

IN NOMINE JESU

THE NEW COVENANT IN CHRIST'S BLOOD

Hear the Word of God for this Maundy-Thursday, as St. Paul affirms the inerrant biblical truth handed down in unbroken tradition from Jesus Christ Himself:

The Lord Jesus, in the night in which He was handed over, took bread, and giving thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My Body, the One given on behalf of all of you; this all of you do into My remembrance." In the same manner also the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; this all of you do, as often as you might drink it, into My remembrance." For as often as you eat this bread and the cup all of you might drink, the death of the Lord you all proclaim until He comes. ¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Tonight it is fitting that we take time to remember the New Covenant in Christ's blood. Soon some of the youth of this congregation will be gathered about the Baptismal Font. They will make solemn vows indicating their understanding of the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the Lord's Supper. Then, with your promise to continue to guide and teach them in the treasures of the faith, they will return to their seats, to participate fully, for the first time, in the complete service of the Sacrament of the Altar.

Each child to commune for the first time here tonight has confessed his or her understanding of the meal of immortality that is offered from this Table. His or her letters confessing and teaching the truths of God regarding His feast will soon be posted on our bulletin boards for all to peruse. In them you will read, in various styles, with the expressions particular to their different age groups, the confession of the truth that they have learned from the Small Catechism as it directly and correctly teaches the Biblical

truths, without error. Each has faced the challenge of memorizing and inwardly digesting the teaching of Christ in his or her own ways.

Parents, in their own ways, have struggled with the children, and sometimes against them, in order to drive home the realities of the blessings and promises of Jesus in the New Covenant of His blood. The Catechists have worked to reward understanding and dialogue about the things that have been learned in the home – through the use of bribes, candy and such, I understand! And, this pastor has sat with each child to ascertain his or her confession regarding the catechumen’s understanding, and confession of this most precious of meals. The grand inquisition has been passed by each!

Having declared those realities to you, I now also declare that each and every child communing tonight will not be doing so as a reward for good memory. Rather, each one will be receiving the Body and Blood of the crucified, risen and ascended Lord Jesus Christ in his or her mouth, on account of Jesus’ work on the cross. It is His faith, rather the fruits of it, that has given them the good confession of the Faith. It is to these words of Jesus that they, and all who commune at this Altar, are to cling:

“This is My Body, the One given on behalf of all of you; this all of you do into My remembrance.”

“This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; this all of you do, as often as you might drink it, into My remembrance.”

Neither this pastor, nor our Catechists, nor the parents of the soon-to-

¹ I Corinthians 11:23b-26.

commune children, nor the children themselves will quibble about those words. We take them as they stand, and do not ask how God makes them so. For, as God is the One Who created the Universe, and all creation by His Word, He is the One who brings His Body and Blood in, with and under the earthly created elements of bread and wine for us to eat and drink. It is His almighty Word that, contrary to the fractious spirits who began teaching otherwise in the late 16th century, and who appear to be in the majority in non-Roman Catholic congregations today, His Word alone that makes the Supper what He says it is.

That dear ones in Christ is part of the vertical dimension of the Lord's Supper. That is, all who receive the consecrated Bread and Wine, by the Word of God, receive the Body and Blood of Jesus, whether they believe that to be true or not! That is why this congregation places such an emphasis on supporting and reinforcing the heads of our households as they teach the Biblical truths in their homes. For, as you heard again tonight, those who commune, that is take the very real Body and Blood of Jesus, sacramentally joined to the Bread and Wine by His Word, without discerning those biblical realities, commune to their own judgment! What Jesus says is the Word of God, and it is not dependent upon our agreement, but solely upon His Word. Hear Him speak again:

"This is My Body, the One given on behalf of all of you; this all of you do into My remembrance."

"This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; this all of you do, as often as you might drink it, into My remembrance."

St. Paul, in handing on those words first to the Church at Corinth, and then to the Church in the world, begins with a phrase that has Jewish rabbinic overtones. That is, he begins with a “quibble,” which means, a tradition that has been passed on. Paul’s “quibble” about the Sacrament of the Altar is *for I received from the Lord*. He then moves from the “quibble” to the “masar,” the actual passing down of the tradition, as he declares: *the thing which also I handed over to all of you.*²

It is due to St. Paul’s faithfulness, as well as the unbroken, unerring testimony of Saints Matthew, Mark and Luke, that we have the solid confession of Jesus’ words among us today. The words of Jesus, in establishing His Supper, leave no room for human interpretation. The word we translate “is” means only “is” as state of being that remains until it is gone, consumed by the mouth of a communicant. This vertical dimension of the Lord’s Supper is so important that the pastors here must ascertain that anyone who comes to this Table to receive the Supper of Jesus knows and confesses that they are receiving what He has promised, His Body and His Blood under earthly elements. This is not just a spiritual communion, nor a simple memorial feast, it is a fellowship in the reality of the Body and Blood of Jesus – for the forgiveness of sins and strengthening to life everlasting to all who believe. That is the vertical – Jesus and the communicant, or more simply put, Jesus really touches me in, with and under the Bread and Wine.

