

THE LORD'S SUPPER UNIFIES THE UNIFIED, SEPARATES THE DIVIDED

Hear again the Word of God given for the ending of Maundy-Thursday and the beginning of Good Friday all of which occurred with the setting of the sun:

For as often as all of you may continue to eat this Bread and the cup all of you may continue to drink, the death of the Lord all of you continue to proclaim, until when(ever) He may have come.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

One of the rightly inspired prophets of the Old Covenant people of God still declares God's Word across the centuries:

I will cut for them (a) covenant eternal, (from) which I will not turn away from them, from causing to do good to them; and the fear of Me I will put in their hearts that they may not turn from Me (Jer. 32:40 MT).

Tonight you who confess together rightly concerning the New Covenant God cut in Jesus' Blood continue to receive those promises. As with the Old Covenant, this New Covenant is unilateral. God caused it to be written. God put it into effect. God gives all that is needed for His people to participate in it. God brings blessings to the faithful, and judgment for the unfaithful. All of that and more He brings forth from His cutting His New Covenant in Jesus' blood. Through the Sacrament of the Altar, God continues to cause to do good for those who fear, love, trust in Him.

This is why you are here this evening – to receive God's promised gifts in the Faith, namely: forgiveness of all your sins and strengthening to life everlasting. This night, sanctified by the Word of God, begins the Great Triduum (Three Days). In this humanly reckoned time zone, from 6:38 pm this evening until 6:41 pm this coming Sunday, the Church sets aside times to specifically remember – memorialize – the Word. Through it, the events and fulfillment of God's promises are recalled to declare all that He put into His cutting of His New Covenant. This He effected through giving His Son, Jesus' Body into death. From that, God set in place His everlasting covenant from which He will

¹ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

never turn away.

The Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was handed over took bread, and having given thanks, He broke (it) and said, "This of Me remains the Body, the One (given) for all of you; this all of you continue to do for My remembrance."

Likewise, also (He took) the Cup after the dinner meal, saying, "This (is) the Cup for the New Covenant (which) remains in My Blood; this all of you continue to do as often as all of you may continue to drink (it), for My remembrance."²

To that end, all the services of the Great Triduum are given to help you remember and proclaim to one another the unending Covenant God Himself established in our Lord's death. The seven Lord's services beginning tonight are given to you that His New Covenant be memorialized and celebrated by you as one Lord's Service. These three days you may consider to be one annual Great Memorial Day of the Lord's New Covenant. To help you remember that, we are going to follow the helpful tradition which removes the Lord's Service ending Aaronic benediction until the conclusion of the Feast of the Resurrection Divine Service (Easter Dawn Matins has the Apostolic Blessing). In doing so, we hope to be found faithful to the apostolic teaching regarding the Lord's Memorial Day:

For as often as all of you may continue to eat this Bread, and the cup all of you may continue to drink, the death of the Lord you all continue to proclaim until when(ever) He may come.³

You surely noted that this whole section of Paul's God-breathed letter is written to "all of you." That means that just as the seven services of the Great Triduum are to be one unified whole, so is it to be with the confession of those who remember the Lord's death until He may come. Right participation in the Lord's Supper means that we proclaim to one another – not to the world outside the Church – that we are united in Christ through partaking His true Body and Blood from His Table, for the forgiveness of our sins and strengthening to life everlasting. Those who recline at the Lord's Table in a given location, then, are called to be of one confession.

² 1 Corinthians 11:24-25.

³ 1 Corinthians 11:26.

To help drive home that truth into the heart of this congregation this evening, we received God's forgiveness through the Lord's Service of Corporate Confession and Absolution. Tonight Lent began its long ending service with a mirror that reflected how Lent began among us on Ash Wednesday. Then, each individual was absolved. That was so that he or she might have a solid foundation upon which to build as he or she reflected on Jesus' sacrifice through his or her own Lenten disciplines. Tonight, all received Holy Absolution as one unified Body. The Lord's Services have moved us from individual reflection to corporate reception of God's gifts. In participating in such services of Confession and Absolution, we desire to be found faithful to our centuries old public confession of the Faith, which declares:

Confession has not been, through the preachers on our side, abolished. The custom has been held among us that the sacrament (is) not administered to those who have not beforehand been heard and absolved.⁴

From that practice, we are drawn back to the readings tonight. They clearly illustrate the truth that the Lord's Supper unifies the unified, and separates the divided. In the reading from the Exodus, we heard of the unity of those whose doorposts and lintels were marked with blood – in the sign of the cross. In the Gospel reading, we heard the Lord Jesus' own example of service to those whom He declares clean. The readings unify in our ears to teach our hearts of God's call for unity in confession and action among God's people.

