

# Lent 2010 – We Preach Christ Crucified

## *"Ours in the Lord's Supper"*

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

*Naught have I, O Christ to offer, naught but Thee, my highest Good.  
Naught have I, O Lord, to proffer but Thy crimson-colored blood.  
Thy death on the cross hath Death wholly defeated  
And thereby my righteousness fully completed;  
Salvation's white raiments I there did obtain,  
And in them in glory with Thee I shall reign. (TLH 366 v.6)*

The theme for our meditations this Lenten season has been ***"We Preach Christ Crucified."*** This evening we continue to explore and expand that theme as we are reminded that that very "Christ Crucified" is given to us in a special, miraculous manner in the Lord's Supper. The text that will form the basis for our meditation is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the Eleventh Chapter:

***1 Corinthians 11:23-26*** *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; <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. Humbly imploring our God to once again bless us through the study of these words, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Fellow Christians:

We have arrived at Holy Week – clearly a time for sober reflection on the part of humankind. The unbelieving world, of course, cannot be expected to grasp the significance of this week and the events of this week, but Christians can and do. While the godless look on the events we commemorate with puzzlement, condescension, even ridicule, not so among us.

We take our cue from Jesus, don't we? Scripture tells us that there is ***"a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."*** (Ecclesiastes 3:4) Jesus taught us that this is not the time for laughing and dancing; it is a time for stone cold sober reflection – serious times for serious people. Jesus knew full well the events that were about to unfold later that very night. He knew that the horrible end was near, for he was about to be betrayed into the hands of his mortal enemies and was about to be put to death. More than even that, he was about to suffer the full fury of God the Father's divine wrath over against sin. He was about to be abandoned by both God and man. There simply are no more serious conditions. If any time, any set of circumstances calls for seriousness, this is it.

A generation after the death of Martin Luther, the Church was blessed with a man who came to be known as "the second Martin" – Martin Chemnitz. Too little thanks is given to God for the gift of this great defender of the faith. One of his many contributions was a marvelous treatise on the Lord's Supper. In the introduction of that work he summed up the gravity of the setting with these words:

*"The Son of God commended to His church the words of institution of the Supper in the form of a last will and testament – at a time of high emotion, with most fervent prayer, and under the most serious circumstances on the night in which he was betrayed. Therefore these words should be observed with*

*the greatest reverence and piety and in the fear of the Lord by all people, for they are the words of the testament of the Son of God."*

Jesus, again, obviously recognized the times and acted appropriately. Knowing that the end was near, he also recognized that this was the time to speak clearly - the time to use precise language that could not possibly be misunderstood. What he was giving to his disciples there in the upper room was his last will and testament. Even you and I today can appreciate that such events and such binding "verbal documents" require precision and clarity. The whole point of a last will and testament is to make certain that your wishes are both revealed to and understood by your survivors. That is why legal documents of this sort strive for such precision and clarity. The individual wants his wishes to be understood and carried out.

Understanding the situation as he did, Jesus on this night used some of the clearest language of his ministry. He was always precise, but at times he spoke in a sort of a code we have come to know as parables. By using parables he was able to communicate with the believing faithful, even while his words and teaching escaped his unbelieving enemies, even if they were right there listening to him. So, for example, he did not say, "Kill me and I will be raised from the dead on the third day" (which could and would have been used against him by his enemies.) He said, "**Destroy this temple and I will build it again in three days.**" Even those words they tried to use against him, but were unable to use them effectively.

He did not use that form of teaching or communication here – not in the Upper Room, not on Maundy Thursday. Jesus knew full well that terrible times lay ahead. He knew that the Shepherd was about to be stricken and that the sheep would be scattered. One disciple would soon be a bloody disgusting corpse at the bottom of a rocky ravine, another would soon publicly disown him, and yet another would flee naked in the Garden. All would be filled with terror and despair. This Jesus knew, which is why here he used words that could not be misunderstood without willful distortion: "**Take eat... Take drink... This is my body... This is my blood...**" Just as a last will and testament today uses specifics rather than generalities, so also Jesus in his last will and testament used precise words according to their universally understood meanings to give every single human being that would follow a crystal clear indication of his will.

