

Grace: God's undeserved love for each and every one of us. Mercy: God forgiving us our sin for the sake of His Son Jesus Christ. And Peace: peace of heart, peace of mind, peace with God. All of these are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

The portion of Scripture before us this evening is found in Saint Paul's first letter written to the Corinthian Christians, the eleventh chapter beginning at the twentieth verse:

Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. ²¹ For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise

you. ²³ 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; ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ 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." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. ²⁷ Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. ³⁰ For this reason many are weak and sick among you,

and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

Heavenly Father these are Your words and therefore they are the truth. We pray, Lord, that You would increase our faith through them. Amen.

Dear Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb,

Tonight we come together on this Maundy Thursday evening to celebrate, arguably, the most important meal that we will ever eat: the Lord's Supper. So far in our Lenten services we have heard about many meals, both good and bad, that have impacted God's chosen people, and tonight we get the meal that is, again arguably, the most important and the one that truly ties together all of God's children.

It was on this evening nearly 2,000 years ago that Jesus met with His disciples one last time before His death. He brought His disciples together to celebrate the feast one more time, and during this meal, He instituted a more important meal. On Maundy Thursday, the night before Jesus would die, He instated the Lord's Supper... a meal which He gave to His disciples and to us for the forgiveness of all of our sins. It was on Thursday night... It was on a night when His disciples were with Him... It was, as our communion liturgy tells us, *on the night in which our Lord was betrayed.*

I must say, that it was a very brazen act that Judas Iscariot took. He met with Jesus, he supped with Him, he may have taken the Lord's Supper (this we do not know and can only speculate on)... and then he had the audacity to turn Jesus into the authorities to be arrested and eventually killed. Judas, who

had followed Jesus for some time, was now ready to betray His master, His Savior. He went to the chief priests and had a company of soldiers come with him to arrest Jesus. And yet, Jesus knew all of this was going to happen.

Because Jesus knew the events of that night, Jesus made sure to have one last meal with His disciples. It would replace all other meals in terms of importance in their lives and would come to be the one meal that would bind them all together for all time... and yet it took place under less than ideal circumstances.

And you can see a similar picture in Paul's letter that he is writing. Paul is writing to a church which was not taking the Lord's Supper with the respect and awe as it should have been. Paul references that people were coming to church and instead of receiving the Lord's Supper for the forgiveness of their

sins, they were looking to fill their bellies. Instead of coming to receive the blood of Christ shed for them they were coming in order to get intoxicated and then go home. These were people who were not coming to the meal with the best of intentions and these were people who were not coming faithfully to the meal... and at times those people sound like us.

Maybe we do not come to the Lord's Supper to get a full blown three-course meal out of it... but I wonder how many come to communion and have the thought of "ooh, a snack during church." How many of us come to communion without preparing ourselves ahead of time? We don't look to see if communion is going to be served. We do not take notice of the "preparation" material that is found on pages 38 and 39 in the front part of your hymnal. And yet we come to the Lord's Supper.

Maybe we don't come to the Lord's Supper to get drunk or intoxicated and yet in my short time in the ministry I have heard one catechism student explain that she couldn't wait to come to communion so she could have wine. So not only are we not preparing ourselves to come to communion, we are neglecting our children and the proper training of them as to what they are going to receive and the decorum they should exhibit coming to the Lord's Supper.

In fact, about the preparation for the Lord's Supper it is concluded in our catechism and hymnal, "*These questions and answers are no child's play, but are drawn up with great earnestness of purpose by the venerable and pious Dr. Luther for both young and old. Let each one take heed and likewise consider it a serious matter; for St. Paul writes to the Galatians, chapter six: "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked."*

And maybe we have to examine ourselves and see that we are no better than those Corinthians that we read about and mock a little. How could they come to the Lord's Supper so unprepared? How could they not realize what is going on? How could they not come with reverence and awe? And then look at yourself and say the same thing.

And yet dear friends, it is precisely because you are not perfect, that is why you are coming to the Lord's Supper. In fact Luther says, "*The best preparation is that a soul, deeply moved by sins, death, and temptations, hungers and thirsts for healing and strength.*" The best preparation for you coming to the Lord's Supper is to realize that you are a sinner, to thirst for God's forgiveness, and to hunger for the strength that only He can provide.

And it is through the Lord Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that we have the forgiveness

of our sins. Through faith that He lived, died, and rose again for me, I now know that heaven is mine. Through faith...

Faith which God strengthens in me through the Lord's Supper. It is in the Lord's Supper that God gives us the strength that we need to continue in this life and it is in the Lord's Supper that we receive, through faith, the forgiveness of sins that only He can offer us. As Schmeling notes, ***"The Holy Sacrament assures each individual personally of the Gospel declaration of forgiveness. In our weaknesses and failures we often begin to wonder whether we are really forgiven. How can God forgive a wretch like me? Are my sins just too great to be pardoned? In this Supper the Lord Jesus removes our every doubt. As we come to the Lord's Table we are in spirit at Golgotha kneeling before the cross embracing His dying body and drinking from His five bloody wounds."***

Through this sacrament, God forgives us all of our sins.

As our catechism says, ***"The benefit which we receive from such eating and drinking is shown us by these words: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins," namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation."*** It continues, ***"It is not the eating and drinking that does this, but the words here written: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." These words, along with the eating and drinking, are the main thing in the Sacrament; and whoever believes these words has exactly what they say, namely, the forgiveness of sins."***

And it is through faith that we believe that these words are true and that they were spoken by Jesus for me, and for all of His

children. And if we come to the table in an unworthy manner, if we do not believe the words of Jesus as they are before us tonight... we are eating and drinking judgment on ourselves. Just as Paul says, ***“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”*** However, we know that when we come to the Lord’s Supper in faith, we are receiving the very body and blood of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

The picture that the early church uses to describe this is phenomenal and I share it with you: ***They have said that Christ purposely used bread and wine for His Supper. For every kernel of grain has its own body and form, but they are ground together and become one bread. Just so every human being is an individual and a creature apart from others. But in the Sacrament we are, as it were, baked into***

one cake; for there we have the same faith, the same confession, love, and hope... thus the fathers have explained it, and to do so is not wrong. For the Sacrament is to serve as a means to hold the Christians together in the same understanding, doctrine, and faith, so that nobody should be an individual kernel apart from the rest and have his own doctrine and separate faith.

Dear friends in Christ, to come to the Lord’s Supper properly is a most important thing for us to do, and thus why we have instituted the examination before we partake of the Lord’s Supper. Because while proper preparation is not done through outward dress, our outward action does say a lot about our preparation. When we ask ourselves if we confess to be sinners, when we ask if we only believe in Jesus for forgiveness, when we acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine... well then we are examining

ourselves and we are coming to His Supper prepared and worthily.

Thank God that He has given us such an awe-inspiring meal that strengthens our faith in His assurance of our forgiveness. Thank God that He has given us forgiveness of our sins. And thank God that He allows us to partake of the body and blood of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness that only He can offer.

Thanks be to God. Amen.