

**THE LORD'S SUPPER IS A MEMORIAL OF THE WONDERFUL WORKS OF GOD****Sermon for Maundy Thursday, 2020****Psalm 111:4-5**

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for this Maundy Thursday service is taken from Psalm 111:4-5: **He has caused His miraculous acts to be remembered. The LORD is gracious and compassionate.**

<sup>5</sup> **He has given food to those who fear Him. He will remember His Covenant for ever.**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

There are three great treasures that we should learn to appreciate ever more highly as we progress in our Christian life, and they are: The Word of God, Holy Baptism, and the Lord's Supper. These three are the means of grace in which God gives and restores spiritual life and health to us, in which He declares our status as citizens in His kingdom - children in His family.

*Maundy Thursday* is a wonderful opportunity to focus our attention on the third of these great treasures, namely, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Through this Supper, we are immeasurably rich because the body and blood of Christ our Lord are given to us together with the bread and wine. Now, our hearts may tremble as we think on these words; can we really believe them? Our emotions may resemble those of the women at the tomb of the risen Lord: we are filled with fear and great joy, but we dare not doubt the Lord's Word. When He says, "*Take and eat, this is My body; Take and drink, this is My blood,*" He means what He says. The Lord gives us His true body and blood, in which a precious jewel lies enshrined. What is that jewel? Christ says, "*For the forgiveness of sins.*" In these words, He has named what can make us truly happy and blessed, for, as we all learnt from Luther's Catechism, "*where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.*"

Let us now, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, see the Lord's Supper as a memorial of the works of God working through His wonderful divine power, His wonderful divine love, and His wonderful divine grace and compassion.

Psalm 111 is about God's works and God's Word. The words from our text, "**He has caused His wonders to be remembered. The LORD is gracious and compassionate,**" were sung by the people of Israel at the annual celebration of the Passover. We remember how this festival had been instituted by God as a memorial of the wonderful deliverance of His people out of Egypt.

At the same time, the Passover contains a type by which the Holy Spirit points to Christ's greater, more glorious, and more wonderful works of the New Testament, namely, to the wonders of the Lord's Supper which will remain until the end of time. Luther suggested that the words, "**The LORD is gracious and compassionate**" should be painted in golden letters around a portrait of the Lord's Supper<sup>1</sup>, for in this Supper Christians continue to remember both the words and works of the Lord. He also made the following comment on this Psalm, "*(The writer) now comes to speak of the Sacrament instituted for us Christians in the New Testament, the Sacrament of which this Psalm treats in particular. For the memorial of the Passover of the Jews has no longer any authority having been abolished by Christ. And note how he describes this Sacrament when he says: 'He has caused His wonders to be remembered.' Even so, Christ calls it His memorial saying, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.'*"

Note in particular that if the people living in the Old Testament times were reminded of the visible and temporal wonders manifested at the institution of the Passover, how much more are we to remember *the spiritual and eternal wonders connected with the institution of the Lord's Supper!* The children of Israel had only signs and types of the Lamb of God who was to bear the sins of the world; we, however, have and partake of the very Lamb of God and in Him all the fullness of grace. We have far more reason to praise with psalms and hymns the memorial of all the wonderful works as manifested in the Lord's Supper. Joyfully, we lift up our hearts to God and consider that the Lord's Supper *is* a memorial of the wonderful works of God.

<sup>1</sup> Luther's Works, AE 13:375

In Exodus chapter twelve, we read of the institution of the Passover. When instituting the Passover, the LORD wanted to prove that He, the almighty and everlasting God, could indeed very well break the stubbornness of Pharaoh and deliver His people. The LORD would pass through the land at midnight and slay the firstborn among the Egyptians. In the meantime, the children of Israel were to be gathered in their houses to partake of the slaughtered lamb, and to strike their doorposts with its blood, so that the LORD would pass over them and spare them. That feast of the Passover with its wonderful fare was to be a constant memorial of the almighty help which the LORD had extended to His people.