Even so, those same texts declare what happens to those who are not united in confession. In the first Passover, given by God to those who were soon to receive the Lord's Covenant through Moses, those who chose not to mark their doorways in blood were not spared the plague of the death of the firstborn. In the night when Jesus established His everlasting covenant in His blood, there was one who chose to remain unclean. He who had held a divisive confession betrayed our Lord unto death. When St. Paul had received through Jesus' revelation that which he handed on without error, there

⁴ Tappert, T. G. (Ed.). (1959). *The Book of Concord the confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*. (p. 61). Philadelphia: Mühlenberg Press.

also were those who had held to divisive confessions. They had gathered around the Lord's Table in the Church in Corinth holding to different beliefs about Church fellowship and Jesus' presence among them. That is one reason why the Apostle, citing the revelation of Jesus, taught them, and still teaches now His table guests, with words like these:

But (a) man must continue to approve himself after testing, and thus from the bread he must continue to eat and from the cup he must continue to drink.⁵

There is God's call for individual responsibility which comes after corporate instruction. The word translated with the phrase, "approve after testing" (δοκιμαζω) indicates that there are standards by which one might measure oneself. That, of course, was referred to by Paul in his opening words of this section of the letter:

For I received from the Lord that which also I handed over to all of you...!⁶

Paul declares that He "received" his teaching from the Lord. The Jewish rabbis with whom the Apostle would have been intimately acquainted used the word which lies behind our "received" to indicate a tradition that has been passed on to others. In one of his letters to another set of congregations, St. Paul testifies that he did not "receive" his teaching from man, but that it came directly to him *through the revelation of Jesus Christ.*⁷ Paul is thus practicing pastoral oversight with regard to the Sacrament of the Altar in the Corinthian congregation. As a Bishop/Pastor, the Apostle is indicating who should recline at the Lord's Table, and who should not, and tying that directly to catechesis — instruction in the basic confessions of the Faith.

St. Paul declares God's judgment on those who had broken table fellowship in that congregation. He rebukes those who sin by being divisive in Altar Table confession and practice. He exercises the Office of the Keys with a statement of the divine retribution that has come upon those who fail to discern the Body and Blood of Christ at Jesus' Table in common confession of the Faith.

⁵ *I Corinthians* 11:28.

⁶ *I Corinthians* 11:23.

⁷ *Galatians* 1:12.

On account of this, among all of you many are sick and powerless, and they continue to die, (a) large number.⁸

Those words of warning about God's gift which is meant to bring forgiveness and strengthening to eternal life still stand for those would abuse the Sacrament. Such people use that which is intended as pure gift as occasion for sin. They would teach, or entice and coerce their pastors into, celebrating the Lord's Supper in manners which are inconsistent with Jesus' institution. Their particular sins, in the context of the letter being proclaimed this evening, lie in the area of divisiveness. Such goes beyond recognizing the Real Presence of Jesus in, with, and under the elements of bread and wine. Remember, the Lord's Supper actually unifies the unified and separates the divided, which is one reason why the Lord through St. Paul still declares:

But if ourselves we continue to discern, we should not be judged. But when we are being continually judged by the Lord, we continue to be trained through discipline in order that we may not with the cosmos we may have been condemned.⁹

There is Good News in all of that! First we deal with the truth that, left to discern our own heart thoughts, emotions, external actions and inactions, we each – and all – find reasons to excuse ourselves for our sinfulness. That last is why once a month or so in the Confession, we say together, “We confess that we are by nature sinful and unclean....” Then, the Word declares that we are being continually judged by the Lord. That happens when His convicting, killing, and condemning word shows us – as it did the Corinthians long ago – what we truly deserve: *to be sick and powerless, and to have a large number of us die.*

Yet, that same Word which brings God's declaration of condemnation and punishment we might face if we remain unrepentant declares that it is give that we might be *trained through discipline*. The Good News is that God our Father loves us enough that He actually warns us away from sins of divisiveness as His Table. He trains us as our loving Father in the discipline which keeps us from receiving the punishments received

⁸ 1 Corinthians 11: 30.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 11:31-32.

by those who are guilty concerning the Body and Blood of the Lord. He keeps us mindful that His Supper, as it is celebrated in the congregation, unifies the unified and separates the divided.

To keep us from that last God gives us His Maundy this Thursday. Tonight we receive such with two of its possible meanings from the Latin, *mandatum*, “commandment,” this do for My remembrance;” and *mundo*, “to clean.” Jesus has declared us who confessed our sins in the Faith to be clean through His Holy Absolution. He leads us to do this: eat and drink for the forgiveness of sins in the unity of the Faith.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent VI Maundy-Thursday (*LSB* One-year series)

Exodus 12:1-14; I Corinthians 11:23-32; John 13:1-15

March 24, 2016

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria