

+ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 + Do This in Remembrance of Me¹ + Maundy Thursday + 24 March 2016 +

On our bedroom wall at home hangs a framed picture without a picture. In place of the picture is a piece of paper with the lyrics of the Christian song “Friends” by Michael and Deborah Smith. Around those lyrics is a big white mat covered with handwritten messages of encouragement and thanks and prayers offered by God’s people at Tree of Life Lutheran Church in Cary, NC. The congregation gave that gift to me and Lisa at the end of my vicar (pastoral intern) year. They loved us dearly and we loved them.

Now could Lisa and I ever forget the love the members showed us while we were there? Of course not! Can any of us ever forget the people we’ve treasured in our past? I hope not, but one of the ironies of life is our ability to put the past in the past. I suppose it’s necessary.

You can’t spend your entire life aching to see people you once knew and loved. Our brains are hardwired to move on as best we can. Yet sometimes you want to recall those people and their love, even if it hurts to miss them. The gifts they’ve given you help bring back all that you treasured about those people. In a similar way, Jesus has given us something to remember him—his Holy Supper. Tonight, we watch with Jesus’ disciples in the upper room, and we hear him tell us, **“Do this in remembrance of me.”**

So how do you choose those tokens of affection that you give to people you love? Sometimes you choose things that have personal meaning. Sometimes you choose things that just “fit,” but sometimes you might scratch your head when you see the gift someone gives you. Is that how we view the Lord’s Supper? We do treasure the gift Jesus gave us in his Supper, but doesn’t it seem rather insignificant?

A bite of bread. A swallow of wine. Seems so insignificant, yet Christ’s gift is amazingly powerful. To really appreciate this gift, we need to take a closer look at how and what he gave. On that dark night when he was betrayed, our Savior at a time of high emotion, with the most fervent prayer, and under the most serious circumstances gave his last will and testament. HE gave his most precious gift to his followers. Within 24 hours, his dead body would be lying within the cold darkness of a borrowed tomb.

This was not a time to speak in parables or figures of speech. There wasn’t time to use earthly stories to teach heavenly truths. The Son of God was on his way to death. His disciples were about to be sifted as wheat. Within hours, one would betray him to his enemies and take his own life at the end of a rope. Another would deny him publicly with horrible oaths. Still another would run away naked rather than be captured with the Lord. The rest would run for their lives and hide for days in tense terror behind locked doors. Now was not the time to use figurative speech.

The time had come to speak with absolute clarity. That way there would be no doubt. If you are going to give a precious gift to your loved ones, you don’t speak to them in figures of speech. No, at such times, you must speak clearly. That way there will be no doubt what gift you are giving your loved ones.

How much more important wasn’t it for our Lord Jesus to use such absolutely clear language on the night he was betrayed? Earlier we sang, **“What was there that you could give them that would never be outspent, what great gift that would outlive them, what last will and testament? ‘Show me and the world you love me, know me as the Lamb of God; Do this in remembrance of me, eat this body, drink this blood.’”** (*Christian Worship Supplement* 717:3) On that night in absolutely clear language, our Lord Jesus gave his dearest possession to the Twelve and us—his body and blood to assure us that he would and did remove the guilt of our sins before God.

Is it any wonder that the bequeathing of this gift by our Savior was recorded not just once, but four separate times in God’s Word? In every instance, the comfort and forgiveness in the Holy Supper comes from Jesus himself.

Jesus took the bread of the Passover, gave thanks, and told his disciples what they were receiving in no uncertain terms: **“This is my body, given for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** **“In the same way, after supper he took the cup.”** What was in that Passover cup? The same element found since the first Passover in Egypt—wine. Jesus blessed it and gave it to them saying, **“Drink from it all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** If Jesus had meant something different, he had other ways to say it, but he needed to be clear. The bread was his body, the wine his blood.

¹ This sermon was adapted with permission from a Lenten sermon series published by Northwestern Publishing House.

Sinful human reason breaks in and starts raising objections. “How can Jesus give his body and blood when he hadn’t even died yet? “How can he do it after he rose again?” “How can bread and wine do such great things like give forgiveness, strengthen faith, and assure me of eternal life?” “How can Jesus give Christians of all time everywhere his body to eat and his blood to drink?” While these questions might come naturally, there’s a problem. When you expect the Holy Spirit to bow to your reason, then you rob yourself of God’s gift of eternal life. In essence, your sinful reason tries to stop Jesus from giving you his actual gift of love in his Supper

If we would only stop and listen to Jesus’ words as he intended them, then Satan’s doubts are dispelled. Think of what Jesus was doing here! You see, Jesus wasn’t adding a New Testament law, an Eleventh Commandment ordering us to eat this bread and drink this cup.

No, Jesus was giving the precious gift of himself and everything that comes with that precious gift. He came to give you relief from the times you have not kept God’s holy Law. He came with a meal that is **“given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** He came with an invitation not a command. He came to give you his very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins! He came to strengthen your faith in him and to assure you that the door to heaven’s eternal banquet stands wide open.

Martin Luther once said that if we were handing out gold coins at the altar, the floor would collapse under the weight of those who would be waiting in line. Yet in the Holy Supper, you receive an even greater treasure, a gift that moth and rust cannot destroy, a gift thieves cannot steal.

Here in this Supper, you receive Jesus, who gives you the very price he paid for your salvation—his true body and blood. Here Christ gives you himself, the living Bread from heaven and the cup of salvation. He declares that it works. It works now and forever for the forgiveness of your sins. That’s why he came down from heaven. That’s why he suffered and died. That’s why he rules all things in heaven and on earth, so in this Supper he could feed you with himself and preserve your union with him for all eternity. That body and blood with bread and wine serve to rescue you from the guilt, punishment, and rule of sin for all eternity.

Just as his forgiveness is greater than your sin, so the gift of his body and blood continues from generation to generation. Since Jesus visibly ascended into heaven, he reassures every believer in every generation, **“My body...my blood...given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.”** In this way, the Son of God, our Brother, spans the centuries and gives you his most precious possession—his body and blood sacrificed on the cross to deliver you so God would declare you not guilty in his sight.

So willingly, so lovingly the Savior gives you everything as he makes his way to the cross to be sacrificed as the Lamb of God for your sin. Yet it’s tempting to view the Holy Supper as insignificant, as unimportant, as not really worth bothering. Your sinful nature wants you to think that this is a gift not worth keeping. However, in that bread, in that cup, you receive all the blessings that come from the death and resurrection of Christ. In fact, Paul tells us, **“Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”**

Every time you partake of the Holy Supper, not only do you receive forgiveness and life through Christ, but you proclaim to others that in his death you share in his new covenant, his forgiveness, his life, his guarantee of heaven. You also proclaim that you are united by Christ through his Word with your fellow believers in what you believe.

A bite of bread. A swallow of wine. It all seems so insignificant, yet in reality, it is an amazingly powerful gift. Come, then, with hearts broken because of sin and guilt and shame. Come with souls starving for food that will strengthen you for the ongoing battle with the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. Come with a heart parched with a thirst for salvation. Come, eat and drink the price of your salvation in this feast of feasts. Then go.

Go to hold him fast who had nothing more to give you this most holy night than himself. Go and hold him fast who had no one he would rather think about than you. Go and forget him never, who made you an heir of the heaven he purchased with his body and his blood for all eternity, the very same he gives you tonight. Go with the gift of his body and blood that strengthens and preserves you for life here and for eternity. Amen.