

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 In the Lord's Supper We Preach Christ Crucified Maundy Thursday, April 1, 2010
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God's grace and peace are yours through your Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.
Tonight's lesson to prepare us for the Lord's Supper is from 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
These are Your Words heavenly Father. Sanctify us by Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear Friends, in Christ,

Throughout this season of Lent, we have considered what it means that Christ has been crucified for us. As sinners we need certainty that our sins are forgiven. God's Word clearly tells us of His forgiveness being not from ourselves, but only through the innocent life of Christ freely sacrificed for us. That is why we have the cross before us. And this evening we have on the altar another way in which God assures us that Christ's sacrifice for sin is ours. The institution of the Lord's Supper uses the Words body and blood. Both were used in a sacrifice. The body of an animal was burnt on the altar. Its blood was poured out before the altar as a sign of total giving of life to God. God did not expect Jesus to die of old age or of a heart attack. With His perfect body, He never would have died of natural causes. So, His blood had to be shed. His body had to be sacrificed to atone for our sins. That is how He won our forgiveness!

In Christ alone our sin is atoned for and God holds nothing against us. Yet, our consciences may still bother us because we have sinned so many times and like Peter, sometimes we have sinned grievously. We know how grave a matter each sin is to the Almighty. As repented sinners we long to be assured that God has Good News of forgiveness for us. God delivered Christ's forgiveness in His Word. God connected His forgiveness to baptism, stating that our sins are washed away. He had one more extraordinary way to convince us that we and all sinners are pardoned.

We Preach Christ Crucified in the Lord's Supper

First, the Lamb of God has died for our sins. We learn of the setting for the Lord's Supper in Luke. "*When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And He said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you.'*" (Luke 22:14-15) The apostles were eager to eat the Passover meal with Christ as well, but not for the same reason. Passover, after all, was the high point of the year for them. It was Christmas and New Year's and the Fourth of July all rolled into one festival. And the culmination of the week-long festival was the Passover meal.

But Jesus' desire to share this meal with His close disciples was based on more than holiday spirit. It wasn't just the ceremony. It was the very peak and summit of the entire history of Israel. Every Passover celebration, every ritual, every ceremony and sacrifice, had led up to this very day and hour when Christ would give His life for them on the cross. No wonder Jesus was eager to eat this particular Passover with his disciples.

To better understand this, we must recall the original Passover dinner at the time of Moses. The Lord God, with His "*mighty arm,*" had saved the Israelites from centuries of slavery and death in Egypt. Finally the day of their deliverance had come when God sent Moses to punish the unbelieving pride of Pharaoh with nine devastating plagues. A strong and prosperous empire was brought to the very brink destruction while its king hardened his heart.

And then the final plague, the death of the firstborn, forced Pharaoh to let God's people go. God said, "*About midnight I will go throughout Egypt. Every firstborn son in Egypt will die, from the firstborn son of Pharaoh, who sits on the throne, to the firstborn son of the slave girl..., and all the firstborn of the cattle as well. There will be loud wailing throughout Egypt, worse than there has ever been or ever will be again. But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any man or animal.*" (Exodus 11:4-7) There was ruin on one side and total peace for the other. But the side with peace came at a price. The Israelites were to slaughter a year-old lamb and paint its blood on their doorposts. This would be the sign that a death had already occurred in the house and that the angel of death was not to come to take another victim.

This Passover meal foreshadowed exactly what Christ would do for all sinners. All people, including us, were caught in the slavery of sin and were condemned to eternal death in hell as a just punishment for our sins. But, Jesus would take our place like the Passover lamb did. He would put Himself between us and God's judgment. As the body of the spotless lamb was slain, so Jesus would offer His sinless body on the cross for the sins of the world. As with the blood of the lamb on the door posts, Jesus' blood stained the wood of the cross as a sign that a death had taken place for sin. No other victim, not one of us, was to be harmed by the avenging angel gathering sinners for the final judgment of shame and eternal suffering with the evil devil.

The Passover meal was commanded by God to be a yearly celebration. Never were the Israelites to forget the price of their rescue from slavery and death. That roasted lamb they ate and the wine they drank would remind them of the great salvation that God had brought to His people through a sacrifice. St. Paul wrote down Jesus' words to His disciples on the night He was betrayed, "*Do this [observe the Lord's Supper] in remembrance of me.*" (v.24) Until the end of time, Christ's people will meet and receive His meal to impress upon them the great salvation that Jesus won for them. It is also a message to be shared. We proclaim to sinners like ourselves that Christ has given His life for them.

Paul wrote, "*Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*" (v.26)

Second, let us eat and drink the forgiveness Christ has won. Paul wrote, "*The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you....' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'*" (v.24-25) Ceremonies like the Passover in Egypt seem distant to us. Yet we gather to eat for special occasions like weddings, confirmations or graduations. Traditional foods, cakes, family and friends gathering convey to us a message as loud as words. Communion does a similar thing for us. It is a ritual meal, but so much more because it is God who performs it, not us. We are here to receive and by His Word to be convinced of what it means. Jesus set the table. We eat and drink what He serves to us, namely the forgiveness of all our sins that He won on the cross by His sacrifice. Every time we receive the Lord's Supper we benefit from the Lord's death on the cross.

The bread is consecrated as the pastor speaks the words that Christ spoke over His Passover bread. Christ's Supper is more than mere bread. The bread is His very body, which was given for us. And the wine is likewise consecrated with Christ's words so that it is Jesus' very blood, which saves us from eternal death.

Think back to what I said a few minutes ago, how when the offenses are many and grave, it will take more to convince us sinners that we are actually forgiven. Look at how much God has done to offer His forgiveness to us and to convince us of it so that faith in Christ remains in our hearts. Not only is it written in the Bible for our eyes to read. Not only is it spoken from the pulpit for our ears to hear. Our forgiveness is put on our tongues for us to eat and drink.

If we have been reminded of anything from our Lenten worship during these past 40 days, it is that our sins truly are a serious matter to God that deserve the worst punishment imaginable. How astounding that Jesus was willing to take that punishment in our place by dying on the cross. Now, here before us, is the evidence of His sacrifice for us to taste to fully assure us that all has been accomplished by Christ. The Father says, "Your sins are forgiven, because my Son is the Lamb whose blood has washed them away. It is His body that was sacrificed on the cross so that you might have freedom from sin and life everlasting. Take and eat His body. Take and drink His blood. Taste His sacrifice of love. Eat and drink the forgiveness Christ has won for you." Amen.