



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

April 5, 2007
Maundy Thursday
Matthew 26:26-30
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 116
Second Lesson: Hebrews 10:15-25
Gospel: Luke 22:7-20

It Is Hidden in the Savior's Feast

Could anything really have been more simple? Jesus is with his disciples. They are in a borrowed room. They have come together to celebrate the Jewish Festival of the Passover—that yearly remembrance of God's deliverance of the children of Israel from the slavery in Egypt. They have come to recall how glorious it was and to celebrate God's incredible love and mercy in passing over the homes of his people that had that blood of the lamb on the doorpost so that the Angel of Death did not kill the firstborn. They also remembered God as a just God as the Angel of Death did not pass over those who rejected him and who did not have the blood of the lamb over their doorposts.

This celebration of the Passover was the highpoint in the Jewish religious calendar. Everybody looked forward to it. It was a celebration, a remembrance of God's incredible love and power. And no doubt the disciples were like everyone else and they were looking forward to this night, this get together with Jesus. But then this Passover was different.

There in the middle of the meal, quietly, without any fanfare or fuss, without any preening or pretense, Jesus did something new, something different. He instituted a whole new feast. But he did it in such a simple way that you have to wonder if the disciples at that point in time understood it all, if they caught the significance of these simple words that Jesus said and this simple act. I would have to say, probably not, because remember these are the guys that were together earlier in the evening arguing about who was going to be the greatest in the kingdom. These are the guys that said to each other, "Not me. You do it. I'm not going to do it. You do it"—when it came to washing the people's feet, which would normally be the job of the servant, but there was no servant there. So no one would do it until Jesus himself got up and wrapped the towel around his waist and washed their feet. These are the guys that had just heard Jesus talk about someone from among their midst who would betray him, hand him over to his enemies, and he would die. The words were probably still echoing in their ears as they each said, "Not I, Lord." And as Peter said, "The rest of these guys might do that, but I never would. I will die before I turn away from you."

In the middle of all of that going on, here comes Jesus and he turns the Festival of Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, upside down. Because when he picks up that unleavened bread that they would have been using, he looks at them and says, "This is my body." He doesn't say, "This symbolizes my body." He doesn't parade it around, worship it, and bow down to it. He says, "Take and eat."

Then he picks up the cup, the grape wine that they would have been drinking as part of the Passover celebration. As they ask the questions and as he answers them, and he says, “Drink from it all of you. This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”—just those simple words. Again, no further explanation—not “This symbolizes my blood.” “This is my blood.” Not “Bow down and worship it,” but “Take and drink.”

Then he says it is for the forgiveness of sins. It’s all so simple. You might miss the glory of it, and I’m fairly certain they probably did. Yet, the glory that is there is just amazing. It is beyond all telling because here is the Lamb that was killed for us. This isn’t a lamb that causes the Angel of Death to pass over so that physical death misses us. This is the Lamb of God, the Son of God from all eternity, saying, “This is my blood. This is my body. Eat it. Drink it. It is for the forgiveness of sins.”

Like I said earlier, we have heard these words so often. We have seen the Sacraments so often that maybe we miss the glory in it because we are just so familiar with it. Maybe we miss reflection on exactly what is going on. And maybe our idea of getting ready for Communion is to ask each other, as we are walking out the door or maybe getting out of the car or entering into church, “Hey, there’s Communion today. Did we go last time? Should we go today?” Or maybe today, because it is Maundy Thursday, “We better go. It’s Maundy Thursday. Everyone goes to Communion on Maundy Thursday. This is the day Jesus instituted it.”

But this gift that our God gives us is not something that is just an empty ceremony whose purpose has been pushed aside. He lays it in front of us each and every time we receive it. “This is my body. This is my blood, for the forgiveness of sins.” Listen to those words. Marvel at those words. Let them be inscribed on your heart. Let them be written on your forehead, on your arms, on your doorposts, on your doorframes and on your gates. Let this incredible gift be what God has intended it to be—a glorious meal that forgives sins.

As Jesus was looking ahead to his death on the cross, this was his Last Will and Testament for us. He says, “This is the blood of the covenant—the blood of the Testament.” So as he is sitting there that evening with the disciples squabbling with one another, when he didn’t get a shred of sympathy from them when he said, “I’m about to be betrayed and handed over.” They argued about who would do it. When he didn’t get any of these things from them, when he saw with perfect clarity what the next 20 or so hours was going to bring to him, what was on his mind? Or who was on his mind?—you—me—the world. He spoke his Last Will and Testament. He gives us what he wants us to have. It’s not stocks. It’s not a homestead. It’s not the family china. It’s not a furniture set. What he leaves to us is all that he had left in the world at that point in time. That was himself. He gives us his very body and blood, which was about to be given and poured out for the forgiveness of sins on the cross the next day. When he had so much on his mind on this most holy night with the culmination and the battle against Satan coming to its pinnacle, you and I were on his mind.

“This is my body. This is my blood.” We don’t eat and drink a symbol in this feast. We receive the very body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and the wine. The same Jesus who spoke these words now comes to us in this intimate way as we receive him for the forgiveness of our sins.

The next day, as he hung on the cross, he cries out, “My God. My God, why have you forsaken me?” The answer to the “why” we can kind of see this evening, can’t we? His Last Will and Testament said, “I am not going to let anything separate me from you. Here is my body. Here is my blood. I want you always to be able to be connected to me.” The very body and blood that hung on the cross so that you have the forgiveness of sins and you know for a certainty that your sins have all completely and absolutely been taken away—even the sins of the times that you have neglected the marvel of this meal, even the times that you have walked through the motions because everyone else in the pew got up and came forward so you thought you should too—“This is my body. This is my blood that is poured out for you to take away your sins.”

In anticipation of that Good Friday, that is what he announces to you and to me and to the world. That is why he suffered and died, so that we would have this expression of his will to be with us to the very ends of the age.

The world passes by the Supper and sees only a small, little flat piece of bread and barely a sip of wine, and it shakes its head and wonders what kind of goofy people think this is important? The glory of this meal is hidden, but because we know the purpose of Christ and we know the purpose of his cross, the glory of this meal thrills us to the tips of our toes. The glory of this meal tells me that I am loved, that I am forgiven, and no matter what I may have been or what I may have done, it has all been washed away by the blood of the Lamb.

So come to his altar with hearts that are broken because of sin and shame. Come with souls that are starving for food that is going to strengthen you to last to eternity, not just until the next meal. But come with a heart that is parched and thirsty for salvation. Then go in the knowledge that you have been forgiven and that all is right with your Lord.