

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Amen.

Luke 22:14-20

¹⁴When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God."

¹⁷After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. ¹⁸For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

¹⁹And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."

²⁰In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

"Father, forgive them" (Luke 23:34). Throughout the Lenten season, we have heard this prayer of Jesus again and again. As he prayed for those who were responsible for his suffering on the day of his death, so we pray for our forgiveness on those many occasions when we contribute to that suffering.

"Father, forgive them." This evening we have before us an answer to that prayer. It is called the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It is, as Luther wrote, **"the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink."**

We know that we have sinned against God countless times. And we know how serious each sin is. That is why, in his mercy, when God had forgiven us in his heart for Jesus' sake, our Lord also brought about a wonderful way to convince us that all our sins are really forgiven. Tonight as we approach the Lord's altar, may this prayer be in our hearts: **Father, Forgive Us Through This Holy Supper!**

1.

"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.'" The apostles probably felt 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 high point of the festival was the Passover dinner.

But Jesus' zealous desire to share this meal with his chosen Twelve was based on more than just holiday spirit or even religious fervor. Every Old Testament celebration, every sacrifice, and every Passover pointed to this day and this hour. No wonder Jesus was so eager to eat this Passover with his closest followers.

To understand why this was, we must once again recall what the Passover dinner was all about. It was a meal to remember the days of Moses when the Lord God, with his mighty power, had saved the Israelites from slavery and death in Egypt.

For 400 years the people of Abraham had lived as slaves in the land of the pharaohs. But finally the day of their deliverance had come. The Lord their God had sent his messenger to the palace of the ruler of Egypt and had demanded, **"Let my people go!"** Pharaoh had refused, and the Lord had let loose nine devastating plagues upon the land of the Nile. A strong and prosperous empire was brought to the brink of utter destruction as its king hardened his heart against God's demands.

And then the final plague was to come upon Egypt, the one that would finally force Pharaoh to let the people go: the slaughter of the firstborn in every house in Egypt.

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, who is at her hand mill, 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)

Not a dog would bark, but there would be a price. The Israelites were to slaughter a perfect yearling lamb and paint its blood above their doors and on the doorposts. This would save them. This would be the sign that a death had already occurred in the house and that the angel of death was not to come there to take yet another victim.

And what was to be done with the lamb once its blood was drained? It was to be roasted and eaten as part of

a meal that would include bitter herbs and unleavened bread. And on every anniversary of that day, the Israelites, just as at the first meal, ate the meat of the lamb, recalling the death of that first lamb that had bought them freedom and life through its bleeding and dying.

Now can you see why Jesus was so eager to eat this meal with his disciples on this particular night that truly was **“different from all other nights”**? For God’s beloved people, not only the Israelites but all the descendants of Adam and Eve, were caught in the slavery of sin and were condemned to the eternal death of hell for their sins.

And on this night Jesus would take the place of the lamb of the Passover. As the body of the spotless lamb was slain in Egypt, so Jesus would offer up his body and his life for the sins of the world. As with the blood of the lamb in Egypt, Jesus’ blood is now the sign that a death has already taken place for sin. No other victim is needed.

Some of his disciples should have been very aware of this. It was Andrew and John, after all, who had stood on the banks of the Jordan River with John the Baptist three years earlier and had heard that prophet tell them, **“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”** (John 1:29). Indeed, every one of the apostles had been trained in this supper all their lives. On this night they would see its fulfillment.

That was why the Lord God had commanded that this Passover meal be a yearly celebration. Never were the Israelites to forget the price of their rescue from slavery and death. That roasted lamb and the wine they drank with the meal—these would call to remembrance God’s great deliverance from Egypt.

And that is why Jesus told his apostles, **“Do this in remembrance of me.”** Until the end of history itself, Christ’s people will also meet and share in this new meal to impress upon their minds the great salvation that their Lord won for them upon the cross. “Father, forgive us through the Holy Supper.” We will eat and drink the salvation that Christ Jesus has won for us.

2.

Today the Passover dinner may seem foreign to us. Yet the idea of a ritual meal is not completely lost on us. We have our ceremonies of eating involving birthday cakes, wedding cakes, Thanksgiving meals, and the like. The very food, the way it is cooked and served, often conveys to us a message louder—in its way, much louder—than words.

Take the wedding cake rite, for example. Bride and groom wield the knife together for the first cut of the cake—that is significant. They feed each other the first pieces—that is significant (sometimes messy too!). And then one piece is to be saved in the freezer and taken out for them to eat together on their first anniversary, to remember the day they became one.

Communion does a similar thing for us. It is a ceremonial meal for us. But unlike what we might expect, in this ritual it is really all about God, not about us. We are just there to eat and drink and be convinced of what it means. We do nothing to gain God’s favor by attending this eating and drinking. We are here to eat and drink what he serves to us. We are the mere receivers of his gift, which makes the forgiveness of our sins all the more real to us.

The bread is set aside for this purpose as the pastor speaks the words that Christ himself spoke over the bread of the Passover. With his words, Christ promised that his Supper is more than just bread but also his very body, which, like the flesh of the Passover lamb, was given for us. And the wine is likewise consecrated with Christ’s words by which it becomes more than just fruit of the vine but also Jesus’ very blood, which, like the lamb’s blood on the doorposts, saves us from eternal death.

Sometimes it takes an awful lot to convince the sinner that his sin is actually forgiven. Look at how much God has put forth to give this forgiveness to us and to make us believe in it and to cement that faith in our hearts. Not only is it written in the Bible for our eyes to see. Not only is it spoken from the pulpit for our ears to hear. Our forgiveness is held under our noses for us to smell and put on our tongues for us to taste.

If we have learned one thing from our meditations during these 40 days of Lent, it is that our sins truly are a serious affair. How often have we strayed into trespasses similar in nature to the deeds of the disciples who fled in fear, of the judges who condemned in hatred and in weakness, of the mob that rejected, of the soldiers that mocked, of the women who would not weep for their sins! How welcome to our ears, therefore, is the prayer of our Savior: “Father, forgive them!”

And now, here before us, is the answer to that prayer: Our sins are forgiven, because Jesus is the Lamb whose blood has washed them away, whose body was sacrificed upon the cross so that we might have freedom

from sin and life everlasting. Take and eat that body. Take and drink that blood. Eat and drink the forgiveness Christ has won for you. Amen.

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