

MAUNDY THURSDAY

April 1 2021

Exodus 12:1-14

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

John 13:1-15

Standing...

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

What started with ashes—leading to forty days of reflection and repentance—
is now white...white with joy.

And you have been drawn here—
during what we hope to be the tail end of a pandemic,
but let's set all of that aside.

You have been drawn to a holy spot—to your church, to this altar.
Where Jesus gets as close to you as humanly possible.
Closing the gap between you and Him.

Let us pray. These are Your words Holy Father. Sanctify us in the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Sitting...

Much of what you will hear from me on this Maundy Thursday,
I was not raised with this knowledge.

Though I was catechized correctly in many things,
I was catechized incorrectly in others.

Huge errors really, that unfortunately were not discovered and resolved until later in life.

Abandoning what I once was taught and believed,
to learn something new was a painful process,
like wearing braces for crooked teeth, or crooked legs.
To be honest, I've actually worn both.

But I'm grateful to God that He patiently
straightened out my theology,
fixing the errors,
putting the pieces together correctly,
the way they were meant to be.

Before any of that correcting took place, here are the words I had in my Bible...

*For our Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread,
and when He had given thanks—He broke it and gave it to the disciples and said,
“Take, eat, this is My body which is given for you.”*

They are the same words you have in your Bible.

In my upbringing, my education as well as my pastoral training,
we took the Bible literally.

Sure—there were a few parts we didn't take literally,
poetic parts of the Bible—apocalyptic parts,
however, for the most part, that's how we took it.
Yet, when it came to these specific words of Jesus,
given on the night of Judas and his betrayal,
Peter and his denial,
Jesus and the Garden of Gethsemane...
all of which are taken literally.
Jesus' trials and torture were taken literally too,
followed by His crucifixion
and the events of His death.
The entire account is literal.

But when Jesus spoke these words that night, at the meal we've termed the Last Supper,
we were taught..."Do not take His words literally."

Jesus just means the bread and the wine are symbols.

"Wait! Don't take Him at His Word?"

"No."

"Then why do we practice this?"

"Why take communion at all?"

"To remember." "Ahhh...ok—"

"So, we take the remembering part literally?" "Yes."

And just like that, what Jesus gives as Gospel,
is turned into Law.

And the forgiveness of sins,
Is not delivered.

My guess, is, the spirit of the Anabaptists, starting with Zwingli and others
would be pleased that this false teaching has persisted the way it has—
this "merely symbolic" view.

We tend to think Luther was fighting against this side only,
but he wasn't—he had another war against the Medieval Catholic Church.

Luther tells about how, in 1510, when he went to Rome...

He attended a Mass where the priest stood up,
and after saying the Words of Institution,
held up the host saying,

"You are bread, and bread you will remain."

The point is,
the spirit of unbelief and blasphemy
was well under way in Rome too.

So, on every side, were those who denied the words of Jesus,
meaning the fight was over the words, "This is My body."

In other words,

what is on that altar?

what is placed into your hand or mouth for you to eat—what is it?

We confess from the Scriptures that it is His Body—

His true Body.

And in the cup is not just wine,

but it is the true Blood of Jesus, given for you.

The Church has rightly been fighting for those words since the days of Luther,
for we know that to attack those words is to attack the promise,
and...to attack the Lord who gave the promise to us.

Something else that wasn't clear for me back in the day
was knowing the distinction in how forgiveness of sins is won
and the way forgiveness of sins is delivered.

Jesus wins the forgiveness of sins in His death on the cross.

He accomplished salvation there.

When He suffers in your place.

When He says, "It is finished."

When He breathes His last, and when He dies.

There, Jesus wins the open door to heaven and the smile of God.

It's all the things that will happen tomorrow,
on Good Friday.

What I didn't know is that Jesus has a different way of distributing His forgiveness.
Of delivering that forgiveness to us.

See, if it were a matter receiving forgiveness by going to the cross,
 none of us could have it.
 Because if you were to go to Jerusalem,
 you can't find the cross.
 Some people say the cross was here,
 others say it was over here.
 No one knows.
 But that doesn't matter.

For Jesus does not distribute the forgiveness of sins from the cross.
 He's instituted other ways to do that.

