**MISSING THE MEAL**

**1 Corinthians 10:16-17**

**Maundy Thursday**

**Trinity Lutheran Church**

**Springfield, Missouri**

**9 April *Anno Domini* 2020**

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

**Our text is from Paul’s first letter to the Christians in Corinth, chapter ten:**

 ***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?***

**This is the Word of God. Amen.**

**We worship annually on Maundy Thursday evenings to remember, to commemorate, and to celebrate what actually took place in history, what actually happened in the year of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. And it is more than just this evening, more than just Maundy Thursday; we remember and celebrate three days, the three most important days in all of history, three days that are the absolute, ground-zero, center of history itself. On these three days, and only on these three days, the past, present, and future converged in space and time, converged to change the course of history, converged to define everything that exists.**

**No other ruler on earth could accomplish this. The ancient Egyptian empire, as powerful and long-lasting as its power and glory, could not do it. Neither could the Assyrians, the Babylonians, the Persians, or the Greeks under Alexander the Great do it. Even the Roman Empire, which had proclaimed itself eternal, fell into the ruins of a dead past. Charlemagne, the Holy Roman Emperors, Napoleon, Hitler,**

**the Soviet Union—all failed, all lost, all died, none are memorialized and worshipped by any sane people.**

**Only Jesus Christ, who *is the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow* was able, during these special and holy three days in history, to deliver--in a present tense moment— the fulfillment of what had come before the Upper Room, before the High Priest’s palace, before the Governor’s headquarters, before the execution chamber on Calvary, before the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. . .and, in these events, define the future of the world and of the destiny of humanity. This is why Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords.**

**And so we again have come to these remarkable three days. Remember the Jewish day did not begin, as we think and live, in the morning with the sunrise (or when our wake-up alarms chase us out of bed and into our busyness). The Jewish day begins at sunset. And the first thing of the day is to have dinner together in**

**MAUNDY THURSDAY—page 2**

**fellowship with the family, and then to sleep. The Jewish day begins by resting and**

 **renewing the body. And so Jesus and His disciples gathered in a borrowed, upper room in the Jerusalem city limits, not to end the old day, but to begin a new day, a new day indeed. The past, the present, and the future are all special guests at this dinner—never before since creation have the three of them in reality occupied the same space and time. But on this night, Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God, brings them together. With delight past, present, and future—torn apart by humanity’s fall into sin and by the introduction of death into existence—walk with their Creator through the events of these three days and witness not only the salvation of the human kingdom, but the redemption of time and all other things. And it all began when Jesus and the Twelve entered that upper room, where Jesus washed the feet of His disciples, enjoyed table fellowship with them, celebrated the Passover meal, and**

**instituted and established God’s new covenant.**

**I cannot help but interrupt myself here, and speak a word to my Trinity family. I’m standing in our pulpit, my pulpit for all these years, in our church sanctuary, looking at empty pews. How can we speak of, much less celebrate, this institution of the new testament, this blessed, miraculous, wonderful gift of the Lord’s Supper. . . when we can’t even have it? What is the meaning of this unavoidable paradox that is so in our face tonight?**

**This is the worship service, this is the annual sermon, in which I have always looked forward to sharing what the Bible teaches us about the Sacrament of Holy Communion. A refresher course for most of you to renew and strengthen your knowledge of the Word and your very faith. But always, too, for our new members, especially new Christians, we see and enjoy in them, a zeal, a hunger and thirst for the Lord’s Supper.**

**And what I particularly notice tonight is the emptiness of this first pew under the pulpit. This is normally where the recently confirmed eighth grade catechumens sit together, for the last time, in their confirmation robes. During the sermon, they are taking notes to complete their final assignment after six years of instruction. And then they come to the altar to receive the bread and wine, that is, the Body and Blood of the Lord.**

**But not tonight. There is no distribution of the Holy Meal here tonight. They are missing the Meal so soon in their new, adult communicant membership in the Church. We all are missing the Meal.**