The Lord's Supper is a far greater wonder of divine power. In this Sacrament, we also receive something to be taken with the mouth. Our text says: "**He has given food to those who fear Him.**" This is no ordinary food, no symbolical, earthly lamb, but the highest and most wonderful food: the Passover Lamb itself, our Lord Jesus Christ. Earthly elements, bread and wine, are certainly present, but in, with, and under this bread and wine we are to eat and drink the true body of Christ and His true blood, that body of the incarnate Son of God given for us into death on the cross, and that holy, precious blood which has been shed for us. We see and taste only bread and wine, but by virtue of the sacramental union, the consecrated bread is the communion of the body of Christ and the consecrated cup, the communion of the blood of Christ.<sup>2</sup> The whole Christ, in a mysterious way, becomes with His body and blood, food and drink to our soul. In this manner, He wants to live in us, and we are to live in Him. We are to be united with Him here in time until the day we enter into His blessed presence and remain with Him eternally.

But really, *who can understand this?* It is a divine miracle! Indeed, this work of divine power is beyond our comprehension. It is certainly a great miracle that Christ became man. However, it is a still greater wonder that He continuously gives us Himself as food and drink. He who bears in mind what is given to him in this Sacrament must surely marvel at such a work of divine power, bow down in humility before the majesty of the Son of God, and in holy awe receive this wonderful food.

Unfortunately, though, our natural heart is so corrupt that we do not sufficiently regard the wonders of God, which we see so frequently. Every single day, all around us, are miracles of divine power in nature, but who still marvels at them? We regard it all as something natural because we see it so often. Thus human hearts are inclined to regard the Lord's Supper in a similar manner. There are many who do not recognise and consider the wonder of grace; they are barely stirred by the fact that in the Lord's Supper, the great and glorious God enters their hearts with His body and blood. Instead, they become cold and indifferent towards this holy mystery and make no distinction between this food and any other. May God grant that we do not become so indifferent, but rather that, as often as we partake of the Lord's Supper, we may behold in it a memorial of the wonderful works of God.

Secondly, the Lord's Supper is a memorial of wonderful, divine love.

By the institution of the Passover, God showed His love to His people. Israel was thereby to remember its deliverance out of Egypt. The celebration of the Passover was to be a constant reminder that God, with a mighty hand and outstretched arm, had delivered them from slavery, from temporal death, and from the power of Pharaoh. At each recurring Passover they were to remember His wonderful love and never to forget what great things He had done for them, and furthermore, they were to realise that with the coming of the promised Messiah He would do still greater things unto them.

Now, in the time of the New Testament, the great memorial of divine love has been established. God has kept His promise; the Messiah has come; His work has now been completed; everything has been done that was necessary to save sinners. We can joyously say: "**He has caused His wonders,**" His wonderful love, "**to be remembered.**"

The wonderful work of redemption speaks of Christ's love, and the Lord's Supper is a constant remembrance of the fact that Jesus has saved us with His body which was broken for us and His blood which was shed for us. The Passover was a proof of divine love. The Lord's Supper is a still greater proof of the far more fervent love of Christ whereby He has delivered us from all the enemies of our soul. We were condemned in sin, lost in death, and held by the devil. From these, we have been made free by the blood and death of our Lord. He has brought us from sin to righteousness, from death to life, from the devil to God. These are far greater wonders than those experienced by Israel in Pharaoh's days. We regard it, indeed, as a wonder of divine love that God spared not His own Son but

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<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 10:16

delivered Him up for us all<sup>3</sup> as the Lamb of God, that He might take away our sins and deliver us from the power of the devil. As often as we partake of the Sacrament, we have a memorial of our complete redemption in Jesus Christ.

Though the Lord's Supper is not a mere feast of remembrance as Reformed Churches teach, it is, nevertheless, instituted as a memorial. It speaks of the love which Christ manifested to us in the work of redemption. We thereby remember His bitter suffering, death and the shedding of His blood. It is to us a pledge and seal that we are by Christ's death, delivered from sin, death, and the power of the devil. Whenever we partake of the Lord's Supper, we should remember that Christ died for us because of His great love and that by virtue of this love He comes to us in the Sacrament. The Apostle Paul writes, "*For, whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are proclaiming the Lord's death, until He comes,*" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

Great indeed, is the marvel that Christ shows us His divine power and love in His Supper. But the greatest miracle is this: that the Sacrament is also a memorial of divine grace and compassion. This now leads us to our third point.