For instance, it's why on the day of His resurrection,
 Jesus breathes on the disciples and says,
As the Father has sent Me, so I send you.
Whoever sins you forgive they are forgiven.
Whoever sins you bind they are bound.
 It's the Office of the Keys—
 one of the ways in which forgiveness of sins is distributed.

It's why Jesus said on the day He ascended into heaven,
Go unto all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father
and the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey
all that I have commanded you and
look I am with you always even to the end of the age.
 Holy Baptism—
 another way in which forgiveness of sins
 is distributed.

But that's not all, it's why Jesus, on this very night, the night He was betrayed...
 after girding a towel and taking a basin of water to wash the disciple's feet...
 takes bread, gives thanks, breaks it and gives it to the disciples saying,
 "Take and eat—this is My Body."
 He then gives them the cup and says,
 "Take and drink—this is My Blood."
 Then He adds, "Do this often."

In my background, the Lord's Supper didn't play a central role in the life of the church.
 Sure, we did it, on occasion, but not often. It was just something we had to do.
 So, not only was it law—*do this in remembrance of Me*—
 but it was burdensome.

This again, is not what Jesus said.
 He intends for it to go on and on and on
 until the Lord returns. For, it's another way
 in which forgiveness of sins is distributed.

Folks, this is why an altar was placed in Topeka in 1874...
 and later, with this building, another altar put right here.
 It's why other altars were placed throughout town through this church.
 So that Jesus' words, "*Take and eat and take and drink,*"
 would take place.
 For what is Jesus doing?
 Delivering the forgiveness of sins
 that He won on the cross.

This is why Lutherans don't sing hymns about going to the foot of the cross,
 not like the American Evangelicals do.
 What the American Evangelicals don't know
 is that at the foot of the cross is not where forgiveness is found.
 We find forgiveness where Jesus puts it.
 In His Word,
 in His font,
 and on His altar.
 And all of this is done so that we can have the
 absolute assurance of His love and care for us.

Speaking of assurance...
 There are several questions that plague many Christians.
 Questions like,
 How do I know for sure I am a Christian?
 Or, How do I know for sure that Jesus loves me?
 How do I know for sure I'm going to go to heaven when I die?
 How do I know?

The temptation for all of us when that questions comes, is to look for assurance within.
 But looking within ourselves is a dead-end road.
 We look within for assurance when we say,
 "Well, I'm doing a little bit better today than I was yesterday."
 But what's the problem with that? Tomorrow!
 When you could be worse tomorrow than you were today.
 Or, one thinks,

“Sometimes I feel close to God and other times I don’t.”
 Trust me beloved, there is no certainty
 to be found amongst your fickle, fallen feelings.

So, how do you know you’re a Christian?

You came to the font and you were baptized.
 It was an external act of God, not an internal one,
 where Jesus claimed you,
 and put His Name upon you,
 gave you His Holy Spirit and the forgiveness of your sins.

How do you know that Jesus loves you?

Because a few minutes ago you confessed that you were a sinner,
 and what was the response?
 Your sins are forgiven. Because He loves you.

And, How do I know for sure I’m going to go to heaven when I die?

Because you, at this altar receive the very Body and Blood of Jesus,
 hearing Him say, “I forgive you.”
 There’s no wondering with that.
 No subjectivity at all.
 It stands.

It stands against the vacillation
 of your emotions.
 It stands against all of the assaults of the Devil.
 It stands against your failures
 and against your sin,
 and that is what it’s supposed to do.

This is why the Sacrament of the Altar is such a great treasure.

It’s what Jesus has instituted for His Church.

And in just a moment, the curtain will be pulled back once again,
 and you will glimpse the mystery where we are mystically bound to Jesus
 and mysteriously united with those around us.

It is a miracle—and listen,
 if God spoke heaven and earth into existence by His Word,
 He can put His Body and Blood into the bread and wine
 for us to eat and drink.

You hear us say it all the time...what you receive here is,

the medicine of immortality—
the antidote to death—
the antivenom—
in the most literal sense of the word.

So when you approach, know that nothing is held back.

Not your sins and not your doubts.

All of it here, drawn to this holy spot,
at this altar, and all of it forgiven,
without conditions or cost.

In the Holy Name of Jesus, Amen.

Standing...

And now may the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.