

Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 13, 2006
Maundy Thursday
Matthew 26:26-28; Luke 22:19,20
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 116
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 10:16,17
Gospel: Mark 14:12-26

He Spoke A Word of Invitation

Have you ever gone out to dinner with another couple or another group and you enjoy yourself immensely and then at the end of the meal you play the “reach for your wallet dance” as you take turns reaching for your wallet saying, “No. We will get it.” Then they will say, “No, we will get it.” You go back and forth until finally somehow the meal gets paid and you leave without washing dishes. Sometimes you think you are getting a free meal and you find out there is no such thing as a free meal.

This evening we come together on the night that our Savior instituted the greatest meal that any of us will ever taste—the Lord’s Supper. But this evening, there is no need to reach for our wallet because our Lord and Savior has paid for every last part of this meal. Our Savior knew that when you and I would come to this meal, when we would listen to his invitation and come, we would come as spiritual beggars—that we could not bring anything in our hands to pay for this meal, to earn this meal or to deserve this meal. Yet, he invited us, because he knew that when he spoke this word of invitation, this was a meal that would be paid for by our Savior. That is why he spoke this word of invitation so that we who are sinners could be united with our Savior.

This meal unites sinners to their Savior. That is an amazing thing when you stop and think about it. We rejoice in the fact that once upon a time, as you probably well know from reading the gospels, this was an accusation—a charge that was brought against Jesus. This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. It was brought time and time again by Pharisees and some of the other leaders of the Jews against Jesus, trying to scare people off and discredit Jesus so that people wouldn’t follow him and probably also as a kind of rebuke to let Jesus know that he was out of line and better step back in line. Those kind of people we don’t associate with. This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. You wouldn’t expect much less though, would you, from the man who said to Zacchaeus—that little guy that had climbed up the tree—when he was there at his house he said, “*the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*” (Luke 19:10). He is also the man who said, “*It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.*” (Mark 2:17). And that he did—outcast lepers, prostitutes, blind beggars along the roadside, tax collectors—Jesus called them all. He had time for them all. He had love for them all. Love that moved our Savior to invest 33 years while he was on this earth, living perfectly in our place, in self-sacrificial love that caused him to leave heaven and come do all of that for us. This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.

To the very end of his life, this was an appropriate model for our Savior, wasn't it? When they got together in that upper room, as we will soon hear from the Gospel of Mark, he was still eating with sinners, wasn't he? You might think to yourself, "Wait a minute. I thought it was only the apostles, the cream of the crop, the people that had spent the most time with Jesus." Yes, sure it was. It was the cream of the crop. It was people like Matthew, who is also known as a Levi. The tax collector, whom they first started saying about Jesus, "This man welcomes sinners, tax collectors, and eats with them." If you looked around the table, you would also see James and John. Do you remember the nickname Jesus gave them because they were so self-righteous and in their self-righteous zeal they wanted to call down fire from heaven from God on those who had rejected Jesus? He called them "*Sons of Thunder*" (Mark 3:17). It was a way of pointing out their self-righteousness.

Then across the table you have Peter, right? And you kind of wonder how he got any food in his mouth because he seemed to have his foot in it so often. When in the world could he possibly have ever eaten with Jesus? Remember Peter was the guy who had the distinction of having Jesus look him in the eye and say, "*Get behind me, Satan!*" (Matthew 16:23). The guy Jesus called Satan was there at this meal when Jesus instituted it. This man welcomes sinners and eats with them. That is the only reason any of the apostles were in that room. They were sinners and they knew their Savior.

It's not really any different this evening, is it? We might come from all walks of life. We might be children with our parents or husbands with a wife. We might be here alone. We might be white collar workers or blue collar workers. We might be all kinds of things from all different walks of life, but the one thing that unites every last one of us is that we are sinners. As we come to this table when we hear Jesus' invitation to take and eat and take and drink, we come again probably carrying some of the same sins that we carried to his table the last time we went. Maybe we are still dealing or struggling with a hot temper. Maybe we are arguing with a spouse or bickering with a brother or sister. Maybe we are not getting what God has told us to get done, done. Maybe we are neglecting to show love to those he put in our lives that we can show love to. Maybe we find ourselves bringing the same sin of just savoring that tasty, juicy piece of gossip that we couldn't wait to get done hearing it so we could share it with someone else. Maybe we bring once again to his altar the words that we spoke to hurt someone just because we wanted our way.

Think of how we bring the same sins to this meal so often and we keep going back and keep committing those sins—do you think just sometimes that maybe Jesus is going to tire of inviting us? Maybe you think that he is going to say that's it or that's enough. Well, his words of invitation provide us the answer. He said, "*Take and eat; this is my body. Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*" (Matthew 26:26-28). Jesus still speaks that word of invitation to penitent sinners like you and me. He still encourages us to properly prepare ourselves and recognize our sins—our new sins, our old sins, our hidden sins, our forgotten sins—but he urges us to cast them all on him and come and eat and drink and be united with him, not only here and now in this intimate way in the Lord's Supper, but be united with him for all of eternity in the heavenly banquet. Because he is the one that has invited us to eat with him.

Good friends invite you to a meal at the best restaurant in town—your favorite restaurant—and they tell you they are going to pay. Are you going to have to think twice? I don't think I would have to. I don't think I've missed all that many meals. Certainly not many free meals. But when you stop and think about it this evening, we are invited to a free meal. The most precious meal of all time. A better meal than anything we could ever eat any place in the world. Don't ignore the invitation. Don't take it lightly. It is free to you and me. It was paid for entirely by our Savior, but don't equate free with cheap. If you listen to those words of his invitation, Jesus says, "This is my body. This is my blood given for you, poured out for you." As we hear those words, we are reminded as we remember him, as we do this in remembrance of him, that this free meal comes to us at a great cost to our Savior—that he willingly and lovingly poured out his precious blood shortly after he spoke these words so that you and I might come to this banquet.

On the cross, not even a full day later, Jesus hung, Jesus bled, Jesus died so that we could eat the richest affair. There the Passover Lamb was sacrificed. The very body and blood that was there on that cross offered for us, Jesus now offers to us in, with and under the bread and wine. 1 Corinthians 10 and 1 Corinthians 11 spell it out for us so clearly—all four things are present. We will hear a portion of that yet this evening.

But can it be that Jesus would change his mind? Do we know for sure that he still speaks these words of invitation? Maybe he is like us. Maybe he sends out invitations and then he lives to regret them. Do you ever do that—put on a dinner for other people and half way through it, after you are cleaning the house, after you straighten everything up, after you are doing all the shopping, after you are doing all the cooking, do you think to yourself, "What in the world were we thinking? Why did we get ourselves into this? Frozen pizza sounds pretty good right about now."

Well, we don't ever have to worry about Jesus changing his mind like we do. All we have to do is do what we have been doing all through Lent—stand underneath the cross and listen to what he said the very next day. He is on the cross and he says, "*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.*" (Luke 23:34). He prays for you, for me, for the people there, and we see that his greatest desire is still that we be forgiven so that we might be one with him. We hear him say, "*today you will be with me in paradise*" (Luke 23:43) to that thief on the cross. He still is inviting sinners to a meal—the banquet of heaven—as he hangs on the cross. We hear him say, "*It is finished.*" (John 19:30). The blood of the covenant lamb has been poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. Now there is nothing left to do, nothing we can offer. The meal has been paid for completely through his life and his death. Now we can know for certain that *neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord* (Romans 8:38,39). We have God's guarantee that he spoke through Isaiah—"Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD, who has compassion on you. (Isaiah 54:10).

The Lord's Supper has been bought and paid for, so take and eat, take and drink. The invitation still stands. But as you hear the invitation, focus also on those two precious words—for you. As you hear those words and as you come to the Lord's Supper, you have the most intimate contact with your Savior that you will have on this side of heaven. His very body and blood, as we have said. And when you receive that Sacrament, it is as though Jesus had done it all just for you. He comes to you directly. He comes to me directly. And he knows all the things that you have done and that I have done and the things that we have tried to hide. And he still loves us and he still says to us, "I have washed them all away. You are my own. I forgive you."

Again and again and again, as often as we come and eat and drink, "for you," Jesus says to us. That is important because on Maundy Thursday, he also issued to his believers something that I think is impossible for us. He said, "A new command I give to you. *Love each other as I have loved you.*" (John 15:12). Think of all the bickering that goes on in families. Think of all the pettiness at times that goes on within congregations. Think of how often we fall short of living up to this new command to love as Christ loved us. Yet, when we come and we eat and drink at this meal, God strengthens us, God empowers us and God enables us to do better and more completely and more fully what he asks us to do—which is to love one another deeply and from the heart as he has loved us. So as Christians who are serious about carrying out the new command that our Savior has given us—come, eat, drink, and rejoice.