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Our Saviour Lutheran Church
Maundy Thursday
April 14, 2022

Let us pray...May the words of my mouth and meditations of our hearts be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, for you are our strength and you are most certainly our redeemer. AMEN.

Sisters and brothers in Christ, as we know tonight is Maundy Thursday.

Tonight, as I said, in the announcements is the beginning of the Triduum, which mean "Three Days" in Latin.

The Triduum marks the Christian observance of Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection.

The Triduum consists of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter.

And tonight is the night then in which we remember that Jesus celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples.

It is called the Last Supper, of course, because tomorrow on Good Friday Jesus suffered death on the cross.

The Last Supper is Jesus' last meal with his disciples.

And, we remember that Jesus was celebrating the Passover meal with his disciples during that Last Supper.

We just heard about the Passover meal in our Old Testament reading from Exodus.

But within the context of that Passover meal with his disciples, Jesus did something rather strange.

Jesus took bread and said, "This is my body given for you."

And Jesus took a cup of wine and said, "This is my blood shed for you."

And by those words Jesus transformed the Passover meal into what has become Holy Communion for us Christians.

But what was Jesus doing exactly, when he re-envisioned the Passover meal?

What was Jesus doing when he re-appropriated the Passover meal?

What was Jesus doing when he changed the Passover meal into our Communion meal?

Well, the answer to that question is found in the Words of Institution which we use for Holy Communion.

There is a particular word in that text—in the Words of Institution—there is a particular word to which we probably give very little thought.

But it is word that has been part of the Words of Institution from the very beginnings of the early Church.

Indeed, in our reading from First Corinthians it says, “On the night in which he was betrayed Jesus took a loaf of bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’ And again, after supper, he took the cup and said, ‘This is the new COVENANT in my blood. Do this, in remembrance of me.’”

And it is these words we say every Sunday when we celebrate Holy Communion.

It is these words which we will say again tonight when we celebrate Holy Communion.

And the word of which I want us to take notice in that text is that word COVENANT.

“This cup is the new COVENANT in my blood.”

Have we ever paused to consider what that means?

Have we ever stopped to ponder what is being expressed here with that phrase “new COVENANT”?

What is this new COVENANT? What is the old COVENANT?

What after all is a covenant? Let’s start there. Because we probably can pretty easily define “covenant,” which we know to be a pact or an agreement.

More specifically, we might speak of a covenant as a promise or we could even speak of a covenant as a relationship between two parties.

And the old covenant was that which existed between God's people the Israelites and God's self.

It was a covenant established as far back as Father Abraham in the Bible, but it was affirmed and truly solidified with the exodus of God's people from Egypt and with the giving of the Ten Commandments.

This then is what tonight's reading—from the book of Exodus, from the Gospel of John, and from Paul's letter to Corinth—this is what tonight's readings are all about.

These readings are orbit around the idea of COVENANT, that is God's covenant with God's people.

And “the new COVENANT in Jesus' blood,” refers to the covenant God makes with all people—not just the Israelites—the new COVENANT is the covenant God makes with all people through his Son Jesus Christ and the blood of his cross.”

And this THIS is what Jesus is doing when he transforms the Passover meal into what we know as Holy Communion.

All people are now invited into relationship with God through Jesus Christ.

PAUSE

Now when Jesus during his Last Supper, during that Passover meal, said to his disciples, “This cup is the new COVENANT in my BLOOD,” Jesus was hearkening back to the BLOOD of the former covenant in the Old Testament.

For we remember that the Passover meal was celebrated because God had freed God's people the Israelites from slavery in Egypt.

God had freed God's people from Egypt by the Ten Plagues, the 10th plague being the plague of the first born, when the angel of death swept through the land of Egypt.

And the angel of death was to pass over those homes where the doorposts and the lintel of the door were painted with lamb's blood.

In this case, BLOOD served as a sign of the covenant.

BLOOD served as God's promise that he would not bring death to those Israelite families.

This is what Jewish families remember still today when they celebrate the Passover.

The BLOOD is the sign of the covenant. It is the sign of God's promise. It is the sign of God's relationship with God's people.

And this is what Jesus is hinting at when he says, "This cup is the new covenant in my BLOOD."

But now, Jesus' BLOOD on the cross is the sign of the new covenant.

Yes, BLOOD is the sign of God's grace for God's people.

Yes, BLOOD is the sign of God's liberating work for God's people.

