

LOOK BACK, LOOK IN, LOOK AROUND, LOOK FORWARD
Sermon for Maundy Thursday, 2021
Mark 14:22-25

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 our sermon tonight is part of the Gospel from before, Mark 14:22-25: ²² **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them and said, “Take it! This is My body.”**

²³ **Then He took a cup, gave thanks and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.** ²⁴ **He told them, “This is My blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many.** ²⁵ **Truly, I tell you, I shall certainly not drink of the fruit of the vine any longer until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”**

²⁶ **After they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.**

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Maundy Thursday is a special night of Holy Week in which we transport ourselves back to the upper room, to the original scene of the Last Supper. That was a night Jesus had eagerly looked forward to as He was going to have the opportunity to celebrate the Passover with His disciples.¹

For a period of seven days, from the day before the Passover week, the Jews would only eat *unleavened bread* to remind them of what the people of Israel had eaten on their journey through the wilderness. This seven-day period was called the Feast of Unleavened Bread.² The Passover itself commemorated the eating of the lamb in Egypt whose blood had been painted on the doorposts so that the LORD would pass over the houses of God’s people.³ This was the most sacred season of the year for the Old Testament Church. It pointed forward to the coming of the Messiah, who would save them from the bondage of sin. Surely as the disciples ate this meal and recalled the history of Israel, they felt a connection to their past. They felt a connection to the LORD God, as they were His people. They felt a connection to one another, as this family history belonged to each one of them. It certainly was a special night - the most special night of the year.

But just when the disciples thought it couldn’t get any better or more significant, Jesus went on to make the occasion more special. **“While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them and said, “Take it! This is My body.”**

²³ **Then He took a cup, gave thanks and gave it to them, and they all drank from it.** ²⁴ **He told them, “This is My blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many.”**

Jesus’ words made it very clear that this New Testament Supper with His disciples was something very special indeed. Taking the bread and the wine of the Passover, Jesus now instituted the New Testament sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Now, instead of the lamb in the Passover, Christ in this Sacrament, would give His body - crucified the next day - and His blood, which would be poured out as a sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, not only for those disciples present at that time but for believers of all time. Already three years before, John the Baptist had pointed to Christ, saying, *“Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”* (John 1:29). The Apostle Paul also says, *“For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes”* (1 Cor. 11:26).

Some two thousand years on from that first institution of His Supper, Jesus invites us to partake of this wonderful Supper. As we do, let us look back, look in, look around, and look forward.

Through the Lord’s Supper, first of all, Jesus invites us to look back.

Whenever we partake of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus wants us to eat and drink *in remembrance of Him*.

Each time we receive the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim that Christ has given His body and has shed His blood to redeem all mankind. We believe, teach, and confess in the real presence. We remember His death, that pivotal, crucial event upon

¹ Luke 22:15

² Exodus 12:15

³ Exodus 12:1-14

which the salvation of every man, woman, and child depends.

Jesus also wants us to look in as *we examine ourselves*.

With the stethoscope of God's Law on our hearts, we are to examine ourselves to see, as Luther so clearly says in his *Small Catechism*, whether we are sorry for our sins, whether we believe in our Saviour Jesus Christ and in His words in the Sacrament, and whether we plan, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to change our sinful lives.⁴ We need this self-examination because we are all guilty of sinning against God and are deserving of His punishment.

We must examine ourselves because, as Paul writes, "*whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord*" (1 Cor. 11:27). A person who eats and drinks unworthily is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. In other words, he isn't guilty merely of misusing bread and wine.

It is useful for us here to say that like Baptism, the Lord's Supper has something that we see and something that we don't see. In Baptism, what we don't see is the forgiveness of sins, being incorporated into Christ's body, receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit, being born again, the bestowal of faith, and the gifts of life and salvation. But in the Lord's Supper, there are two things that we don't see: the one is Christ's body and blood. The other is the benefit people receive through it, the forgiveness of sins, life-giving power, and salvation. The believer receives both. The unbeliever receives Christ's body and blood, but not the benefits of it; rather, he eats and drinks to his judgment.

As we come to the Lord's table, Jesus also wants us to look around and *appreciate the blessing of unity we have with those who stand (or kneel) at our side receiving His body and His blood*. This, too, is important, for the Lord's Supper has always been seen as a sign of unity between those who commune together at the Lord's Table.

For Christians in the time of the apostles, the Lord's Supper was the highest form of unity, of fellowship. This was foremost in Paul's mind when he said the words of our Second Reading before "¹⁶ *Is not the cup of blessing that we bless the communion of the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break the communion of the body of Christ?* ¹⁷ *Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body. For we all partake of the one bread*" (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

"The body of Christ" meant the actual physical, historical body of Jesus, born of the Virgin Mary, that suffered and died on the cross. That is clear because the word 'blood' is used with it. When Paul uses the expression 'one body,' he means the one holy Christian Church, the whole number of believers in Jesus of all times and places.

Attempts have been made to express this corporate aspect of the Lord's Supper and haven't quite said it. The *Didache*, an early Christian manual from the first or second century AD, said that as the individual grains of wheat on the mountains were made one loaf, and the individual berries made one wine, so the believers were made one. What Paul actually says is that, though there are many people who partake, they are one body in Christ because they all partake of the same bread and the same wine. What he really means is that the one historical body of Christ, born of the Virgin Mary, in *communion* with the bread, and the one blood of the Saviour, in *communion* with the wine, makes us *one* in the mystical body of Christ, the church.

