



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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April 9, 2009
Maundy Thursday
Luke 22:14-20
Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Exodus 12:21-30
Psalm of the Day: Psalm 116
Second Lesson: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17
Gospel: Mark 14:12-26

Forgive Us Through This Holy Supper!

The Lamb has died for our sins
We eat and drink the forgiveness he has won

For each of the Midweek Lenten Services, we've been coming together and focusing on the theme, the prayer really, "Father, forgive them" and "Father, forgive us." We looked at individuals or groups that were a part of Jesus' suffering, his passion history. We've seen what their sins were and also have been convinced that quite often those same sins are found in our lives. We've seen that prayer that Jesus prayed as he was being nailed to the cross and applied it to ourselves time and again as we've seen the immensity of our sin and what it does to us and how it separates us from God. That prayer is echoed again and again from our lips - "Father, forgive us."

As we come together this evening, the first of the three Holy Days of Christendom, we see one of the ways in which our God has answered this prayer. We see how God has taken the time, how Jesus took the time hours before his death, less than 24 hours, to give us this Sacrament, this meal that goes far beyond a meal. It goes to give us the certainty as to what God's answer to our prayer is. It's the Sacrament of the Lord's altar, what Luther said was the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine instituted for us Christians to eat and to drink.

In this Sacrament we find God's response. We find his forgiveness. Forgiveness at its essence has two parts. If you have offended me, the first part is in my heart. I forgive you for what you have done to me. But for you to know that you are forgiven, I need then to communicate that to you, to talk to you, to tell you, to assure you that I have forgiven you and God has also forgiven you for whatever this offense might be. Imagine if the offense is great. Imagine how much more convincing it would take, how much more uncertainty there would be. Can you really forgive me for what I've done to you?

As we've seen our offenses against our God are immense. They are without number. So we see how God went to great lengths to assure us by the use of every sense that he has forgiven us. As we focus on these words from Luke this evening, we do so knowing that soon we can approach God's altar with a prayer on our lips, "Father, forgive us through this Holy Supper."

This Holy Supper was founded at another remembrance supper. In Luke 22, Jesus said to his disciples "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you." He speaks of it as

though it's something different than the other Passovers they would have eaten. Jesus would have been to this meal 30-some times by this time. For the disciples, I don't know if they understood the importance of those words of Jesus when they first heard them because for them, the Passover was Easter, Christmas, the 4th of July, all rolled into one. It was the high point of the Jewish year. It was the high point of their worship life. So much of what they did pointed to it and focused upon it.

Jesus' zeal to have this Passover meal with his disciples wasn't just because of it being such a special meal. I don't doubt that Jesus also viewed it as a great blessing to be able to come together with them and remember the blessings that God had given them in the past. Because they would come together and it was a full-blown ritual meal that they had, where they had to ask various questions and answer them. There were certain Psalms by this time (the time of Jesus) that they sang at different spots of the meal. There were different responses. There were different questions. There were certain people that would have to ask and answer these questions. It was laid out in this way so the people would remember what God had done for them.

This meal took place when the children of Israel were in Egypt as slaves. For 450 years they had lived in Egypt. And much of it had been as slaves. Four Hundred Fifty years – compare that just for an instant in your mind to how long the United States has been around. It doesn't compare, does it? Four Hundred Fifty years of living in slavery of having God say that he would deliver them, but that delivery not yet coming. Moses tried to deliver them once and God said “now is not the time.” But now the time had come. Moses had been talking to Pharaoh. The plagues, nine of them had come and gone, and the Pharaoh had said they could go. Then he changed his mind. Even after the last plague he told them they couldn't go. So the tenth plague was going to come. This plague was like no other. The Angel of Death would come through all of Egypt and kill the firstborn of all the people and all the livestock. It would strike them dead in one night.

Now the Israelites God had said would be delivered, but this delivery would come at a price. The price was the blood of a lamb, a spotless lamb without blemish or defect, a year-old lamb. That lamb, they were to slaughter it. They were to take the blood and put the blood on the top and the sides of the doorposts so that the Angel of Death would pass over their house. They were not to leave their house until morning. They were to eat unleavened bread because they wouldn't have time for the yeast to rise because their deliverance was at hand. They were to eat with their walking stick in their hand and their walking cloak tucked into their belt so they could get up and go. They were to eat all of the lamb that was there that night.

That night the Angel of Death did come. And for those Jews who listened to the Lord and the blood of the lamb was on their doorpost, the Angel of Death passed over them and visited death upon those who didn't have this blood and who weren't covered by the blood of the lamb. Every year they would remember God's faithfulness to his promises and how they were delivered from death by the blood of a lamb. Every year they had those reminders.

