

# Maundy Thursday Sermon – 2024

## “Today Needs Tomorrow”

Text: Matthew 26:26-30

May the comfort and strength afforded us in Holy Communion result also in an increased love for those souls who do not yet know Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, the story is told of a woman who called her pastor one evening, 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.

A cheater bar is a length of pipe that fits over a ratchet or breaker bar to increase the torque you can apply to break loose a rusty nut or bolt. Through the physics of mechanical advantage, it makes turning a stubborn nut or bolt much easier. It's a force multiplier.

On this special evening, we celebrate and thank our God for His gift of Holy Communion – God's own spiritual "force multiplier." As the cheater bar is to the ratchet, so also Holy Communion is to faith. Can you loosen a bolt with just a ratchet and socket? Usually. Can you loosen a bolt with just a 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 this the night before he was killed. Yet we do Christ a disservice whenever we confuse what Jesus did for us on this night with what he did for us *on the cross*. 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 a *confusing* of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. This evening we seek to clear away that confusion under the theme: "Today Needs Tomorrow." 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." 27 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 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." 30 ¶ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

This is God's Word. With complete confidence and trust in the truth and power of these words we seek to gain our Lord's promised strength and comfort through their study. To this end we pray, **"Sanctify us by your Truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth!"** Amen.

There are many examples in the Christian faith where "today needs tomorrow"; that is, where an event provides no real advantage without that which followed after. Jesus' entry into our world on Christmas Day, for example, would have been of no benefit to us had it not been followed by all of the "tomorrows" where Jesus lived a perfect life and then sacrificed that perfect life as our substitutionary sin payment.

Holy Week was no different. Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday as King and Savior. He was, of course, both, but Palm Sunday needed the tomorrows of the rest of that week to demonstrate just what sort of King and Savior he was. Good Friday needed Saturday to fulfill the prophecy that Jesus would remain in the tomb for three days. Saturday clearly needed the tomorrow of Easter Sunday for Jesus to be raised from the dead.

This evening, Maundy Thursday, we focus on this day's need for the day that follows – Good Friday.

On Maundy Thursday our Lord did three things of note and importance: He washed his disciples' feet, he gave us the **"New Commandment"** to love one another, and he instituted the Lord's Supper. None of these three things can really be understood without a rock-solid understanding of what Jesus did the next day – on Good Friday. In fact none of those three things make any sense at all apart from Good Friday. It is only in understanding Jesus' **"It is finished!"** from the cross that we can know with certainty that nothing he did on the previous day represents some requirement for salvation placed on Christians. We look then at the three from this perspective.

When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he thereby gave them an example of the humble nature of the service they would be called upon to perform. To imagine that Jesus here gave us a new commandment that must now be obeyed is to ignore the facts of

Good Friday. On the cross, Jesus did not say, "*I am finished!*" He said, "***It is finished!***" That means that *the work of our salvation* has been completed. The debt of sin has been paid. God and man are reconciled. We know that this is what Jesus meant both from the plain words he spoke and from the tearing of the curtain in the temple at the moment of Jesus' death. That veil had separated the Holy of Holies (or Most Holy Place) in the temple from the rest of the temple. Beyond this veil no one was permitted except the High Priest once each year on the Day of Atonement. The fact that this barrier was effectively removed at the moment of Jesus' death was God's pronouncement that Jesus had won reconciliation between God and man. The barrier of sin was removed by Jesus' perfect life and innocent death. When Jesus said, "***It is finished!***" there can be no doubt as to what he meant: No obligations remain for mankind to fulfill. The barrier of sin has been removed. God and man are reconciled. Believing, you will live. Nothing is left for you to add.

The second thing Jesus did on Maundy Thursday actually explains the first. The "New Commandment" he gave to the Church was "new" in the sense not of *additional* but *different*. It was Jesus' summary of what our attitude ought to be in view of the fact that he has paid the bill in full for our sins. The "***It is finished!***" tells us that the new command to "***love one another***" is not the kind of command that demands and threatens. It is a summary of the attitude of heart that he would see in his children.

The third thing Jesus did on Maundy Thursday was to institute Holy Communion. Here in particular it is a profound mistake to consider the Lord's Supper apart from Good Friday, effectively turning the Lord's Supper into the third law Jesus gave on this night. The "***It is finished!***" tells us, again, that forgiveness *has been secured* for us. The debt is paid. Good Friday teaches us that Jesus did not give us the Lord's Supper as an outward ritual to earn for ourselves the forgiveness he has already earned. It was given to remind and assure Christians of all ages of just what *has been accomplished* for us and *is our ongoing constant possession* through faith alone in what Jesus alone accomplished on Good Friday.

What Jesus accomplished on Good Friday is the source of our confidence, peace, and joy. Those priceless gifts can only come from trusting the goodness, the perfection, of what Jesus has already accomplished for us. That is our hope and confidence as we walk day by day and step by step closer to the final meeting with our Maker. Our confidence on this Maundy Thursday is in what Jesus accomplished for us tomorrow. The today of Maundy Thursday absolutely relies on the tomorrow of Good Friday.