What was that will? What is it that Jesus sought to convey first to his disciples in the upper room and then down through the ages to you and me? The simple answer is his unconditional love. He made it clear that the Supper that he was instituting only gave, never demanded. It was an ongoing reminder of God's love and forgiveness, never a requirement or claim. That's what wills do, isn't it? They don't demand or require; they give. Nor was this giving restricted just to those disciples in the upper room. We know this both from the words and timing (or history) of our text.

The words of our text were written almost a generation after the death of Christ – about 30 year or so after the events of Maundy Thursday. Note that virtually the same words that he used on Maundy Thursday were taught here by Jesus himself to the Apostle Paul many years after Jesus had risen and ascended. This proves that the gift, the promise, was still in force and still extended to the Christians of Paul's day. This tells us that these promises were intended to reach down through the ages to countless more than just the disciples, extending also to us on this night almost 2000 years later. Jesus' words "**This do, as often as...**" were purposely and precisely open-ended. The gift that he gave on Maundy Thursday he gave to the entire Christian Church to be enjoyed until time itself came to an end.

Why did Jesus make this his last will and testament, and why did he see to it that this gift extended also to you and me so many years later? The obvious answer is that Jesus knew that we would need this gift just as much as did the disciples of his own day. He knew that you and I would struggle and suffer, that you and I would be tempted and tormented with doubts and fears. He knew that we would occasionally need something intimately personal and unmistakably individualized if we were to enjoy the comfort of forgiveness and freedom from guilt that he wants to be ours.

When, for example, your called servant announces on a Sunday morning the Lord's own decree that your sins are forgiven, those words are announced to a crowd. Jesus knew that individuals can get lost in a crowd; that is, individuals can come to imagine that the forgiveness pronounced applies in a general way to most, but not necessarily in a specific way to every individual. You and I see our sin from the inside, and we often tend to imagine that our sin is worse than that of our neighbor. That is what happens when individual Christians do not experience the comfort and assurance that God intends for them in the general absolution on any given Sunday morning.

God's remedy for this problem is the Lord's Supper.

While the regular Sunday service absolution is certainly intended to give comfort and assurance to *every single repentant Christian*, the personal and individual nature of the Lord's Supper absolutely mandates the inclusion of every single communicant. There simply is no way for the sinner to imagine that he is somehow excluded from the Lord's gracious pronouncement of forgiveness when the very body and blood are so personally received. Since we are sensory creatures, Jesus made certain that every sense would be assured. We hear, we touch, we taste, we smell, we see that I too am included. Christ body and blood were not just given for others; they were given also for me.

Understand also that this means that Holy Communion wasn't given because of our strength and spiritual prowess; it was instituted by Christ because of our obvious weakness. Can a human being be saved without ever once having communed? Of course. **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."** (Acts 16:31) Nonetheless the Lord himself gave us this special gift. Why, and what should we learn from the very fact that he instituted this sacrament?

Many Christians over the years have expressed their own private spiritual terror at the thought of going to communion *because they felt their sins were too great or too grievous*. Although that *sounds* like a very exemplary Christian demonstration of humility, it isn't. In fact it's sort of like refusing to go to the doctor because you are too sick. The simple fact is Jesus' goodness is far greater than your sin. It is especially in Holy Communion that the Lord reaches out to us, calling, **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."** (Matthew 11:28-29)

Note also the entire direction of our text for this evening – the direction of Holy Communion itself. When Jesus says, **"Do this in remembrance of Me"** he is neither pointing you towards further self-condemnation nor giving you a command or an ordinance that you must carry out. He is extending an invitation. He is inviting you to stop looking at your own sinful failures and to remember instead exactly what he accomplish *for you* on the cross of Calvary. And not what "you" as a group are supposed to remember; "you" as an individual. Just you. You are thereby invited to remember – when you receive his body and blood – that the full debt that you owed for your sins was paid in full by the very body and blood that you are receiving. That is how we are to "remember Jesus" in the sacrament. It is an invitation to bring to mind what Jesus has done and to thereby gain personal comfort and assurance.

Jesus used such clear, exact language precisely because he wanted absolutely no doubt to remain in your head or in your heart that you do indeed stand before him now without even one sin on your account. The body and blood give evidence in a most special manner that you have been washed clean.

Take comfort then in your Savior's last will and testament. There find an extra measure of assurance that **"there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."** Jesus has sealed the promise with his own body and blood. Taste and see that the Lord is good! Amen.

