

# Maundy Thursday Sermon - 2015

Text: Matthew 26:26-30

May the strength afforded us in Holy Communion result also in souls converted through our witness. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, a woman called her pastor obviously distraught. "Pastor," she said, "I don't know what to do. I just went out to the garage where my husband is working on the car to tell him that dinner was ready and I could tell he was very frustrated. He then told me that he couldn't come in for dinner just then because he was going to the cheater bar! He was so preoccupied that he didn't even notice how upset I was, so I came in to call you. What should I do?" She was greatly relieved to learn that a "cheater bar" was not what she thought it was.

Most of you know what a ratchet, socket, and wrench are - tools used to tighten or loosen nuts and bolts. Sometimes, when struggling with a particularly stubborn rusty bolt, mechanics need to increase the torque they can apply, so they "go to the cheater bar." A cheater bar is a pipe that fits over the handle of the ratchet or wrench. Through the physics of mechanical advantage it makes turning a stubborn nut or bolt much easier. It enables mechanics to break loose rusted nuts and bolts they could never hope to turn without it.

On this special evening we celebrate and thank our God for His gift of Holy Communion. As we examine this special "last will and testament" of our Lord Jesus, what we hope to demonstrate is that as the cheater bar is to the ratchet or wrench, so also Holy Communion is to faith. The text on which we base our Maundy Thursday meditation is found in Matthew's Gospel, the 26<sup>th</sup> Verse:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 26:26-30** *Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." <sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, <sup>28</sup> for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. <sup>29</sup> I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." <sup>30</sup> ¶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

So far the perfect and holy words of God. With complete confidence and trust in the truth and power of these words we seek now to gain our Lord's promised strength and comfort through their study. Our prayer is as

always, "**Sanctify us by your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!**" Amen.

Permit me to return briefly to the ratchet and the bar. Can you loosen a bolt with just the ratchet? Usually. Can you loosen a bolt with just the cheater bar – the extension of the ratchet? Never. Therein lies the comparison between faith (or conversion) and Holy Communion. We are saved "by grace through *faith* alone." In this sense the Lord's Supper is not necessary for salvation. It is intended as a strengthening of *faith*, through which we are saved. Holy Communion is indeed a most precious gift given by Christ to his bride, the Church, on the night before he was killed. Yet we do Christ a disservice whenever we confuse what Jesus did for us *on the cross* with what he does for us still today *in Holy Communion*. We insult Christ and his death whenever we try to use his gift of Communion as that for which it was not intended. What we are talking about then is really nothing more than a *confusing* of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

Here is how that is possible. On Good Friday our Lord Jesus offered his perfect life into innocent death on the cross. This was his *once and for all* payment for sin – *all* sins. Every single one. That payment is credited to us and to our own sins (it becomes our own personal possession) at the moment we are brought to faith, the instant we are converted or "born again." At that moment, and for as long as that faith remains alive in our hearts, we *have* the full and complete forgiveness of all of our sins. If we imagine that an additional payment for our sins is somehow offered in Holy Communion, we are left with one of two conclusions, both of which are wrong. It is either true that when Jesus said, "**It is finished**" on the cross, he did not really mean it is finished (since something more was left to be done to gain forgiveness for our sins; in this case, communing) or Jesus' death on the cross was unnecessary. If forgiveness of sins could be gained by going to the Lord's Supper, then God the Father didn't need to hang his Son on a tree.

But isn't it faith in that very death on the cross that gains me the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper? To answer we need but ask two questions to clarify the point. First, "*What do you have after communion that you did not have in full before communion?*" If we do indeed receive forgiveness in Holy Communion that we otherwise would not possess, then one must answer "*I receive forgiveness for some of my sins.*" The next question then follows natural and is deeply disturbing: "*What then would be the state of my soul if I had died suddenly on the way to the communion rail?*" If there are sins forgiven after communing that were not forgiven before, then we live continually in a very precarious state from communing to communing, from

forgiveness to forgiveness. If we do indeed walk about with unforgiven sins, we must also wonder how any of us will ever make it into heaven. We will also have to explain what the gospel teaches us in passages such as Romans 8:1-2: ***"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. <sup>2</sup> For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death."***

Forgiveness is always all or nothing. It is never a product of anything that any sinner can or has done. There is only one path by which forgiveness is granted to sinners, and that is freely, by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ. In other words, full and complete forgiveness is the constant possession of every single Christian. Faith, again, is the key, since ***"faith is accredited as righteousness."*** (Rom 4:5) That means that by God's holy decree, whenever he finds faith in Jesus Christ in the human heart, that faith is accounted by God as a perfect substitute for a holy, pure, perfect life. One of the two, you will remember, is necessary before God will allow anyone to enter heaven. You either have to have a life that is completely without sin of any kind (including the sins with which you were born) or you have to have faith that Jesus Christ kept the law perfectly as your substitute. God accepts either for admission into his heavenly mansions.