**So why speak about such a wonderful gift, such a miracle—known in the early Church as the “medicine of immortality—when we will not receive it, when it has been robbed from us?**

**Here’s one reason why—because what is happening to us tonight and in the last month is not as important as what happened during those three amazing days in history when Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples in the upper room.**

**MAUNDY THURSDAY—page 3**

**Time here on earth is not on our side. It doesn’t ultimately matter from year to year in our lives whether things are going good or bad for us on any given Holy Week. It did matter; it does matter; it will always matter what happened on that first Maundy Thursday. Time was on Jesus’ side that night. He held the past, present, and future in His hands along with the bread and the cup!**

**So, yes, let’s join Jesus and His disciples in that Upper Room!**

**I think perhaps one of the reasons we don’t hear of any debates, issues, or false teachings and practices regarding the Lord’s Supper in the first Jerusalem congregation, and in some of the first mission plants in Palestine is because the first Christians were a large majority Jewish. They knew already for 1500 years the central place of the Holy Meal in the divine covenant God made with His people. They understood God had given very specific details and commands about how to conduct the meal. Disobeying, ignoring, or changing details would forfeit the benefits and gifts God intended for them when they participated in it. So the New Covenant, the New Testament, was also blessed with a Holy Meal, a gift that would be central in their worship and lives as Christians. If they wanted the benefits of that genuine gift, they knew the commandments and details, as in the mystery of Baptism, must be followed carefully according to God’s Word. So not much had to be written about the Lord’s Supper, important as it was, in the first several chapters of the Book of Acts.**

**As Christianity spread like wildfire beyond Jewish people and their synagogues, into communities where pagan religions were more about experience and legends, and worship often more about emotion and celebration of earthly things, the Lord’s Supper was subject to perversions. Corinth was a congregation who not only misunderstood, but also misused and abused the Holy Meal.**

**The disadvantage the Christian Church has today, after twenty centuries of Christianity, is that false teachings and practices that follow those false doctrines, have appeared in almost every point of Biblical truth. Before the sixteenth century reformation movements, things were added to what the Bible said, some of them very harmful ideas; during and since the sixteenth century all sorts of untrue things were said and practiced, mainly subtracting from the reality, power, and benefits of Holy Communion.**

**Communion gives to us the real and true Body and Blood of Jesus. Of course, it is a miracle, but it is as real as His other miracles recorded in the Gospels. When He opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, when He restored paralyzed limbs, people really did see and really did hear and really did walk and run. When He transformed a few fish and a few loaves of bread into enough fish and bread to feed and satisfy thousands and thousands of people, it was real; they all ate and were filled, and twelve baskets of food were left over, one for each individual apostle. When He raised Lazarus from the dead, four days after he expired, Lazarus went back home, resumed his work and life, and carried on until he died**

**MAUNDY THURSDAY—page 4**

**again.**

**When He took the unleavened bread of the Passover meal, gave it to the apostles, and said, “Take, eat, this is My Body,” He spoke clearly, He meant what He said always, and they received, chewed, swallowed, and digested both a piece of unleavened bread and the Body of Jesus that was standing right before them, but was within hours to be tortured and broken on the cross. When He picked up the cup of wine and gave it to them, saying, “Take and drink, this is My Blood of the new covenant, He spoke clearly about something their minds could never understand, but His words were simple, and they received and swallowed and digested both wine and His Blood, which within hours would be splattered in the High Priest’s palace, in the Governor’s outdoor pavement seat, on the road to Calvary, smeared on the cross. These are the Words of the Son of God. The power of the Word of God makes all things possible.**

**Jesus instituted this gift to be used, not according to some specified time-table (once-a-year, once-a-month, once-a-week), but invited us to come often on account of the benefits and blessings given in the Sacrament—forgiveness of sins, strengthening of faith, life, and salvation. He assures us, especially in the definitions and admonishments the Apostle Paul gave to the Corinthians, that this is no mere ceremony or symbolic ritual involving a morsel of bread and a sip of wine. This eating and drinking is a great and gracious feast. And when we participate in it, by faith believing the words and promises of Jesus, we enter into that dimension Jesus**

