

**+ 1 Corinthians 11:23-28 + A Heavenly Feast Given for You¹ + Series: What Does This Mean? +
+ Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY +
+ 17th Sunday after Pentecost + 1 October 2017 +**

It all seems so simple, so insignificant. A bite of bread without yeast, a swallow of grape wine—simple means accompanied by simple words without a grand display of power...and yet a feast! A feast? How can such meager means be considered a “feast” by any stretch of the imagination?

Well, it shouldn’t surprise us that the Lord in his infinite wisdom once again uses unimpressive means to provide his blessings. He uses mere words through fumbling, stumbling lips to convey life-changing, faith-creating good news about our Savior. He uses mere water connected with his saving name and his all-powerful Word to drown sinful natures and raise souls to new life in Christ. So mere bread and wine as a God-given feast? That’s certainly God’s M.O. when it comes to how he conveys his blessings. Yet what makes it a heavenly feast given for you?

To help us see Christ’s Holy Supper for what it really is, we sit at the feet of the Apostle Paul this morning. We find a very concerned Paul writing to the Christians in Corinth. You see, they were misusing and abusing the precious gift of Christ’s Supper. They saw it as a feast to fill their bellies. Some impatiently consumed all the bread since the Supper was celebrated as part of a fellowship meal. That meant others went hungry and received nothing. Still others got drunk on the wine. It was an awful situation that was going from bad to worse in God’s eyes, so out of concern for their souls, Paul took them back to the night on which Jesus was betrayed.

Jesus had gathered with his disciples in a borrowed room. They had come to Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover—the annual remembrance of God’s deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian slavery. They recalled how glorious it was when the angel of death passed over the houses of the Israelites who had painted their doorposts with the blood of a lamb. They remembered how that same angel of death struck down the firstborn son of every household in Egypt as God carried out his judgment on stubborn Pharaoh who refused to let God’s people go.

Jesus and his disciples had celebrated Passover every spring since they were kids, but that night was different. In the middle of the celebration, without fanfare or fuss, Jesus did something new. He instituted an entirely new feast based on what he would do for humanity. Chances are pretty good, though, that the disciples didn’t pay attention. They had been too busy arguing over who was the greatest and ignoring the lowly task of washing feet before the meal to realize what was going on.

Yet without fanfare or fuss, Jesus took the plainest bread possible—the unleavened Passover bread, gave thanks, and broke it to give to his disciples to eat. As he did so, Jesus declared, **“This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.”** He didn’t explain it. The words were plain and clear. **“This is my body.”** Just as simply, he took a cup of wine used in the Passover celebration and declared, **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”** Again Jesus gave no further explanation of what he meant. The words were plain and clear. **“This is my blood.”**

The very next day Jesus’ body would be given up for all people on the cross. Jesus’ blood would be poured out as a sacrifice for the sins of the entire world. By doing so, Jesus would establish a new covenant, a new agreement, a new union between us and God. Jesus’ death would bring deliverance from sin for every man, woman, and child. The disciples were never to forget that as they received Christ’s body with the bread and his blood with the wine.

What a feast! Yet the Holy Supper still seems so simple and insignificant that we’re tempted to forget how great a feast this Sacrament really is. We’re tempted to treat it like an empty ceremony whose meaning we forgot long ago. We’re tempted to partake of the Supper as something we have to do since that’s what we do at church. We’re tempted to be ashamed of celebrating Christ’s Supper because when we partake of it we proclaim something that is either pleasing or disgusting to Christians and non-Christians. When we celebrate the Supper, we proclaim that we hold to all of God’s Word and that only the true teaching of God’s Word can bring true communion between believers.

We fail to see this meal as a feast, yet here the Lamb for sinners slain comes to us, the Lamb whose blood was poured out for the sins of the world. Here in this heavenly feast is the solution to the sins the disciples were committing that night and the sins you committed this morning. Here Jesus gives himself **“for the forgiveness**

¹ Some of the thoughts and language of this sermon were received with thanks from a 2007 Lenten sermon by Prof. Em. Daniel Deutschlander.

of sins.” Here Jesus becomes the **“medicine of immortality”** as an early church father (Ignatius of Antioch) once said centuries ago.

Here we find the Lamb who gave himself as he looked ahead to suffering and death. **“This is my body, which is for you...”** **“For you”**? Yes, you! That night there was so much on Jesus’ mind—the suffering, the crown of thorns, the nails, the cross, yet Jesus thought about you! He gave himself for you!