From this it is clear that the only way that a sinner can be without full and complete forgiveness is when he is without faith in Jesus Christ. Sins committed by Christians do not linger with damning potential in some sort of a personal, spiritual account until we confess them or go to Holy Communion. True Christians actually live in a constant state of repentance and grace. The debt for every sin has already been paid by Jesus Christ. We confess those sins and we partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ in Holy Communion to receive assurance that, though we sin often, our God, for Jesus' sake, has indeed declared us not guilty in Christ.

How then did the current misconception of Holy Communion come to stand so openly and receive such acceptance in so many corners of the Christian Church? In many cases, the answer is that it sailed into port on the ship of Roman Catholicism and was assembled with pride in the human heart and mind. At one point in history, prior to the Lutheran Reformation, there was but one Christian Church - the Roman Catholic Church. Rome taught Christianity as a straight business deal: when you sin, you incur a debt, and that debt must be paid by performing good works. They also taught that going to communion was one of those good works that *earned forgiveness* for past sins. It was there that the idea of "getting forgiveness" when we commune began. Today, Christians realize that forgiveness is a gift, but some nevertheless imagine that forgiveness is a gift given to us in the human act of communing. The problem was

compounded by the understandably human error that our two sacraments (Baptism and the Lord's Supper) had to have been given for essentially the same reason and purpose. That's not true. While Baptism is a conversion tool (a means to create saving faith in an unbeliever) Holy Communion was intended only for the strengthening of a faith that is already present. So also God's Word speaks of gaining forgiveness through Baptism, but it does so because through baptism the Holy Spirit creates saving faith, which in turn makes forgiveness our constant possession. The Bible never speaks of "getting forgiveness" in connection with the Lord's Supper.

It is wrong then to ever speak of "receiving forgiveness" in the Lord's Supper? Not if by "forgiveness" we are referring to the gospel itself, or to a restatement of the fact that Jesus has already earned our sin payment for us. That truth is certainly sealed to us when we hear the words of institution and receive the very body and blood that earned that forgiveness for us on Calvary's cross.

Knowing well how hard it can be to sell anything to the Christian Church without proof from Scripture, the devil promoted the best he could offer. He knew there was no passage that said what he wanted us to believe, so he used a *misreading* of our text for this evening. Ask a man today why he believes we receive "forgiveness of sins" in the Lord's Supper and he will undoubtedly first misquote our text: ***"Drink from it, all of you... for the remission of sins."*** This is, of course, not at all what our Lord said. It is not even close to what he said. In fact what an insult to twist Jesus' own words in this way. How like Satan to try to turn man from what Christ did to what we must do. Jesus said that it was *his* blood, shed on the cross, that won the ***"remission of sins."*** We do not eat and drink ***"for the remission of our sins."*** His blood was shed ***"for the remission (or forgiveness) of our sins."*** That is what the passage says. No more, no less.

Then surely some other passage in Scripture must tell us that we receive the forgiveness of sins in the Lord's Supper. The fact is nowhere else in Scripture is forgiveness of sins even mentioned in connection with the Lord's Supper. This is only surprising to us when we try to make communion what it is not (a means to gain forgiveness) instead of what it truly is (an assurance of forgiveness that is already ours).

To this point we have really only talked about what communion is not. We would be remiss if we did not also define exactly what it is. Our Lord Jesus gave us *his* Supper as a "last will and testament." Knowing that he would die the next day, he gave his dear bride, the Church, a special

gift. Our Lord knew that his Church would be hard pressed in the days and years to come. Indeed he warned us that **“the student is not above the teacher.”** If they persecuted Jesus, we should expect no less. Jesus also knew how weak and frail we are. He knew we would need a special source of strength and comfort if we were to survive. That is why he left his Bride with the perfect gift: Holy Communion.

Here is where our Lord promised to be found in the days and years to come. He promised to be with us always in spirit, but he also promised to give us, in a heavenly and miraculous way, his very body and blood in Holy Communion. This is the very same body and blood given and shed on that cross standing atop Golgotha - “the place of a skull.” So much of our Christian faith cannot be seen or verified with our eyes. We cannot touch, taste, see or smell it. We are to accept what we are told by faith. In Baptism and in the Lord’s Supper, our merciful God connected tangible elements to the gospel – the means of grace. He gave us something that occupies space – something we could actually handle. We should not need such visible reminders, but our merciful God has given them to us in love.

It is true, as we have said, that some have gone to heaven without ever having communed. Yet when the “nuts and bolts” of life get really tough, how sweet it is to have the leveraging power of “the cheater bar.” - the strengthening and assurance offered in The Supper. In fact until we reach heaven we will most likely never even realize just what great spiritual benefit we have gained from the Lord’s Supper. Though Holy Communion does not store up forgiveness for us, it most certainly makes us spiritually stronger when we eat and drink in faith. Just as something as simple as the flu can be deadly to the weak and infirm, so too simple temptations can be devastating to those who are weak and sickly in the faith. Some argue that communion should be reserved for desperate times. How many of you feel like exercising when you are sick? Is the deathbed the place for calisthenics? Obviously not. The Lord gave us this Supper for our strengthening and conditioning. Spiritually strong and healthy Christians find it much easier to handle the virus of temptation.

Finally, Jesus gave us this last word in his instructions on how to use *his* Supper: **“Do this in remembrance of me.”** Here again we see the love and selflessness of our Savior shining through. Our Lord did not give us this encouragement for *his* sake, as though he was afraid we might forget him. He spoke these words for *our* sakes. “Remembering Christ” does not mean that we are to remember in the way a friend or loved one remembers to place flowers on a grave. What Jesus wants remembered each time we commune is the event where he offered his body and blood as the once and for all payment for the sins of the world. Here we see the

very heart of Jesus' gift to us in Holy Communion; here we see the source of the strength he offers to his children on earth – the increase and personal application of the power of his love. When we find ourselves laboring in a sinful world, burdened by our own sins and unfaithfulness, then think of Christ. Call to mind the blood-stained cross, and see there the payment rendered for your own sins, as well as the sins of the whole world. Holy Communion thus focuses us neither on what we do, nor on what remains undone. It points always to what *has been completed*. We have full forgiveness of sins. Holy Communion seals to each of us this fact in a most special way. Thanks and praise to our most merciful God for this tremendous gift, freely given to his needy children. Amen.

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## Maundy Thursday Service – April 2, 2015

### The Opening Hymn (311)

### Invocation

**Pastor:** *In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*

**Congregation:** *(Spoken) Amen.*

### Confession and Absolution (TLH 318)

**P:** *Acknowledging that we stand in the presence of our Holy God we humble ourselves, and in true repentance we confess our sins:*

**All:** *Before Thee, God, who knowest all, with grief and shame I prostrate fall.  
I see my sins against Thee, Lord, the sins of thought, of deed, and word.  
They press me sore; I cry to Thee: O God, be merciful to me!*

*O Lord, my God, to Thee I pray; oh, cast me not in wrath away!  
Let Thy good Spirit ne'er depart, but let Him draw to Thee my heart  
That truly penitent I be: O God, be merciful to me!*

**P:** *Jesus Christ himself has been punished for your sins. God the Father has placed upon Jesus the iniquity of us all. According to His authority, and by His command, I announce to you the divine decree of our God that all of your sins are forgiven, in the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

**All:**

*O Jesus, let Thy precious blood be to my soul a cleansing flood.  
Turn not, O Lord, Thy guest away, but grant that justified I may  
Go to my house at peace with Thee: O God, be merciful to me!*

### The Reading of the Passion History

### The Apostolic Creed

I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth.

And in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord,  
Who was conceived by the Holy Spirit,  
born of the virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate,  
was crucified, died, and was buried.

He descended into hell.

The third day He rose again from the dead.

He ascended into heaven

and is seated at the right hand of God the Father almighty.

From there He will come to judge the living and the dead.

I believe in the Holy Spirit,  
the holy Christian Church  
the communion of saints,  
the forgiveness of sins  
the resurrection of the body,  
and the life everlasting. Amen.

### The Pre Sermon Hymn (33)

**The Sermon** – *The theme for our devotions this Lenten Season is*

**"We See Jesus"**

*(Please turn to the back page for this evening's service details)*

**The Response** – (TLH Hymn 138 v5)

**My Savior, I behold Thee with faith's enlightened eye;  
Of Thee no foe can rob me, his threats I can defy.  
Within my heart abiding, as Thou, O Lord, in me,  
Death can no longer frighten nor part my soul from Thee.  
Amen.**

### The Offering

### The Prayer of the Day

### The Lord's Prayer

### The Christian Questions and Distribution (Hymn 163)

### The Benediction

**P:** *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
And the love of God the Father,  
And the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.*

**C:** **Amen, Amen, Amen.** *(Sung by all)*

### The Closing Hymn (316 1,4-5)

### Silent Prayer

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**Announcements** *[All are invited to remain for fellowship and light refreshments.]*