**brought to the table on this very evening—we are taken back into the past, our connection with the ancient people of God and their Scriptures, their promises, and their Messiah also now belong to us. And today in our lives, the eternal Jesus, the One Man whom sin could not stain, against whom the devil could not win even one small win, and whom death could not conquer, He is alive and present with us as our Host in Word and Sacrament. And when we come to His table and He feeds us, we are connected in a holy communion with Him; we are connected to the angels, archangels, and all the host of heaven as we receive His Body and Blood, a blessed rehearsal of our own Easter Day, on the Last Day, when our bodies will be raised and glorified in time for the great festival banquet in the new heavens and earth, a marriage feast of the Lamb of God and His bride, the Church, a feasting without end.**

**One final thought on this particular Maundy Thursday. The Word of God has done its work in lifting our minds and hearts to Godly things. Yet, the fact remains we still did not get to take communion.**

**Ah, the text! *The cup of blessing. . .a participation in the Blood of Christ. . .the bread***

***we break. . .a participation in the Body of Christ*. The word in the Greek is significant, and some of you will recognize it—*koinonia*. Latin translation in the early Christian Church is the word from which we get “communion.” It also means “fellowship,’ in the New Testament sense. In other words, this gift of the New Testament Holy Meal, like the former Meal given to Israel, is not an individual gift**

**MAUNDY THURSDAY—page 5**

**between God and the individual believer. It is a gift given to the congregation of believers, a gift meant to be administered in the corporate life and worship of the Church. It is a sign of the unity and harmony of the truth and love of Christ that lives in His people, as His Bride. You and I, individually, do not comprise and define His Bride. Only the Church as a whole, new people of God do that.**

**So even when the pastors take Holy Communion to the sick, the dying, and the homebound, they bring it as from the altar of the *koinonia*, of the fellowship of the family of God He has brought together in a new creation.**

**Do not misunderstand me here. When we are talking by phone or communicating by text, e-mail, Facebook, and the like, and you share with me how much you are missing the Sacrament, it is good. It is good that we missing the Meal. I would never want to squelch your hunger and thirst for the Lord’s Supper. I miss the Meal, and I think tonight and Easter Sunday we are all going to experience the emotion of missing the meal even more so.**

**But we are missing the meal for a worthy and Godly reason. No one is keeping us from it because of some evil purpose. We are not being persecuted by our governments. This is not an American first amendment problem. The sacrifice we are being asked to make is a reasonable one, involving a number of our normal free choices. Our leaders and the men and women God has called into the vocation of medicine and health care are trying to stop a plague and keep us safe, preserving as many lives as possible. This is why God gives the gift of government, and under the Fourth Commandment, expects us to obey these laws and mandates at such a time as this. So especially we Christians want to set the example. It is truly serving our neighbors, love for the neighbor and her/his well-being.**

**These mandates are not about the practice of religion, not about hostility to Christians, not about freedom to worship, not about the Word or Sacraments being proclaimed and practiced. They are about gathering in groups and spreading a dangerous virus that we do not know much about.**

**But I want communion, Pastor. I miss the Lord’s Supper. I need the Lord’s Supper.**

**We all do. We are in this together. *Koinonia.* Fellowship. *We who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread [and cup].* It’s only been four weeks. I know it’s not just any week. It’s Holy Week. But it’s only been since March 15th that we were together. This soon will pass, and what a glorious day it will be for us when we reunite in our sanctuary, and worship and receive and eat and drink! How hungry and thirsty and thankful we will be! How pleasing it will be to God! And if God has other plans for us, and we are unable, the time will come when we will find ways to get His gift to you, as we do when you become homebound and can never come to church again, when you are sick and weak for a prolonged time, when you**

**MAUNDY THURSDAY—page 6**

**are on your deathbed and the Sacrament can strengthen your faith to meet your Lord and His angels. Until we meet again,**

**In the Name of Jesus. Amen.**



[The Rev. William R. Marler, Maundy Thursday, *anno Domini*, 2020]