Here in this Holy Supper what we receive causes us to **“proclaim Christ’s death until he comes.”** **“This is my body, which is for you...This cup is the new covenant in my blood...”** We don’t eat a symbol in this feast with mere bread and wine. No, we receive the real, living Son of God, the same Jesus who spoke that night and poured out the fullness of his self-sacrificing love. Here in his feast we partake of our Savior’s love in all that fullness.

Here in this heavenly feast we receive Jesus who was still thinking about you the next day when he cried out from the cross, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** (Matthew 27:46) Why? God turned his back on his Son to save you, to forgive you, to rescue you from the torments of hell. All around him the people cried out, **“If you are the Son of God, come down.”** (Matthew 27:40) But he didn’t. So why didn’t he?

Remember what Jesus promised the night before! He promised that he would pay for the sin that separates you from God. He promised that he would endure the torment of hell as your substitute. With you in mind, Jesus declared on the night he was betrayed, **“This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me...This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”**

In his heavenly feast, Jesus gives us something we can’t find anywhere else. He gives us himself—the living bread from heaven, the cup of salvation, the very price he paid to save you—his true body and blood. Martin Luther described it this way back in 1523, **“This Sacrament is the gospel.”** (Luther’s Works 26:289) Dr. Luther wasn’t diminishing the importance of God’s Word or Holy Baptism, but instead he was emphasizing the unique nature of this heavenly feast. It’s not just bread and wine for us to eat and drink, nor is it some magically transformed flesh and blood. No, the Holy Supper is Christ’s body and blood in, with, and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of your sins and mine.

Now you’d expect that such a heavenly feast would take your breath away. Did it the last time you came “face to face” with your Savior at his table? As you received “things unseen” together with the wafer of bread and the swallow of wine, were you amazed at the Real Presence, that unexplainable miracle of God’s grace and power? As you stepped away from the Lord’s Table, did you joyfully bask in sins forgiven, guilt cleansed, faith strengthened, eternal life assured, or just the simple words **“for you”**? Even if you did none of those things, would you want to partake of Christ’s heavenly feast, that **“medicine of immortality”** again? Of course! **“This Sacrament is the gospel.”**

The gospel is not just proclaimed from this ambo or poured out at the font, but given for you to eat and drink regularly and often. Where the gospel is faithfully proclaimed and administered, the blessings of God’s grace always follow. Through that eating and drinking of Christ’s body and blood, we receive a feast of blessings. We receive **the forgiveness of sins**. You see, we sin daily. Each of us desperately needs the assurance of God’s forgiveness. In the Supper, you receive Christ’s body pierced for your transgressions and Christ’s blood poured out for your sins together with bread and wine. You receive the heavenly morsels of Christ’s full and free forgiveness. For that reason, when you partake of Christ’s Supper in repentance, no matter how awful your past sins might be, no matter how heavy your load of guilt might be, you can be assured that Jesus has forgiven every one of your sins.

You also receive the blessing of **life**, the strengthening of your faith. Luther described it as **“the food of the soul.”** Your soul grows weary with sin, but Jesus gives you strength for the journey from this life to heaven.

We partake of the blessing of **communion**, where we have opportunity to enjoy our unity with Christ and our fellow believers. Isn’t it amazing that Jesus actually gives you himself in this feast? Doesn’t that make your jaw drop? It makes you wonder why we don’t celebrate even more when we partake of this Holy Supper. Christ with all his power, all his grace, all his blessing sits down and gives himself to you. And we’re not alone in enjoying this Holy Communion! Rather we’re joined at the Lord’s Table with those who are one with us in Christ, who are united with us through a common unity established on God’s Word. Finally, we receive the blessing of **eternal salvation**, the ultimate result of Christ’s forgiveness. When we partake of this Holy Supper, we lift our eyes to the marriage feast of the Lamb of God that we will enjoy one day in heaven and that loved ones in the Lord now enjoy with him.

So many blessings. So much glory and power in this feast given to us and for us from Christ himself. So what will we do? We come to the feast! We come with hearts hungering because of sin and guilt and shame and thirsting for salvation. We come with souls starving for food that will strengthen us for the ongoing battle with Satan, the world, and your sinful flesh. We come and partake of the grace of God given and poured out for us for the forgiveness of sins. Then we go. We go from the Lord's Table filled with joy and awe at his gospel given to us and given for us. We go, proclaiming Christ's death until he comes. We go forgiven, strengthened, alive, and at peace. Amen.