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Epiphany Lutheran Church, Castle Rock, Colorado
Maundy Thursday
Thursday, March 29th, 2018

Sermon: Take, Eat, Drink

Texts: Mark 14:12-26; Matt. 26:26-28; 1 Cor. 10:16-17

Focus: We are one Body in Christ.

Function: That they would see the Body and Blood of Jesus in the fellowship of bread and wine.

Structure: Text-Application

Locus: “It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself for us Christians to eat and to drink” (SC, What Is the Sacrament of the Altar?).

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. Today is Maundy Thursday, the night on which we remember the commandments Jesus gave to his disciples on the night when he was betrayed. *Maundy* comes from the Latin word *mandatum*, which means “commandment.” Jesus gave many commands to his disciples that night in the Upper Room, including “love one another” (John 13:34) and “wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). Yet, perhaps most wonderful of all, are those “commands” that Jesus gave when he instituted his Supper: “Take,” “eat,” and “drink” (Matt. 26:26-28, ESV).¹ The invitation to the Lord’s Supper is both commandment

¹ All Scripture references, unless otherwise indicated, are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version.

and promise, for with these words, he offers us his very Body and Blood for the forgiveness of sins.

As the apostle Paul writes in our epistle: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16a). The answer to this rhetorical questions is, “Yes, of course, it is!” “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” (1 Cor. 10:16b). Again, absolutely yes! And so we discover that when we eat the bread and drink the cup, we have the miraculous Real Presence of Christ with us. For even after his Ascension into heaven, Jesus assures, “Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20). Indeed, “where two or three are gathered in [his] name,” he is here among us (Matt. 18:20). Yet in the Lord’s Supper, there is more than a merely spiritual presence. There is an actual, physical, real, sacramental presence of Jesus’ Body and Blood “in, with, and under” the common elements of bread and wine.

We do not know *how* this miracle takes place. Yet by faith we believe that it *does* because of the simple words of Jesus: “This is my body” and “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for

many” (Mark 14:22, 24). Ever since the time of the Reformation, there has been great debate about the meaning of these words. Christians from Ana-Baptist and Reformed traditions, such as Presbyterians, Baptists, most Methodists, and some Anglicans insist that there is no way we can take Jesus literally at his Word. They argue that the bread and wine are merely *symbols* of Jesus’ Body and Blood, meant to remind us of his sacrifice on the cross—“Do this in remembrance of me” (1 Cor. 11:24-25). They leapt through elaborate theological and grammatical acrobatics in order to show how the word *is* doesn’t mean “is.”

But Luther rightly believed and taught that we must believe the simple words of Jesus. *Is* means “is.” At the Marburg Colloquy in 1529, Martin Luther met with the Swiss reformer, Ulrich Zwingli, to try to come to agreement on fifteen articles of faith. The Lutheran prince, Philip of Hesse, wanted to unite all Protestants into a military and political alliance, but Luther insisted that there could be no alliance without theological agreement. Remarkably, Dr. Luther, who was not known for compromise, was able to find agreement with Zwingli on 14

out of 15 points of doctrine. But the 15th point, on the Lord's Supper, became the point of breakdown in discussions.

Zwingli insisted that because Christ's body had ascended into heaven, there was no logical way for him to be really present in the Lord's Supper. Luther, on the other hand, insisted that because Christ's human nature had assumed the properties of the divine nature, including omnipresence, he could be present physically in the Lord's Supper by miracle of his Word. At one point Luther became so dogmatic that he took out his pen knife and began carving the Words of Institution into the meeting table! **THIS IS MY BODY**, Luther wrote. **THIS IS MY BLOOD**. At the end of the meeting, Luther and Zwingli agreed to disagree, and the envisioned Protestant League never took shape.

I know what some of you are thinking: what a bonehead! What's the big deal if we view the bread and wine as symbols in a memorial meal or if we recognize the Real Presence of Jesus' Body and Blood in a miraculous meal? Well, as a matter of fact, it makes a *huge* difference! First, even if Luther's method was distasteful, his theology was correct. Christ himself declared, "This is my body... This is my blood..." (Mark

14:22-24). Who are we to argue with Jesus? We either take Jesus at his Word, or we don't. We either trust and believe him, or we don't.

Second, the apostle Paul is quite clear that if we *don't* believe in the Real Presence, then we should not receive Holy Communion. In 1 Corinthians 11 he writes:

“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. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves, we would not be judged” (1 Cor. 11:27-31).