The first-communicants tonight have also learned another truth. That is, that

² I Corinthians 11:23a.

there is an horizontal dimension to the Lord's Supper. That is, everyone who kneels here is to be in fellowship, and common confession of the faith, with everyone else here. This means that anyone's presence here assumes that that person holds to the Biblical truths confessed here – that Jesus is present in the elements; that baptism now saves; that the pastors' pronouncing holy absolution means that Christ is doing so through him. It further means that the person at the Table believes that he or she is in violation of the Ten Commandments, and hence needs the forgiveness that is offered to him or her here. Further, the horizontal dimension of communion is indicated in every communicant's confessing the truth of the Creed, and regularly participates in the Lord's Prayer. (Those six things together are why we only confirm those who have studied, learned, and assent to the Six Chief parts of the Small Catechism).

These children, as well as you adults who are confirmed in the faith once delivered, that is the apostolic faith confessed, taught, and proclaimed here and in other places also faithful to the Lord's divine realities, know that there are other confessions of faith in our world. There are those who prefer a law-oriented, ordinance based faith – Jesus says, “do this” so they obey on account of the Law. Their confession cannot save, for how much Law must one do to know that one has done enough? There are those who prefer a individual-oriented faith – they say in effect: it is my decision, and it is up to me to assent to God's word and then show my faith by doing the things he says – Baptism, Supper, and confession in my heart alone! If faith were up to you, dear ones, then you are in trouble, for you are not God. To those who so errs, we, the Church of

Jesus Christ say: hold your reason captive to the Word of God. Believe His Word as it stands, do not add to it, nor take away from it!

That brings us to the Good News from this night when we remember the Words of our Lord which bring us His Body and Blood. For He has promised, in His inspired Word, that those who discern His Real Presence receive all His benefits. That is, in taking the once-crucified flesh and blood of Jesus into you, you are made clean in the sight of God. You, in communing in faith, partake in the remembrance of the Sacrament as Jesus intends – for His words recall the words of at least two Psalms of deliverance – for here Jesus makes haste to help the repentant sinner, here Jesus does not rebuke the sinner, nor chasten him or her, but hurries to deliver her or him.³

Here, in this night when the Church remembers rightly the events of the night in which Jesus was handed over to sinners, we have the life given up in death. Here, in the feast of the Lord's Table, we have the true Holy, Innocent Blood shed on account of humanity's breaking God's Old Covenants. This meager seeming Supper is brings the everlasting benefits of God's long-promised, and for us, long-delivered New Covenant.⁴ This Covenant in His blood is a unilateral work – God does it all. He establishes the promises, He seals the promises, and He forgives the promises breakers!

In this New Covenant, the promise, guarantee, pledge and reality of God are offered by God to those of us who call upon Him sorrowing over our sins. The Old Covenant of Law and human striving to be pleasing to God has been taken away by God.

³ *Psalms 38 and 70.*

The New Covenant of the Gospel, declaring God's forgiveness to those who know they cannot earn it, is here, now. We rejoice to have the children join us today, for the first time in confessing the truths, promises and blessings of Jesus' words for this day of remembrance:

"This is My Body, the One given on behalf of all of you; this all of you do into My remembrance."

"This cup is the New Covenant in My blood; this all of you do, as often as you might drink it, into My remembrance."

Soon, with His words, we will continue to proclaim the Gospel; that is the Good News of His death for our sins. We pray that you will join us in so doing, until the Christ comes again on the clouds in power and majesty. He has said, *Yes, I come quickly.* And His Church responds, *Come Lord Jesus, be our Guest, let these Thy gifts to us be blessed!*

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Lent VI Maundy-Thursday (LSB One-year series)

Exodus 12:1-14; I Corinthians 11:23-32; John 13:1-15

April 9, 2009

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

SOLI DEO GLORIA

⁴ cf. *Jeremiah 31:31 and 32:40.*