

In Nomine Iesu

The 14th Sunday after Trinity, 2018

Faith makes you worthy – 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new testament in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.”

Grace be to you and peace from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Dear fellow redeemed in Christ:

It is one of the tragedies of Christendom that the Supper of our Lord, in which we are united with Him, has been the focus of so much division. The place where there should be spiritual unity among Christians, around His very body and blood, has become a point of conflict. But this should be no surprise. For wherever Christ is with His grace and forgiveness, there the devil, the world, and our own flesh work to confuse and divide. Just as Paul said to the Corinthians right before the words of our text, “For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.” Division arises when human opinion collides with the clear word of God. Apart from His Word there is no truth and can be no real unity. Unity never comes by compromising God’s word.

I

Conflict over the Lord’s Supper fills the history of the church. For example, to this day Roman Catholic dogma insists that the body and blood of Christ in the Supper are offered by priests as a sacrifice to God the Father for the sins of the living and the dead, even though the only only-begotten Son said of His atoning sacrifice, “It is finished.” During the Reformation others reasoned that Jesus’ words can’t mean what they plainly say, because He ascended to heaven and now sits at the right hand of God. They rationalized that the bread must then just symbolize Jesus’ body. But these two arguments are human opinions that depart from the clear words of the Lord Himself, and so inevitably cause division in the church.

Divisions over the Lord’s Supper appeared in the time of the apostles, within a few years of the Lord’s death and resurrection. The epistle text before us today speaks to this very thing. In Corinth there were some who viewed the Lord’s Supper as something other than our Lord’s body and blood given to sinners to eat and drink for the forgiveness of their sins. For them the Lord’s Supper was a social gathering of the church. No longer was the sacrament of Jesus’ body and blood understood to

be the great and mysterious gift of love it truly is. No longer was His feast of grace and forgiveness at the center of the congregation's worship life. Yes, there was congregational eating and drinking in the Corinthian church, but it was not coming together to eat and drink of the **Lord's** Supper, but a supper of their own making, much as Israel's self-made worship at the foot of Mt. Sinai while Moses remained on the mountain was, in the eyes of God, just sitting "down to eat and drink and rising up to play." (Exodus 32:6)

Paul wrote to the Corinthians not only as their former pastor but as a **steward of the mysteries of God**, called to say what the Lord wants said about the gifts which He wills to give us for our eternal good. As a faithful teacher Paul was making a clear distinction between that which comes from man and that which comes from God. He was a steward of God's truth, as divinely inspired author of many of the epistles of the New Testament, apostle, missionary, preacher, and pastor. For he knew that it was the gospel alone, the heaven-sent good news of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, that was "the power of God unto salvation." (Romans 1:16)

Dear friends, we all tend to give more weight to our own way of thinking, our own perceived needs rather than to what the Lord gives and promises. It wasn't so with Paul. He did not begin by saying, "Let me share with you my vision of what should be taking place here in Corinth." He did not offer his hearers just a way to look at the Lord's Supper. He did not offer another interpretation of the Supper to be set alongside other seemingly reasonable interpretations. No, he begins, "**from the Lord** what I also delivered to you." (v. 23)

II

"For **I received from the Lord** that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, 'Take, eat, this is My body which is broken for you, do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new testament in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'" (vv. 23-25)

The words, given Him directly from the Lord Himself, tell us what the Sacrament is. It is the body and blood of our Lord given under the outward bread and wine for us to eat and drink. The words tell us that this is the Lord's gift to us, and invite us to receive in faith what He gives for our blessing and benefit. It was on the basis of Jesus' words alone that Paul deals with the troubles at Corinth. He does not present a philosophical argument for the presence of the body and blood of the Savior, something the Greeks of Corinth might well expect. He simply points his hearers to Jesus' words concerning the bread and wine of this holy meal, and then removes all doubt as to their plain, clear meaning by saying: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an **unworthy** manner **will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.**"

In the Sacrament we are given Jesus' body and blood. The very body conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary to bear our sins and suffer death in our place is given into our mouths. The very blood He shed for you **then and there** in 1st century Israel to win your forgiveness He miraculously gives you **here and now**

in 21st century America to guarantee to you the forgiveness of all your sins. Now, you might say, “Wait, that is not possible!” But dear friends, on that first Easter evening Jesus’ own disciples – especially Thomas! – did not think it was possible that He who was dead could enter a closed room and stand before them in the flesh. Mary could not understand how she, who had never known a man, could conceive and bear a son, much less the Son of God. But, as she was assured, “With God, nothing is impossible.” As we eat and drink the Lord’s Supper in the midst of our public worship we proclaim the impossible to all: that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We call this the Divine Service, because the Divine One stands in our midst, just as He promised, and bestows His forgiveness on us. Here He who “came not to be served, but to serve and give His life as a ransom for many,” (Matthew 20:28) continues His ministry of mercy.

Dear friends, this Sacrament does not depend on us but on Jesus who established it on the night in which He was betrayed. It is not our faith that makes this Supper a sacrament. On the contrary, all who come to the altar receive Christ’s body and blood, whether they believe or not. That is precisely why Paul goes on to warn the Corinthians that those who partake of the Supper in an unworthy manner are guilty not of receiving bread and wine, but of the body and the blood of the Lord! This is also why we insist that those who come to altar confess what Jesus says of it.

When it comes to the Sacrament and its beneficial reception, what matters is the faith and confession of everyone who desires to come to the altar. We emphasize the need for faith because Jesus did! Faith saves. Faith trusts Him who lived and died for us. It is only in believing Jesus’ words that we receive His body and blood as He would have us do. This is what it means, to use Paul’s own turn of phrase, **to be worthy**. Worthiness has nothing to do with your goodness and everything to do with your faith in Jesus’ words and promises. Paul warns us all, “whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” To prevent that, St. Paul says, “let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”

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So, dear friend, examine your life in light of God’s holy law, His commandments. See your sins for what they are. See how unworthy you are to come into the very presence of Christ on the basis of your own goodness. But then hear what Christ says of this Supper. Hear how He has taken your sins on Himself and paid for them all. Hear how He wills to assure you that He has covered your sins with His own righteousness, and so hunger and thirst for Christ’s righteousness given us in the Supper. Confess how great is the gift of the Lord’s Supper. There is the cure for **what truly ails us all**. The Lord’s Supper is the pure grace of God in Christ Jesus, given us here and now for our comfort and assurance in the midst of sin and death. Hear, and know that **“He is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, ‘Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.’”** (Small Catechism, part IV) Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria