaps then I will be worthy of the Lord's Supper.* We may feel that if we read our Bibles more and pray more, we might be more worthy or our hearts might be more prepared to receive the Lord's Supper. We might even feel that we don't have enough contrition for our sins. But none of that is what makes us worthy or unworthy. It is good to try to prepare ourselves for the Lord's Supper. We should examine our hearts. That's part of the reason we have a confession of sin. But we will never make ourselves worthy. As long as we live in this life, we are perpetually unworthy. And we are never as contrite as we should be. We examine our hearts so that we will know just how much we need the Lord's Supper. In the Lord's Supper, Jesus offers the forgiveness of sins. If we ever became worthy of it, it would not be forgiveness anymore. The very definition of forgiveness, and the very definition of grace means that we do not deserve it. We are perpetually unworthy. So it's never a matter of becoming worthy.

Rather, it is simply a matter of eating and drinking in a *worthy manner*. And to eat and drink in a worthy manner, we should believe two basic things about the Lord's Supper: what it is and what it's for. We should believe that it is the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and we should believe that it is for the forgiveness of sins. No matter how unworthy or sinful we may be, if we believe these truths about the Lord's Supper, we may eat and drink in a worthy manner, and we will receive the gifts Jesus promises us here.

The Lord's Supper is a gift. And gifts are never earned, not true gifts, anyway. This is a true gift. You and I do not deserve it. We are totally unworthy. But Jesus invites us to come, trusting in his promises.

The gift here is more than bread and a cup. And it's more than the mysterious miracle that Jesus joins his body and blood to the bread and the cup. But the gift is what Jesus did with his body and blood in his crucifixion and resurrection.

It's no coincidence that Jesus instituted this meal on the evening before his death. Whenever we receive his body and blood, he wants us to reflect on his sacrifice. So he says, **"This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many"** (14:24). It is the body and blood that was crucified for our sins and raised for our justification. If Jesus had instituted this meal, and then just gone home to Galilee the next day, it would do nothing.

But after this meal, he went to the Garden of Gethsemane, where he knew Judas would lead the mob to arrest him. He submitted himself to being arrested. He submitted himself to being placed on trial, first before the council of priests and elders, then before Pilate. He submitted himself to being mocked, beaten, and crucified. That is the body and blood Jesus gives to you in this Sacrament.

So when you come to the altar, meditate on his crucifixion. As you kneel before this cross, imagine that you are kneeling before the real cross. Imagine that your knees are resting on rocky dirt at Golgotha. And you're outside. It's the middle of the day, but it's dark. Perhaps the air is cold and damp. And before you, the real cross is not empty. But there is a man hanging on it. His body is torn. He is weak. His blood drips onto the ground in front of you. You hear soldiers and bystanders mocking him: "Save yourself, and come down from the cross" (15:30). Or, "He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, come down now from the cross that we may see and believe" (15:31-32).

You hear Jesus say, **"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"** (Luke 23:34).

"Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 24:43).

"Woman, behold, your son!" and, **"Behold, your mother!"** (John 19:26-27).

"My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

"I thirst" (John 19:28).

"It is finished" (John 19:30).

And, **"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"** (Luke 23:46).

Then he dies. His breath leaves his body, and his spirit is truly committed to God his Father. That is the body and blood that is given and shed for you. As you eat the bread and drink the cup, you receive the benefits of what Jesus did in that moment.

And then, as you rise and go in peace. Remember that Jesus rose from the dead. And the body and blood you just received was not the dead body and blood of Jesus, but it is the body and blood of Jesus that was crucified and raised. It is the living body and blood of Jesus. So you receive forgiveness from his crucifixion, and you also receive the new life that he was raised to.

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This is all a gift to you. Jesus invites you to come and eat his body and drink his blood. Because, with his body and blood, you receive everything he earned for you by his death and resurrection. You receive forgiveness, life, and salvation. Amen.

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