# Lent 2010 – We Preach Christ Crucified

## *"Ours in the Lord's Supper"*

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

*Naught have I, O Christ to offer, naught but Thee, my highest Good.  
Naught have I, O Lord, to proffer but Thy crimson-colored blood.  
Thy death on the cross hath Death wholly defeated  
And thereby my righteousness fully completed;  
Salvation's white raiments I there did obtain,  
And in them in glory with Thee I shall reign. (TLH 366 v.6)*

The theme for our meditations this Lenten season has been ***"We Preach Christ Crucified."*** This evening we continue to explore and expand that theme as we are reminded that that very "Christ Crucified" is given to us in a special, miraculous manner in the Lord's Supper. The text that will form the basis for our meditation is found in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, the Eleventh Chapter:

***1 Corinthians 11:23-26*** *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; <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.*

These are the verbally inspired words of our God. Humbly imploring our God to once again bless us through the study of these words, so we pray, ***"Sanctify us through your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."*** Amen.

Fellow Christians:

We have arrived at Holy Week – clearly a time for sober reflection on the part of humankind. The unbelieving world, of course, cannot be expected to grasp the significance of this week and the events of this week, but Christians can and do. While the godless look on the events we commemorate with puzzlement, condescension, even ridicule, not so among us.

We take our cue from Jesus, don't we? Scripture tells us that there is ***"a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance."*** (Ecclesiastes 3:4) Jesus taught us that this is not the time for laughing and dancing; it is a time for stone cold sober reflection – serious times for serious people. Jesus knew full well the events that were about to unfold later that very night. He knew that the horrible end was near, for he was about to be betrayed into the hands of his mortal enemies and was about to be put to death. More than even that, he was about to suffer the full fury of God the Father's divine wrath over against sin. He was about to be abandoned by both God and man. There simply are no more serious conditions. If any time, any set of circumstances calls for seriousness, this is it.

A generation after the death of Martin Luther, the Church was blessed with a man who came to be known as "the second Martin" – Martin Chemnitz. Too little thanks is given to God for the gift of this great defender of the faith. One of his many contributions was a marvelous treatise on the Lord's Supper. In the introduction of that work he summed up the gravity of the setting with these words:

*"The Son of God commended to His church the words of institution of the Supper in the form of a last will and testament – at a time of high emotion, with most fervent prayer, and under the most serious circumstances on the night in which he was betrayed. Therefore these words should be observed with*

*the greatest reverence and piety and in the fear of the Lord by all people, for they are the words of the testament of the Son of God."*

Jesus, again, obviously recognized the times and acted appropriately. Knowing that the end was near, he also recognized that this was the time to speak clearly - the time to use precise language that could not possibly be misunderstood. What he was giving to his disciples there in the upper room was his last will and testament. Even you and I today can appreciate that such events and such binding "verbal documents" require precision and clarity. The whole point of a last will and testament is to make certain that your wishes are both revealed to and understood by your survivors. That is why legal documents of this sort strive for such precision and clarity. The individual wants his wishes to be understood and carried out.

Understanding the situation as he did, Jesus on this night used some of the clearest language of his ministry. He was always precise, but at times he spoke in a sort of a code we have come to know as parables. By using parables he was able to communicate with the believing faithful, even while his words and teaching escaped his unbelieving enemies, even if they were right there listening to him. So, for example, he did not say, "Kill me and I will be raised from the dead on the third day" (which could and would have been used against him by his enemies.) He said, "**Destroy this temple and I will build it again in three days.**" Even those words they tried to use against him, but were unable to use them effectively.

He did not use that form of teaching or communication here – not in the Upper Room, not on Maundy Thursday. Jesus knew full well that terrible times lay ahead. He knew that the Shepherd was about to be stricken and that the sheep would be scattered. One disciple would soon be a bloody disgusting corpse at the bottom of a rocky ravine, another would soon publicly disown him, and yet another would flee naked in the Garden. All would be filled with terror and despair. This Jesus knew, which is why here he used words that could not be misunderstood without willful distortion: "**Take eat... Take drink... This is my body... This is my blood...**" Just as a last will and testament today uses specifics rather than generalities, so also Jesus in his last will and testament used precise words according to their universally understood meanings to give every single human being that would follow a crystal clear indication of his will.

