

Sermon  
4/1/2021

**Sermon on John 13:1–15**  
**Holy Thursday**  
**April 1, 2021**

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today on this Holy Thursday, you just heard the Gospel text from John chapter 13 in which is recorded the history of that first Holy Thursday when Jesus shared his last Passover meal with his disciples and washed their feet and taught them to do the same.

We know from Matthew, Mark, Luke and St. Paul that on that original Holy Thursday Jesus also instituted the Lord's Supper.

Why John did not record these details of the Lord's Supper is unknown. I think it is because John focuses in his Gospel on the preached word and writes about the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in a more subtle and indirect way.

So it is that John records Jesus indirectly teaching on baptism when He said, *"Unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God."* Water and the spirit, of course refer to baptism, this is from John chapter 3.

And John records Jesus indirectly teaching on the Lord's Supper when He said, *"Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink."*

Now one can feed on Christ's flesh and drink his blood in a spiritual way by faith, and this is the most important and necessary way. All who truly believe in Christ spiritually feed on his flesh.

Still, this text clearly alludes to the actual feeding on Christ's body and blood in the sacrament where there is eternal life for all who believe and partake of it in a worthy manner as our epistle text says.

On this night, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, I want to take another opportunity to preach on the doctrine of the sacrament, and I will use primarily on the epistle lesson.

Now, it is true, you just heard two sermons on the Lord's Supper during our midweek Lent services just a few weeks ago. But we get so lazy about spiritual matters and end up belittling and scorning the sacrament, and this is not good!

So it is good right and salutary to consider it yet again that we might truly partake of it properly and so be comforted and benefited by it.

We will cover two things tonight: the great reason that Christ instituted the Sacrament, and the great error concerning the Sacrament which we ought to avoid.

So, first, what is the great reason Christ himself instituted the sacrament? The answer is, for our comfort! Jesus established the sacrament for our sake, that we would eat it and in our affliction be comforted with Christ and the forgiveness of sins.

We Lutherans have learned this in the catechism, *What is the benefit of this eating and drinking?* These words, "Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins, show us that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words..."

Now I can attest to you personally, that having enough money to pay the bills is sure nice; and being healthy is sure nice; and having a wife and children and friends are sure nice; but nothing brings me more comfort and joy than knowing that God loves me and forgives me all my sins.

And this is what preaching the Gospel and the sacraments are all about, bringing to you that which Christ won for you on the cross, the comfort of the forgiveness of sins and peace with God.

Preaching and the sacraments are the delivery mechanism of getting to you these treasures of Christ. You could say that I am like the UPS man, delivering to you something good, something great, something utterly fantastic: forgiveness.

Now our epistle text tonight explains the comfort of Christ and the forgiveness of sins that are given us in the sacrament through Jesus' own words, *"This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."*

So we believe that because of Jesus' plain words here that the bread in the sacrament is his body, and the wine is his blood.

Jesus comes to us bodily in the sacrament not as some magical trick for us to marvel at, as though Jesus were some kind of entertainer, he comes *"for you"* that is, *"for your benefit."*

And this benefit is spiritual, he comes to bring you what his shed blood on the cross won for you: the forgiveness of sins.

Notice though Jesus' command, *"Do this in remembrance of me."* Why does he say this?

He says this because he knows we need to remember and refresh ourselves daily with the riches of Christ's victory on the cross.

We are so lazy about matters of the faith and we easily forget the great and incredible event of Jesus' shed blood on the cross and what it means.

It means victory over the devil, it means victory over the grave, it means victory over God, that is, God's wrath! Oh the incredible riches of Jesus Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sins! Oh what a supper we have at the altar where we receive all these victories and riches!

And yet in our sinful laziness we forget the great event of Christ crucified and what it means.

And we think that we are not such great sinners, and so the Gospel and the sacraments are not such a big deal and can be done away with.

Oh what horrible devilish things we do when we forget what Christ has done for us!

We forget that as baptized Christians we are God's holy people who ought to behave as his holy people. And instead we revert to our old sinful way of living and rather than living like Christ, we look at how the sinful world lives and begin living like them!

Oh what horrible sins we commit when we forget what Christ has done for us and who we are!

And so God instituted the Sacrament of the Altar that we would regularly remind ourselves what Christ has done for us and receive from him what we so very much need (the forgiveness of sins).

Not only that He gave us the supper and told us to observe it often; in this way we would always have opportunity to spur our faith into action and feed the fire of our faith and love for God because of what Jesus has done for us.

And we have this precedent with the Passover meal that God instituted for the Jews; and this is what our Old Testament text tonight from Exodus is all about.

When God saved the Israelites from the land of Egypt he did so with great signs and wonders: with the ten great plagues that destroyed the land of Egypt, and then with the great crossing of the Red Sea when God destroyed the army of Egypt.

And God instituted the Passover meal, that sacrament of Old Testament times that was meant for the Jews, so that they would remember and recall what God had done for them: he saved them from the hands of the Egyptians.

*And God used the passover to remind the Israelites, "Hey you are my people now. I saved you and brought you out of Egypt. Remember the angel of death and how you were saved from it through the shed blood of the lamb? Remember how I saved you from Pharaoh and how he perished in the Red Sea? You are my holy people now who ought to live holy lives"*

And yet, the Israelites forgot what God had done for them and whose they were. And they began to live like the Canaanites around them. And this always coincided with failing to observe the Passover!

Well friends, when Christ came the Passover meal reached its expiry date and Christ instituted a new sacrament for all who repented of their sins and believed in the Son: this is the Lord's Supper.

But let us learn our lesson from the Jews and their Passover: should we forget what Christ has done for us, which the sacrament is meant to prevent, then we will have the same fate as the nation of Israel: exile and destruction.

Now, let me address for a minute the great error concerning the Sacrament. And it is simply this: when one makes the Lord's Supper into something that we do for God.

When this error is made then all comfort and blessing that the sacrament is meant to deliver to us disappears. The Supper becomes not God's gift to us that we might be filled with comfort, but it becomes our work for God; and this never brings comfort.

The Roman church errs in this way. For them the sacrament is primarily a sacrifice where the priest offers to God the body and blood of Christ. And so it becomes a spectacle, a magic show, where the priest will parade around with the consecrated elements. Eating and drinking for the forgiveness of sins is beside the point.

But the evangelical churches err similarly. For them the sacrament is our work for God. They do not have a priest offer the elements to God as a sacrifice, but their remembering of Christ becomes their sacrifice. It is as though they are saying, "Look God I remember Jesus so you have to save me."

And so this sacrament brings nobody pleasure because our remembering is always corrupted and impure.

Should we remember Christ and his work on the cross? Of course, but God wants us to remember not as a work of ours, but as a mechanism for humbly receiving the forgiveness of sins.

Lastly, remember, Christ instituted the sacrament for your benefit. It is not a spectacle show to titillate and entertain us. Nor is it a crass work through which we get brownie points by participating in it.

Rather, the Supper is something Christ instituted for your comfort, that all anxious and troubled souls would be fed with the body and blood of our Lord and comforted with the forgiveness of sins.

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If you do not think that you are a sinner who has offended God, then the sacrament is not for you. But should you recognize your sin and lament over it, then the sacrament is for you, provided that you believe the words, *“Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins”*

If you believe those words you have exactly what they say, “The forgiveness of sins”

What a supper!