**"He has caused His wonders to be remembered; the LORD is gracious and compassionate."** Listen again to these beautiful words: "...**the LORD is gracious and compassionate.**" Of what benefit to us would be the streams of Christ's love if they did not have their source in the hills of His eternal grace and compassion and did not come down upon us in grace and mercy! The weary and heavy-laden<sup>4</sup> are encouraged by the grace and compassion of God to partake with joy of the Lord's Supper. What wonderful words these are: **gracious and compassionate!** They tell us: Christ does not come to reckon with us and judge us in the Sacrament, but rather to offer us His grace. He does not ask anything of us but bestows His heavenly gifts upon us. He comes as a doctor to the sick. He brings salvation, the fruit of His suffering and death, the most precious heavenly gifts, namely, the forgiveness of sins and eternal redemption. He has compassion on us in our misery, sin, and distress.

As often as we come to the Lord's Table, we are to remember that He forgives us our sins, that He has patience with our weakness, that He is long-suffering, and that He will not cast us away from His presence. He certainly assures us that His Supper is a memorial of His grace and compassion. It is, indeed, a wonderful work that the Holy One comes to us sinners, the Highest to us who are dust and ashes, the ever Blessed One to us miserable creatures. This is grace indeed, which the human mind cannot comprehend.

Dear friends, we belong to the highly favoured guests at the Lord's Table. Sometimes though, we hesitate or are afraid to follow the Lord's invitation, because our conscience accuses us and says that we are not worthy, or Satan himself tries to make our sins appear greater than God's grace. If any of you think like this, then remember these words: **the LORD is gracious and compassionate. Trust Him and His Word.**

Again, at times the thought may come to us that surely God must grow tired of forgiving our sins again and again. If this is the case, then let us remember the closing words of our text: "**He will remember His covenant for ever.**" This is the covenant of grace which God has made in Christ with us sinners, which He has proclaimed in the Gospel, and sealed by the Sacrament. It is an everlasting covenant. God remains faithful even though we break the covenant. He will always receive us again when we come in repentance and faith and will strengthen us by means of His holy Sacrament.

Let us then rejoice that Christ has given us in the Lord's Supper a wonderful memorial of His power, love, and grace. Let us praise the Lord for His goodness! And remember, whenever we poor, miserable sinners are guests at His Table, we do receive His holy body and blood in remembrance of His death and for our salvation. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

#### PRAYER FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY

Almighty God, heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for Your goodness and loving kindness in sending to this needy world Jesus Christ, the bread from heaven. We praise You that you have enabled us to know You through Him.

Open our eyes that we may see ourselves as we really are in the mirror of Your holy Word, and grant us a sincere repentance. Nothing is hidden from You. You know our secret sins. Therefore we cast ourselves down before You, trust in Your mercy, and cling only to this, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin. Forgive us our

<sup>3</sup> Romans 8:32

<sup>4</sup> Matthew 11:28

many transgressions. Grant that by faith we may grasp what Christ has done for us, and rejoice in the perfect peace of His pardon. Do not take Your Holy Spirit from us, but continue to make us glad that You have saved us. Satisfy our souls with the bread of life, and grant that through faith in Him we may never hunger again. Do not cast us from Your presence because of our faithlessness, but through Christ keep us for Your eternal kingdom. Help us to overcome pride and self-will, which disregard Jesus' example of humble service. Give us a ready mind and a pure heart to follow in His steps.

Bless Your Church, O Father. May all Your people be nourished by the true manna, which has come down from heaven, and given them the vision and strength to do Your will. Help Your Church to appreciate and use Your Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, through which Your Spirit brings salvation to all people.

May Your blessing rest on all who feel the burden of a guilty conscience, the pain of sickness, the ache of sorrow, the sadness of separation, and the sting of death. Give to all who seek Your gracious help the assurance of Your love and comforting presence, and, at the end, entrance into Your eternal glory.