In Paul's day, some Christians were abusing the Lord's Supper by getting drunk on the wine and gorging themselves on the bread, as if they were just ordinary bread and wine (1 Cor. 11:19-22). But they *weren't* ordinary bread and wine. They were the very Body and Blood of Jesus! And to believe or act otherwise was to eat and drink judgment upon yourself. Paul says that some people even got sick and *died* because they were unworthy to receive Communion.

This is the reason why Lutherans (and most other Christians, including Catholics and the Eastern Orthodox) historically practice what is called “close” or “closed” Communion. We want to make sure that before people receive the Lord’s Supper, they are baptized Christians with faith in the Triune God who recognize the real presence and their need for Christ’s forgiveness. Otherwise, they take Communion to their great harm.

Some people, of course, are offended by this idea. They wonder, “What gives them a right to tell me whether or not I should go to Communion?” Actually, Scripture does. Out of love, we do not want our uninstructed or unbelieving brothers and sisters to bring judgment upon themselves. Divisions in the Lord’s Supper are nothing new. Paul writes, “I hear that there are divisions among you, and I believe it in part, for there *must be* factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized” (1 Cor. 11:18-19). In order to

rightly receive the Lord's Supper, we need to know *what* we are receiving and *why* we are receiving it.²

Holy Communion is *not* an individual affair. It's a *community* affair, a shared meal (note the common root between "community" and "communion"). St. Paul says that the loaf of bread and cup of wine are a *participation* in Jesus' Body and Blood. The Greek word for *participation* is *koinonia*, which is usually translated as "fellowship" in the New Testament. *Koinonia* comes from the Greek word for "common" or "shared" (*koinos*; cf. Acts 2:44). The Lord's Supper is a common meal shared *with others*. In our fellowship of the altar, there are two dimensions: vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension represents our faith relationship with God, our Savior. The horizontal dimension represents our fellowship with one another, our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Unfortunately, American individualism has put the horizontal relationship out of mind for many of us. We tend to view the Lord's Supper as a private thing, an individual affair, a

² In the Large Catechism, Luther writes, "For it is not our intention to let people come to the Sacrament and administer it to them if they do not know what they seek or why they come" (LC V, 2).

matter of conscience “between me and God” alone. But if you notice, you are never alone when you come to the Communion rail. There are always other Christians beside you. We do not eat the Lord’s Supper by ourselves any more than we have a Thanksgiving Feast by ourselves. To do so would be devastating. The best meals are meant to be shared. All this “me and Jesus, Jesus and me” business has no place in the Christian Church. Yes, Jesus saves us individually, but he saves us *into* community.

Paul emphasizes this close Communion fellowship in our epistle: “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body for we all partake of one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16). The unity Paul describes is best represented by one common cup (chalice) and one loaf of bread. I know that in our modern American Communion practice, we have become accustomed to individual plastic cups of wine or grape juice and little, paper-thin wafers of bread made in a factory. But this was not always the case! For over 1,900 years, regular Christian practice was to have everyone drink from *one* cup and eat from *one* loaf of bread. (In fact, I often like to joke that it takes more faith to believe that the wafer is

actually *bread* than it does to believe it is Jesus' Body!) It wasn't until the 1890's and the widespread fear of diphtheria and tuberculosis that churches first introduced individual Communion cups. The fear of germs and getting sick made them afraid to share a common chalice anymore. Initially, the novelty of individual cups caused a scandal in the American Church. It's actually quite ironic that we have come full circle the other way now.

But notice that Paul mentions "*the* cup of blessing," singular, and *not* the "cups," plural (1 Cor. 10:16). So also the Greek word for "bread" (*artos*) actually refers to a single *loaf*, not lots of individual pieces. To be honest, I am not certain that Jesus and the apostles would recognize our celebration of the Lord's Supper. It's too focused on "me and Jesus" instead of "us and Jesus *together*."

On Maundy Thursday Jesus gave us his Supper as a loving meal of remembrance and forgiveness for the entire Christian community—"poured out for many" (Mark 14:22). It was never intended for "me and Jesus." The Lord's Supper is one of the means by which Jesus is truly present with his Church. The Lord's Supper shows forth our unity of

faith—and it also makes us one. As Norman Nagel once put it so well, “The sacramental body ‘bodies’ together the ecclesiastical ‘body.’”³ In the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gives us one bread, one cup, and one body to make all Christians one. He invites us to take and eat, take and drink, for the forgiveness of sins (Matt. 26:26-28). And in this way we participate in his Body and Blood.

“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” (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

Thanks be to God! In the name of the Father and of the Son and ✠ of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

³ Gregory Lockwood, *1 Corinthians* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 342.