What was that will? What is it that Jesus sought to convey first to his disciples in the upper room and then down through the ages to you and me? The simple answer is his unconditional love. He made it clear that the Supper that he was instituting only gave, never demanded. It was an ongoing reminder of God's love and forgiveness, never a requirement or claim. That's what wills do, isn't it? They don't demand or require; they give. Nor was this giving restricted just to those disciples in the upper room. We know this both from the words and timing (or history) of our text.

The words of our text were written almost a generation after the death of Christ – about 30 year or so after the events of Maundy Thursday. Note that virtually the same words that he used on Maundy Thursday were taught here by Jesus himself to the Apostle Paul many years after Jesus had risen and ascended. This proves that the gift, the promise, was still in force and still extended to the Christians of Paul's day. This tells us that these promises were intended to reach down through the ages to countless more than just the disciples, extending also to us on this night almost 2000 years later. Jesus' words "**This do, as often as...**" were purposely and precisely open-ended. The gift that he gave on Maundy Thursday he gave to the entire Christian Church to be enjoyed until time itself came to an end.

Why did Jesus make this his last will and testament, and why did he see to it that this gift extended also to you and me so many years later? The obvious answer is that Jesus knew that we would need this gift just as much as did the disciples of his own day. He knew that you and I would struggle and suffer, that you and I would be tempted and tormented with doubts and fears. He knew that we would occasionally need something intimately personal and unmistakably individualized if we were to enjoy the comfort of forgiveness and freedom from guilt that he wants to be ours.

When, for example, your called servant announces on a Sunday morning the Lord's own decree that your sins are forgiven, those words are announced to a crowd. Jesus knew that individuals can get lost in a crowd; that is, individuals can come to imagine that the forgiveness pronounced applies in a general way to most, but not necessarily in a specific way to every individual. You and I see our sin from the inside, and we often tend to imagine that our sin is worse than that of our neighbor. That is what happens when individual Christians do not experience the comfort and assurance that God intends for them in the general absolution on any given Sunday morning.

God's remedy for this problem is the Lord's Supper.

While the regular Sunday service absolution is certainly intended to give comfort and assurance to *every single repentant Christian*, the personal and individual nature of the Lord's Supper absolutely mandates the inclusion of every single communicant. There simply is no way for the sinner to imagine that he is somehow excluded from the Lord's gracious pronouncement of forgiveness when the very body and blood are so personally received. Since we are sensory creatures, Jesus made certain that every sense would be assured. We hear, we touch, we taste, we smell, we see that I too am included. Christ body and blood were not just given for others; they were given also for me.

Understand also that this means that Holy Communion wasn't given because of our strength and spiritual prowess; it was instituted by Christ because of our obvious weakness. Can a human being be saved without ever once having communed? Of course. **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved."** (Acts 16:31) Nonetheless the Lord himself gave us this special gift. Why, and what should we learn from the very fact that he instituted this sacrament?

Many Christians over the years have expressed their own private spiritual terror at the thought of going to communion *because they felt their sins were too great or too grievous*. Although that *sounds* like a very exemplary Christian demonstration of humility, it isn't. In fact it's sort of like refusing to go to the doctor because you are too sick. The simple fact is Jesus' goodness is far greater than your sin. It is especially in Holy Communion that the Lord reaches out to us, calling, **"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. <sup>29</sup> Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."** (Matthew 11:28-29)

Note also the entire direction of our text for this evening – the direction of Holy Communion itself. When Jesus says, **"Do this in remembrance of Me"** he is neither pointing you towards further self-condemnation nor giving you a command or an ordinance that you must carry out. He is extending an invitation. He is inviting you to stop looking at your own sinful failures and to remember instead exactly what he accomplish *for you* on the cross of Calvary. And not what "you" as a group are supposed to remember; "you" as an individual. Just you. You are thereby invited to remember – when you receive his body and blood – that the full debt that you owed for your sins was paid in full by the very body and blood that you are receiving. That is how we are to "remember Jesus" in the sacrament. It is an invitation to bring to mind what Jesus has done and to thereby gain personal comfort and assurance.

Jesus used such clear, exact language precisely because he wanted absolutely no doubt to remain in your head or in your heart that you do indeed stand before him now without even one sin on your account. The body and blood give evidence in a most special manner that you have been washed clean.

Take comfort then in your Savior's last will and testament. There find an extra measure of assurance that **"there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus."** Jesus has sealed the promise with his own body and blood. Taste and see that the Lord is good! Amen.