Dear Father in heaven, as the ongoing restrictions keep us from meeting together to receive the body and blood of Your Son, nevertheless, may we continue to proclaim our Lord's passion and death in the communion between bread and Jesus' body and wine and Jesus' blood at His Table, and be united with Him and with each other in faith and fellowship. For there we are one body in Him. Assure us again that these restrictions are only temporary, remind us of Your presence and Your mercy, and let us fix our eyes on the future when we shall once again come together to partake in this glorious meal.

Increase our joy and hope of heaven. Let Your Word and the Lord's Supper continually strengthen us during our pilgrimage on earth, until we finally share in the marriage supper of the Lamb for ever. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, whose saving death is our peace and hope until He comes. Amen.

#### MAUNDY THURSDAY

Exodus 24:3-11

<sup>3</sup> When Moses came and recounted to all the people all the Words of the LORD and all the Ordinances, all the people answered with one voice: "We shall do all the things that the LORD has spoken."

<sup>4</sup> Then Moses wrote down all the Words of the LORD. He got up early in the morning, built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>5</sup> Then he sent the young Israelite men, and they offered whole burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. <sup>6</sup> Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls and poured the other half out on the altar. <sup>7</sup> Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it aloud for the people to hear. They said, "We shall do all that the LORD has spoken, that we may be obedient."

<sup>8</sup> Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "Look! The blood of the Covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these Words."

<sup>9</sup> Then Moses went up, together with Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel, <sup>10</sup> and they saw the God of Israel. Under His feet there was something like a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. <sup>11</sup> However, God did not stretch out His hand against the eminent men of Israel. They saw God and ate and drank.

Hebrews 9:11-22

<sup>11</sup> However, Christ has come as a High Priest of the good things that have been done, through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle, which has not been made by human hands, that is, not a part of this creation. <sup>12</sup> Moreover, not through the blood of goats and calves but through His own blood He entered once for all into the Most Holy Place, when He obtained eternal redemption. <sup>13</sup> For, if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer that are sprinkled on people who have been defiled make them holy, so that their bodies are clean, <sup>14</sup> how much more will the blood of Christ, who, through the eternal Spirit, has offered Himself without blemish to God, make our consciences clean from dead works, that we may serve the living God? <sup>15</sup> This is also why He is the Mediator of the new Covenant, that, after death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions under the first Covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance. <sup>16</sup> For, where there is a testament, it is necessary that the death of the one who has made the testament must be established. <sup>17</sup> For a testament is in force after people have died, since it is never valid while the one who has made the testament is still alive. <sup>18</sup> That is why even the first Covenant has not been inaugurated without blood. <sup>19</sup> For, after Moses had told all the people every Commandment in accordance with the Law, he took the blood of calves

and goats, together with water, scarlet wool and hyssop and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people.<sup>20</sup> He said, "This is the blood of the Covenant, which God has commanded for you."<sup>21</sup> Then in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the Tabernacle and all the objects used in worship.<sup>22</sup> According to the Law almost everything is made clean by blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

#### Matthew 26:17-30

<sup>17</sup> On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?"

<sup>18</sup> He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says, "My appointed time is near. I shall celebrate the Passover at your house with My disciples"'!"

<sup>19</sup> The disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.<sup>20</sup> When evening had come, He was reclining at the table with the Twelve.

<sup>21</sup> While they were eating, He said, "Truly, I tell you that one of you will betray Me."

<sup>22</sup> They were very sad, and each one of them began to ask Him, "I am not the one, am I, Lord?"

<sup>23</sup> Jesus answered, "He who has dipped his hand in the bowl with Me is the one who will betray Me."<sup>24</sup> The Son of Man is going as the Scriptures have said about Him, but how terrible for that man through whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would be better for that man if he had not been born."

<sup>25</sup> Then Judas, who was betraying Him, asked, "I am not the one, am I, Rabbi?"

Jesus told him, "You have said that."

<sup>26</sup> While they were eating, Jesus took bread and gave thanks. He broke it, gave it to the disciples and said, "Take, eat! This is My body."

<sup>27</sup> He took a cup, gave thanks and gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you!"<sup>28</sup> For this is My blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.<sup>29</sup> For I tell you, I shall certainly not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it with you anew in My Father's kingdom."

<sup>30</sup> After they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.