

TEXT – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Introduction: There is a time for everything. In Jesus' ministry there were times when he spoke in parables and other figures of speech. Through parables and various figures of speech Jesus could communicate his saving truths to his faithful followers strengthening their faith while at the same time concealing these truths to his enemies who had rejected him as a judgment against them. There was a time to speak in parables and there was a time to speak plainly. As Jesus reclined around the table with his disciples on the night he was handed over to be crucified, this was not the time for parables or figures of speech. On Maundy Thursday evening Jesus spoke plainly. On this night before his death Jesus announced his betrayer, Judas Iscariot who would hand him over to the chief priests and elders of the Jews. On this night in the Upper Room, Jesus predicted Peter's denial, though Peter had boasted that he would never betray his Lord. On this night we call Maundy Thursday, Christ our Savior spoke very plainly about his death and a new meal that he would institute for his faithful followers. We continue with our Lenten theme - WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED IN HIS HOLY SUPPER.

I. "This is my body and blood"

- What do you do when you are about to die? I know that is kind of a morbid question but an appropriate one as we consider our Savior who was about to die. Before we die we want to put into writing our last will and testament. This is a time to be specific so that our wishes are not misunderstood. In my last will and testament I wouldn't say, "I hereby do bequeath to my firstborn that silver bullet parked in my driveway." Rather I would say, "I give to my son Aaron my 2003 Buick Century." In our last will and testament we want to be incredibly clear on what and to whom we are giving our possessions so that no one can contest it.
- On the night before he died, Jesus gave his last will and testament to his twelve apostles and to us as his disciples today. He was giving to them and to all believers his most prized possession – himself in his very body and blood given and shed for us and miraculously present in the bread and wine of his holy Supper. The Apostle Paul quotes the words of Jesus on that night as they were given to him by the Lord Jesus himself. Again this was not the time for parables or figures of speech. Jesus was very clear.
- Paul says that Jesus took the bread, the unleavened bread from the Passover meal that they were celebrating, he gave thanks to God for this bread, and he broke off some pieces and gave them to his disciples to eat. To this point there is nothing that different from a normal meal. But then he said, "This is my body, which is (given) for you; do this in remembrance of me." The gospel writers include the command to take and eat the bread that Jesus was giving to them. Jesus is very clear. This bread is my body.
- Paul tells us that in the same manner Jesus took the cup of wine from the Passover meal and passed it around for his disciples to drink. He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it (or as often as you drink it) in remembrance of me." The gospel writers also include the command for all of them to drink from the cup. Once again Jesus is very clear. This cup, the wine, is a new covenant, the gospel covenant of forgiveness in my blood.
- At this point we might have one point of clarification, maybe two or three. First of all, how can Jesus give those twelve apostles his body and blood in the bread and wine before he has even died? Secondly, how can Jesus continue to give his body and blood in the Lord's Supper every time it is celebrated? Wouldn't he run out of body and blood to give to each communicant over a couple thousand years? Thirdly, how can there be Jesus' body and blood in the bread and wine when we only taste and see bread and wine? Even if we were to analyze the elements under a microscope we would only see bread and wine not body and blood.
- Faith accepts and believes Jesus' words because they are the words and promises of our Savior. Jesus gives his body and blood to us in the Lord's Supper because he says he does and that's all we need to know. If Jesus told us to eat cake and drink milk for in, with, and under the cake and milk was his body and blood we would do it. Why? We would do it because Jesus gave us his promise of forgiveness by eating cake and drinking milk. It is the words of our Savior that gives this holy supper its meaning, its power, and its spiritual blessings.
- Now Jesus invites us to sit at the table with him again and again to partake of this holy supper. In, with and under the bread and wine he gives us his very body and blood, the same body and blood he offered on the cross. You can't get more personal or more intimate with your faith than to receive in a very personal and intimate way the flesh and blood of your Savior. This body and blood of Christ is for you – you meaning the Christian. Though Jesus is very clear about what we are receiving, it is still hidden to the unbeliever. They see bread and wine. We through faith in Jesus see and receive his body and blood which he gives to us.

Transition: We preach Christ crucified in his holy supper. We believe what Jesus says, “This is my body and blood.” We also follow Jesus’ instruction, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

II. “Do this in remembrance of me”

- On the last night of his earthly life in his state of humiliation, Jesus instituted the eating and drinking we call Holy Communion or the Lord’s Supper. With this holy supper Jesus invited us to receive his body and blood in the bread and wine for a very special purpose. He referred to it as the new covenant in his blood. This is not the old covenant of the law given to Moses full of commands that we cannot keep, commands that only prove how sinful we are and condemn us. Ezekiel says, “The souls who sins is the one who will die.”
- Jeremiah explained the new covenant when he wrote, “This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law (teaching) in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”
- The new covenant is the gospel covenant. It is the covenant or agreement from God to forgive all our sins through the suffering and death of his Son, Jesus Christ. Doesn’t that just fit perfectly with the Lord’s Supper as we receive Christ’s body and blood? Matthew in his account records it this way, “Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.’”
- Somewhat unfortunately, at least in our Lutheran circles, this day has become known as Maundy Thursday, which is translated commandment Thursday. It refers to Jesus’ command while in the Upper Room with the Twelve to love one another. John records Jesus’ words in chapter 13 of his gospel, “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” The good thing is that by receiving the Lord’s Supper and the assurance of our Savior’s forgiveness we are moved and encouraged to love one another.
- Jesus did issue this “command” in the Lord’s Supper, “Do this in remembrance of me.” This is not really a law command but a gospel imperative for our faith to latch on to. What are we to do and what are we to remember? The do part is fairly easy. We do exactly what Jesus did when he instituted the Lord’s Supper. We speak the Words of Institution, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread...” Without the Word of God this would just be an ordinary meal. With God’s Word we are consecrating this meal, making it what Jesus wants it to be. Then we distribute the bread and wine as Jesus did. Finally the communicants eat the bread and drink the wine and receive the body and blood of Christ their Savior.
- We do what Jesus did, but what are we to remember? Paul writes in the last verse of our text, “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” We proclaim Christ’s death to others in this meal. If they were paying attention they would at least hear that we are preaching Christ crucified – his body given for us and his blood shed for us. We remember what we are proclaiming. We remember and receive by faith the blessings and benefits of Christ’s death on the cross, namely the forgiveness of our sins and the guarantee of eternal life in heaven.
- What would you do if a very rich and famous person invited you to his or her house for a meal? What if this rich person said that we could swim in the huge indoor pool and water-park, play in the awesome arcade and ride go-carts, watch movies or play video games in the private movie theater with a 30 foot by 60 foot screen, and eat and drink whatever we wanted? This rich person also said that we could come over as often as we wanted to and really meant it. Would you take this generous, wealthy person up on his or her offer?
- Jesus in his holy supper gives us so much more. He feeds and strengthens our faith in him as our Savior. His body nailed to the cross and his blood poured out on the ground washes away all our sin. That guilt you have been carrying around for days, maybe months, even years is no more. In the new covenant God announces that he remembers your sins no more. There is not a more faith-strengthening, sin-cleansing invitation than our Savior’s invitation to do this in remembrance of him – to receive his forgiveness. And we get to do it again and again and again.

Conclusion: Tonight Jesus is not speaking in parables. When he says, “This is my body,” and “This is the new covenant in my blood,” he means just that. Jesus could not be any more reassuring in our forgiveness than to have his own body and blood placed in our mouths and to hear his words spoken by the pastor, “This is my body, which is given for you,” and “this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” In effect Jesus is saying very clearly, “I forgive you. I really, really do.” Amen.