In the story of the Exodus, God liberated God's people from the slavery in Egypt.

But in the story of Jesus death on the cross, God liberated God's people from their enslavement to sin and death.

PAUSE

So, we see then how our Old Testament reading for tonight, and our reading from First Corinthians relate to one another.

But what about our Gospel reading? And, that takes us to the second part of the covenant.

We have observed God's work, his part in the covenant—God is about freeing God's people from that which enslaves them, whether the Egyptian taskmasters in the Old Testament, or the powers of sin and death in the New Testament.

We have observed God work, his part in the covenant, but what about the response of God's people?

What is our part in the covenant?

PAUSE

When God freed the ancient Israelites from Egypt, Moses then led the people into the wilderness.

And it was there in the wilderness that the people of God received the Ten Commandments.

And the Ten Commandments were the means by which the Jewish people were to keep the covenant with God.

Thou shall not kill. Thou shall not commit adultery. Thou shall not steal, nor bear false witness, etc. etc.

We get the picture. If the Israelites kept the commandments, they would be God's people, and God would be their God.

But our Gospel reading tonight tells us that Jesus gives us a new commandment.

A new covenant warrants new commandments. Only we don't get new commandment(S), but we get only one commandment.

But by following this new commandment we fulfill all the other commandments listed in the Ten Commandments.

Jesus tells us that he gives us a new commandment to love one another.

And if we sincerely strive to love our neighbors, we are not going to want to kill them, we are not going to want to harm them physically.

If we sincerely strive to love our neighbors, we are not going to want to lust after our neighbors' spouse.

If we sincerely strive to love our neighbors, we are not going to want to steal from our neighbors, nor lie to our neighbors, so on and so forth.

If we sincerely string to love our neighbors, we will fulfill all that the Ten Commandments would require of us.

But that is not all. For "love" is not a passive word, but an active word.

The Ten Commandments tell us all those things we shouldn't do, but nothing about what we should do.

Jesus' new command to love one another is a proactive command.

Thus, we are called to support the physical well-being of our neighbor.

We are called to help our neighbors in their marital relationship.

We are called to refrain from lying to our neighbor, but to speak well of our neighbor and to always interpret our neighbor's actions in the best possible light.

And, this is actually one of those questions I regularly ask our confirmands when we go through the Ten Commandments during confirmation.

Luther was really helpful in this regard.

In the explanations of the commandments, Luther regularly says that the commandments are NOT just about what we shouldn't do, but they are also about what we should do.

And so, I ask the confirmands, How we are to be proactive with respect to say the fifth commandment, "Thou shall not kill."

How can we help care for the physical well-being of our neighbor?

And so we talk about helping our elderly neighbor with their yard work, or with shoveling snow.

How can we help care for a couple's marital relationship?

And so we talk about babysitting a couple's child so that those parents can go out for dinner and a movie.

How can we help care for our neighbor's possessions?

And so we talk about community watch programs, where neighbors keep a lookout for any suspicious activity in their neighborhood.

Yes, Jesus' command to love one another is a proactive activity.

It is not a passive activity.

We are to be aware of the ways in which we can be intentional about caring for our neighbors, and not just resting on our laurels.

I haven't killed anyone. I haven't stolen anything. I haven't lied to anyone. I'm good with God. But, in truth, Jesus is saying that isn't good enough, "You are supposed to love one another."

PAUSE

But back to the main point of this sermon.

Tonight is the beginning of the Triduum.

Tonight is Maundy Thursday.

But the real significance of tonight is the fact that we are remembering the COVENANT God has established with all people in Christ Jesus.

God had once affirmed a COVENANT with the Israelites through the lamb's blood on the doors of homes.

God had once affirmed a COVENANT with the Israelites at the time of Passover.

And a meal then came into existence to remember that covenant, known as the Passover meal.

And the Ten Commandments were set in stone as the means by which people would keep that COVENANT.

But now, God has established a new COVENANT.

God has established it with the blood of his Son.

And a meal has come into existence to remember this new covenant, a meal known as Holy Communion.

And a new commandment has been established as the means by which we are to respond to God's covenant in Jesus Christ.

We are called to love one another.

And when we do that, Sisters and Brothers in Christ, as we strive to love one another, we will be faithful to our covenant with God.

And we will be God's people, and we will honor the God who has claimed us as his own.

Thanks be to God. Amen.