Yet how can the peace and confidence of Good Friday remain in our hearts? How can we know that what our Savior has begun in us will be carried out to the bitter end. In other words, we desire the confidence in knowing not only what Jesus *has* done for us but also what he *will* do for us. That's what Holy Communion is all about. Holy Communion is where our Lord promised to visit us with his true body and blood to give us the pure, bold confidence of sins forgiven – once and for all. Here he offers strengthening and assurance by giving us, personally and individually, the very body and blood by which he earned our forgiveness. We are to hear the words "***Given and shed for you***" and know that on the cross Jesus also paid for *my* sins. The Lord's Supper is therefore the merciful gift of an understanding Savior – a Savior who knows how weak we are and how great and constant are our needs. It is his ever-present reminder: *I have already done what needed to be done. Forgiveness is yours. Look to me and believe.* This is exactly what Jesus was telling us to do when he said, "***This do in remembrance of me.***"

The disciples were surely puzzled by these words on Thursday – because they needed Friday.

Holy Communion is not therefore how or where our forgiveness is earned. Nor is it how or where that forgiveness becomes our own personal possession. That happens at conversion. We are given full and complete forgiveness 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 our sins. In fact the core principal of the Christian faith is that God regards faith (trust in the sin-payment of his Son Jesus) as the only acceptable alternative to a lifetime of sinless obedience. <sup>ESV</sup>(**Romans 4:5**) "***And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.***" Paul was speaking here about how Abraham was not considered righteous because of his actions but because of his faith in God's Promised Savior. To make sure that all would know that this is how all of us, not just Abraham, are saved, he added, "***That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.'***" <sup>23</sup> ***But the words 'it was counted to him' were not written for his sake alone,*** <sup>24</sup> ***but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,*** <sup>25</sup> ***who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.***"<sup>ESV</sup>(Romans 4:22-25)

When God sees faith in Jesus in the human heart, he regards that individual as sinless, holy, forgiven. Forgiveness is therefore our complete, uninterrupted possession as long as that faith remains. We do not therefore need that which we already have, we need only the comfort and assurance that forgiveness is, in fact, ours through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Again from 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."** The only way there could now be **"no condemnation for those who are in (that is, have faith in) Christ Jesus"** is that they have no sin in God's sight – as also the second half of the passage tells us: **"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, never partial or "piecemeal." You have it full and complete or you do not have it at all.

This is exactly how and why "today needs tomorrow" – Maundy Thursday needs Good Friday. On Thursday the disciples were undoubtedly puzzled by Jesus' **"This is my body...this is my blood...given and shed...this do in remembrance of me."** Not so much after Friday, and certainly not thereafter. On Good Friday they witnessed the "giving" and the "shedding," and they had no doubt what the Holy Supper was supposed to bring to mind. The very body and blood of our Savior Jesus, that we are here receiving, are the very body and blood he gave to secure our forgiveness. That payment has been made. We believe. We are forgiven.

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 the Lord's Supper, as in Baptism, our merciful God connected the gospel to tangible elements. 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, for when the "nuts and bolts" of life get really tough, what a blessing to have the leveraging power of "the cheater bar" or "force multiplier" – the *personal* and *individual* strengthening and assurance offered in Holy Communion. The personal reception of his body and blood reminds us that Jesus did not just die for the sins of the world, he died for *my* sins. Not just the world's sin debt has been paid, *my* debt has been paid.

When you find yourself laboring in this sinful world, burdened by your own sins and unfaithfulness, then come to this Supper and remember Christ. Call to mind the blood-stained cross and recognize there the payment rendered for your own sins. Let this Holy Communion focus you neither on what you do, nor on what remains undone. Let it remind you always what *has been completed* and what you now possess. You have full forgiveness

of sins through faith alone in Jesus Christ. Holy Communion seals to each of us this fact in a most special way. To which we can only say, *"Thank you, Jesus."* Amen.

## Sermon Text:

<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.*

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

Matthew 26:26-28



# Maundy Thursday

“Today Needs Tomorrow”

St Paul Lutheran Church  
Bismarck, North Dakota

# ST PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E Divide Ave Bismarck, ND 58501  
Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

[www.bismarcklutheran.org](http://www.bismarcklutheran.org)

Mick Johnson – President      Angela Pfennig - Organist  
Michael Roehl – Pastor

**Maudy Thursday Service – March 28, 2024**

**The Opening Hymn** – 306 (*Stanzas 1-4*)

*“Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast Prepared”*

## 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. By His authority, and according to 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, Lord, Thy precious blood is to my soul a cleansing flood.  
You turn not, Lord, Thy guest away, but grant that justified I may  
Go to my house at peace with Thee: God has been merciful to me!*

**The Reading of the Passion History**

**The Confession of Faith**

(Explanation of the 2nd Article from Luther's Small Catechism, Sydow Edition)

**I believe that Jesus Christ, true God,  
begotten of the Father from eternity,  
and also true man,  
born of the virgin Mary, is my Lord.**

He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person,  
purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and from the  
power of the devil,  
not with gold or silver,  
but with His holy, precious blood  
and His innocent suffering and death.

He did this that I should be His very own,  
live under Him in His kingdom,  
and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and joy;  
just as He is risen from death,  
lives and reigns in eternity.  
This is most certainly true.

**The Pre-Sermon Hymn** – 163 (*Stanzas 1-4*)

*“The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord”*

**The Sermon** Text: Matthew 26:26-30

*“Today Needs Tomorrow”*

**The Post-Sermon Hymn** – 163 (*Stanzas 6-9*)

*“The Death of Jesus Christ, Our Lord”*

**The Acceptance into Membership of Chip and Amber Stroschein**

**The Prayer of the Day and The Lord's Prayer**

**The Preparation for Holy Communion** (*The Christian Questions*)

**The Distribution**

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

**The Closing Hymn** – 659

*“Feed Thy Children, God Most Holy”*

**Silent Prayer**

---

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