But now Jesus says he eagerly desired to eat this Passover because this Passover was different from all the others. You can probably guess why because this is the one that is going to be the fulfillment of what all the other Passovers pointed to, the blood of another lamb that was spotless and without blemish, the Lamb of God who took away the sins of the world, the identification that John the Baptist had spoken and pointed to Jesus with some of those disciples that were there in that room. They could have had that inkling of what was about to happen because Jesus was going to take this ritual meal and give it new meaning. The meaning would point away from a lamb from long ago and it would point them to the Lamb of God who would take their sins away.

This is why this Passover was so special and why Jesus looked forward to it because now he takes this meal and he changes the ritual meaning. He takes it from looking back to Egypt to now looking to Jerusalem, to looking to himself as the Lamb of God, and to looking to his body and blood that was given and shed so that sins might be forgiven. Jesus himself now says, "Do this in remembrance of me." He reminds us that as often as we eat and drink, we proclaim his death. We proclaim him to be the Lamb of God who takes away our many, many sins.

That's why until the end of time this meal has special importance for us because we remember that Jesus has died for our sins. But even more than that, our sins are actually forgiven as we eat and drink in a worthy manner as we prepare ourselves, confess our sins, recognize the body and blood of Christ in, with and under the bread and wine. Our God tells us our sins are forgiven.

Ritual meals like this that they were celebrating might seem foreign or ancient to us, but we have our own ritual meals. We have Thanksgiving dinners, maybe Easter dinners. We have wedding cake. We have birthday cake. We have rituals that go with them, right? You have to cut the first piece of cake and then shove it in each other's face so you can take a picture of it, right? We have our own rituals, but none of them are rituals like this because in all of those rituals, we are the ones doing something, right?

In this ritual meal that we have before us tonight, God is the one who does all the work. God comes to us and says your eyes see that this is just a wafer and that this is just a mere sip of wine. But he says to us, and his Spirit has led us to believe, that the body and blood of Christ are there and are present. He has led us to believe that the words that are spoken to consecrate these elements bring to it the power of God's promise that now the bread and the wine, in, with and under it, is the body and blood of Christ. And as we eat and drink, we receive bread, wine, body and blood, and it is for the forgiveness of our sins.

Think about why Jesus went to such lengths to do this. At such a time when he knew that the agony of hell was right there in front of his face, he takes the time to give us this gift because he knows the truth of what I said earlier. When you know that your sin has been great, it takes a lot more at times to convince you that you truly are forgiven. So our God gets us to focus on his life and death in our place through this Sacrament. He

gets us to hear it as those distributing it say “This is the body of Christ. This is the blood of Christ.” Just like we might hear it in a Sermon or in a Reading or in an Absolution, we hear about God’s forgiveness.

But we also can smell it. We can also taste it. We can also touch it. It’s there. God is coming to us in a way that we could not imagine because he is so desperate to have us know that we are forgiven. That’s why Jesus looked forward to this like he had looked forward to no other Passover, because he knew he was giving a gift not just to those people around that table, but a gift to all Christians of all times after that who would have this Sacrament that actually forgives sins, where we come into closer contact with our Savior than we do in any other way on this side of heaven.

It’s kind of interesting, isn’t it? The prayer, “Father, forgive us,” we find the answer as we look into the Word. We find the answer as we make use of the Sacraments. Word and Sacrament – what God does for us is where we find the strength then to go forward and live for our God. I think that’s one other reason why Jesus said he looked forward to celebrating this Passover with his disciples that night for our benefit because shortly after they had this meal, he gives them a command that is like no other command. He says to them, “A new command I give to you. Love one another. As all people have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you love one another.”

“Love one another” wasn’t a new command. Deuteronomy 6:5 - *Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.* Love your neighbor as yourself. That clearly had been taught in the Old Testament. But love as Jesus loved us. Love with a perfect love that forgives and forgets. Love with a perfect love that puts the interest of others ahead of your own. Love with the love that is Jesus, that doesn’t just talk but acts. This is the new love, the new command he calls us to.

You and I can’t do it. We absolutely can’t do it. We don’t want to do it. We are, as we said last Sunday, sinful selfish beasts who want the world to revolve around us. If anything changes from year to year in the rituals of how we worship, we want to pout and hold our breath because “it’s all about me. It’s not about God.” That’s why we need this ritual meal where God comes and forgives us because we can’t find the strength in and of ourselves to love one another. We don’t want to, but in this meal, he forgives us for those times that we are that selfish beast. In this meal, he forgives us for the times that we have neglected his Word and his Sacrament, where we have found better things to do than reflect upon his suffering. In this meal, he washes that all away.

Why? He is a God of love; not because we’ve earned or deserve it. As we remember that, and as we grow in that, then we want to go forward and love one another, because we have been forgiven by a loving God.