For some time after Christ's resurrection, Christians continued to pray with the Jews in their synagogues and the temple, even though their leaders did not believe Jesus was the Christ and had been raised from the dead.⁵ However, the Lord's Supper was celebrated not in the temple but only in the homes of Christians that served as their churches. The Apostle Luke says, "*And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts*" (Acts 2:46). Unbelieving Jews were excluded from the Sacrament. The writer of the Hebrews says, "*We have an altar from which those who serve the tent have no right to eat,*" (Hebrews 13:10).

Unity requires oneness in the Gospel and confession of the truth of the Gospel in its totality. Sadly, it wasn't long before Christians were soon divided into competing sects with differing doctrines. Some Christians were united in their adherence to the apostles' teaching that preserved the word of Jesus. James, Peter, and John received Barnabas and Paul into their fellowship because they held the same teachings. This mutual recognition was necessary for joint preaching and missionary activity.⁶ While churches like the Nicolaitans who did not hold to apostolic teachings were not in fellowship with apostolic churches⁷, churches that acknowledged the apostles' teaching⁸ formed one fellowship throughout the civilised world and welcomed each other's members to the Lord's Supper.

⁴ The Small Catechism with Explanation. Question 303.

⁵ Matthew 28:11-15; Acts 4:1 ff.

⁶ Galatians 2:9

⁷ Revelation 2:6, 15; 1 John 2:19

⁸ Acts 2:42

Thus for those first Christians, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was that through which they were united with Christ *and with each other*. Receiving the Lord's Supper was more than an individual expression of belief. There was a special oneness there with each other as members of one body.

The Lord's Supper has always been a public, in fact, the most public confession of unity in the church. The sainted German theologian Werner Elert says it succinctly: "*By partaking of the Sacrament in a church, Christians declare that the confession of that church is their confession*". Communing together is a confession of unity in faith.

Finally, above all else, above looking back, above looking in, above looking around, as we come to this table and as we leave this table, our Saviour invites us to look forward. We are to look forward until that day when He "**drink(s) it anew in the kingdom of God.**"

Jesus, as testified by His own words and promise, is miraculously present in this meal. When we receive His Supper, He is there, attaching Himself in, with, and under the earthly elements through His Word. As we receive His body and His blood, He's offering to us the forgiveness of sins that only comes through the Gospel.

Dear friends, whenever you receive the Lord's Supper, enjoy it as you hear the words spoken so many years ago, spoken again to you personally by your Saviour, "*Take and eat, this is My body, given for you. Take and drink, this is My blood, shed for you.*" Savour this meal every time you come to the Lord's Supper. But do so knowing that our Saviour's goal is not simply to dine with us as He did with His disciples at the Last Supper. No, He has given His body and blood so that we could have reservations with Him at a lasting supper - a lasting supper where He eats and drinks with us "**anew in the kingdom of God.**"

What that heavenly banquet exactly looks like, feels like, or tastes like, I don't know. But it will be new. New in quality. New like something we've never experienced before. No longer shall we have to look in and examine ourselves for sin because we'll be confirmed in holiness, wearing white robes of righteousness that were tailored by the blood of Jesus. No longer shall we have to look around and be saddened that we can't share this feast with everybody because, in heaven, there will be perfect unity. No longer will Jesus be with us only in, with, and under the wine; He will be with us visibly, as we see our Saviour face-to-face. No longer shall we need to look ahead because what is now in the future tense will then be a present reality, a reality that is breath-taking, filled with overwhelming joy that will never end. It will be a lasting supper. 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 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.

As now we proclaim our Lord's passion and death in the communion between bread and Jesus' body and wine and Jesus' blood at His Table, unite us with Him and with each other in faith and fellowship. For there we are one body in Him. Assure us again of Your presence and Your mercy. 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

³ 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.”

⁴ 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 also set up twelve pillars for the twelve tribes of Israel. ⁵ Then he sent the young Israelite men, and they offered whole burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls and poured the other half out on the altar. ⁷ 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.”

⁸ 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.”

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

1 Corinthians 10:16-17

¹⁶ Is not the cup of blessing that we bless the communion of the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break the communion of the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body. For we all partake of the one bread.

Mark 14:12-26

¹² On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when people used to kill the Passover lamb, the disciples asked Jesus, “Where do You want us to go and prepare for You to eat the Passover?”

¹³ He sent two of His disciples and told them: “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him! ¹⁴ Where he goes inside, tell the owner: ‘The Teacher asks, “Where is My guest-room, in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?’” ¹⁵ Then he will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Prepare for us there!”

¹⁶ The disciples left, went into the city, found things just as Jesus had told them and prepared the Passover. ¹⁷ When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve.

¹⁸ While they were reclining at the table and eating, Jesus said, “Truly, I tell you, one of you, one who is eating with Me, will betray Me!”

¹⁹ They began to be sad and to ask Him one after another,

“I am not the one, am I?”

²⁰ He told them, “It is one of the Twelve, the one who is dipping into the bowl with Me. ²¹ For the Son of Man is going away as Scripture has said about Him, but how terrible for that man by whom the Son of Man is being be-trayed! It would have been better for that man if he had never been born.”

²² While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it, gave it to them and said, “Take it! This is My body.”

²³ Then He took a cup, gave thanks and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. ²⁴ He told them, “This is My blood of the Covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵ Truly, I tell you, I shall certainly not drink of the fruit of the vine any longer until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”

²⁶ After they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.