

1 Corinthians 11:23-32
"Examine Yourself"
Maundy (Holy) Thursday

March 28, 2024
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

"On the night when He was betrayed [Jesus] took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, 'This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.' In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me'" (1 Corinthians 11:23b-25).

Inspired by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Paul writes, ***"Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup"*** (1 Corinthians 11:27-28).

Before my time, I have heard that Lutherans would announce for Holy Communion. This would be done by visiting their pastor at the parsonage or at his study. The pastor would then ask his parishioner a question or two, likely from Luther's *Small Catechism* on the fifth and sixth chief parts: Confession and the Sacrament of the Altar. Maybe the pastor would just ask general questions to get to know his parishioner better, things like how work was going and how's the family?

The intention behind this practice of personally announcing your intention to commune was to assist us in what our text this evening from 1 Corinthians 11 calls for, which is examining yourselves.

From what I have heard, this old practice was a good one. The pastor could meet one-on-one with every member. But this old practice did fall out into disuse for many reasons. The primary reason was our personal schedules became too busy for both the pastor and his parishioners. But the registration for Holy Communion has continued. Instead of personally meeting with your pastor, we now write our names on cards or sheets of paper. We register now for more practical purposes, so that the church secretary may record who communed on that particular day.

Today is Maundy Thursday. It's called Maundy Thursday, because of these words of Jesus that He said on this day nearly 2,000 years ago: ***"A new commandment I give to you"*** (John 13:34) and ***"Do this"*** (1 Corinthians 11:24).

The word we know as “mandate” comes from the Latin word “mandatum,” which means “command.” In that upper room this night, Jesus gave the command to love one another. This wasn’t a new command. He had said this previously. In fact, this has been said all throughout Scripture. This summarizes the Two Tables of the Law: first, love God; and second, love your neighbor as yourself.

What’s new about this command is what Jesus did on that night: He washed His disciples’ feet, serving as a further reminder that Jesus didn’t come to be served, but to serve. Also, that night, Jesus took bread, gave thanks, and broke it saying, **“This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me”** (1 Corinthians 11:24). After supper, Jesus said, **“This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me”** (1 Corinthians 11:25).

The Sacrament of the Altar, which is also known as the Lord’s Supper, or the Eucharist meaning “thanksgiving,” is also included in Christ’s mandate as He says, **“Do this.”** Do this in remembrance of Me.

The Sacrament of the Altar is Jesus’ gift to His bride, the church. He wants us to open our mouths to receive His goods, which are wrapped in His love: forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation.

But what is St. Paul meaning when he says, **“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup”**? (1 Corinthians 11:28).

First, we all ought to know what the Sacrament of the Altar is and what it is not. The Sacrament of the Altar is not just ordinary eating and drinking. It is the “Lord’s Supper.” It is “Holy Communion.” So, we aren’t having snack time at the communion rail. The communion rail isn’t the church’s concession stand. The meal that we receive is not merely a memorial meal, a symbolic remembrance of yesteryear. What is happening in the Lord’s Supper is an action that we can see, a meal we can taste, and a miracle that we experience. That miracle is that through that bread and wine, Jesus gives us His very body and blood. Jesus is present, in, with, and under, that bread and wine. He is just as present as He was as He gave the command in that upper room on that first Maundy Thursday.

Second, examining ourselves means searching our hearts. So, what does this mean? It means that we should examine ourselves to see whether we are truly sorry for our sins and whether we truly believe that we have forgiveness when we eat and drink the body and blood of Christ in the Sacrament.

So, firstly, examine yourselves asking these two questions:

- First: Have I confessed and repented of my sins?
- Second: Will I, with the Lord's help, amend my sinful life?

Because if you don't repent of your sinful life and continue to approach the Lord's Table with impenitence or unbelief, you are only receiving judgment upon yourself, and not forgiveness of your sins.

Now, none of us are blameless. We are all indeed, poor, miserable sinners. Christ isn't saying you must be perfect in order to receive His forgiveness. That makes no sense. In order to be forgiven, we must be in need of forgiveness. What is needed is that we realize our guilt and our desperate need for Jesus. So, as we commune, the triune God wants us to be aware of our sin and actually be sorry for it, but also confident that because of Jesus, our sin is forgiven as we partake in the Lord's Supper.

One other question that should be examined before coming up to the communion rail is this:

- Do I share the confession and unity of this congregation?

As the Evangelical Lutheran Church, *“we believe, teach, and confess that the only rule and guiding principle according to which all teachings and teachers are to be evaluated and judged are the prophetic and apostolic writings of the Old and New Testaments alone”* (FC Epitome Summary). As Evangelical Lutherans, we believe that God's Word as written in the Bible is completely true from cover to cover. We believe that we have not lived up to how God has called us to live in the Ten Commandments. We believe that we have redemption in Jesus Christ alone. We believe that we only come to faith in Jesus through the indwelling and work of the Holy Spirit as He strengthens our faith through Word and Sacrament.

So, as Evangelical Lutherans, the Sacrament of the Altar is the most visible public confession of our faith. So, we don't treat the Lord's Supper casually or carelessly as it is the most public confession of our unity in Christ. For this reason, the historic practice of the Evangelical Lutheran Church is that of close communion, or sometimes called closed communion. Holy Communion is not just between you and God; Holy Communion is between you, God, and your fellowship with the Church, your brothers and sisters in Christ. So, everyone who communes together is part of the one Body, united. In other words, when we partake of Communion, we are in communion.

Now, what to do with St. Paul's admonition: "***For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself***"? (1 Corinthians 11:29). This eating and drinking "judgment" on oneself is not necessarily eternal damnation – *at first*. First will come weakness and illness and physical death. Those are examples of such judgment on those who do not examine themselves. But if one continually refuses to examine oneself and continues to approach the Lord's Table with impenitence and unbelief, that judgment will indeed become eternal damnation.

Third, you must believe to be true these words of Jesus: "***This is My body, which is for you***" (1 Corinthians 11:24). "***For you***" means that in the Sacrament of the Altar, you, *yes you*, are receiving from Christ Himself forgiveness of sins, eternal life, and salvation through those words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation. Those words "***for you,***" were given to us by Christ for weak and struggling sinners like you and me, in order to draw us to Himself and to strengthen our faith in Him.

The Sacrament of the Altar's worthiness does not depend on us. If it did, we'd get nothing out of eating Christ's body and drinking Christ's blood, because we are poor, miserable sinners. So, we go to the Lord's Supper, because we are in need of Christ's forgiveness. The only reason we would refrain from the Lord's Supper is if we desire no grace and no Absolution and have no intention to change our sinful ways.

By coming to the Lord's Table, we give testimony not only that we repent and believe in Jesus, but we also proclaim that Jesus' death was for the good of all people. Through partaking of Christ's body and blood, our faith is strengthened, and we are eager to live by God's will.

Maundy Thursday is the night on which Jesus was betrayed, so we are gathered here to do what Christians have done for nearly 2,000 years. We come at Jesus' mandate: "***Do this.***" What we do is come to eat and drink and so, by a miracle, receive Jesus anew in our hearts and lives. Through repentance and faith in Christ, we are worthy because of Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +