

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on Thursday of Holy Week. This gives us the opportunity to think about this sacrament. We make use of the Lord's Supper often. It is easy to become unthinking while receiving it. It is good, then, to remember what is going on when we receive the Lord's Supper.

Toward that end, I'd like to talk about three things tonight. First, I'd like to talk about what the Lord's Supper is. Then I'd like to talk about why it is important. Finally, I'd like to talk about who should receive it.

First, what is the Lord's Supper? Jesus defines it. Of the bread he says, "This is my body, which is given for you." Of the wine he says, "This cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." What Jesus says is clear. The bread is his body; the wine is his blood. Although Jesus's words are simple and easily understood, that is not the same thing as believing what he says. Taking Jesus's words literally can seem impossible. Experience seems to teach this.

When you eat the consecrated wafer it tastes like bread, it smells like bread, it looks like bread. The same thing is true for the wine. Our God-given senses tell us that this is bread and wine. Only one of our senses tells us something different, which is our sense of hearing. Our ears tell us what Jesus says. So what are we to do in this situation where our experience says one thing, and God's word and promise says something different? We should go with what God's word and promise says.

This conflict between experience and faith is extremely common in the Bible. Think of the well-known stories. You will almost always find that the people involved are torn between what their experience and their senses are telling them on the one hand, and what God has said and promised on the other.

When Adam and Eve were tempted in the garden it says that the fruit looked good to eat. When God commanded Noah to build the ark, no flood like that had ever happened before nor has one ever happened since. When the Israelites were led by God into the wilderness their senses were telling them that there was nothing to eat and to drink. They thought they were going to die.

Fast forward all the way to Jesus. Even though Jesus told his disciples what was going to happen, when the time came they couldn't believe what Jesus had told them. When they looked at that battered, bloodied worm of a man, they thought that Jesus must have been mistaken. He couldn't be their king. They had thought that he was the king, but their experience made them believe it no longer. They were wrong.

So when it comes to Jesus's words in the Lord's Supper, we should not disbelieve him just because our experience or our other senses tell us something different. We know that God can do powerful things with his Word. We know, for example, that God speaks things into existence. God said, "Let there be light," and there was light. If Jesus says over plain ordinary bread, "This is my body," we should believe it is his body. Same thing with the wine.

Having established that the bread is Jesus's body and the wine is Jesus's blood, why is this important? Think about the context surrounding Jesus's institution of this sacrament. Jesus was only hours away from becoming the atoning sacrifice. Jesus is talking about his sacrifice in the Lord's Supper. Body and

blood are sacrificial terms. In a few hours after the Lord's Supper Jesus would be stripped, beaten, whipped, mocked, and killed. We symbolize the closeness of the Lord's Supper to Jesus's sacrifice by the stripping of the altar that will take place at the end of our service.

Understanding the close connection between this sacrament and Jesus's sacrifice teaches us how we are saved. We are saved through this body and this blood. People have all kinds of ideas about how to be saved, how to be good, how to have a full life, how to be blessed. Amid these many ideas and plans Jesus throws in his two cents: "Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you... Take, drink, this is my blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins."

This is life and salvation. Jesus says in John chapter 6: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." The flesh and the blood of Jesus was sacrificed. Without this flesh and without this blood there is no life. On the other hand, with this flesh and with this blood, there is eternal life.

How do we eat this flesh and drink this blood? First and foremost, we do this through faith in Jesus. When we believe in this saving flesh and blood of the Son of Man we are spiritually eating his flesh and spiritually drinking his blood. All Christians can do this at any time and in any place. Believe in Jesus's flesh and blood and you will be spiritually eating his flesh and spiritually drinking his blood.

However, in addition, anyone who hears Jesus's words in John 6 can easily see how they can be applied to the Lord's Supper. Jesus says whoever eats his flesh and drinks his blood has eternal life. What is the Lord's Supper but the offering of Jesus's body that was sacrificed and Jesus's blood that was shed? Those who receive Jesus's body and blood in the Lord's Supper can certainly apply these words to themselves: "Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day."

The Lord's Supper is Jesus's body and blood. The reason why this is important is because Jesus's body and blood was sacrificed for us. The last thing I'd like to talk about is how this sacrament is "for you." Jesus is rather emphatic in the words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you." "This cup is the New Testament in my blood which is shed for you for the forgiveness of your sins."

We used the service of corporate confession and absolution at the beginning of our service tonight. The words that we heard speak well to this aspect of the Lord's Supper. It said, "This holy Sacrament has been instituted for the special comfort of those who are troubled because of their sin, and who humbly confess their sins, fear God's wrath, and hunger and thirst for righteousness."

This is the "you" of the "for you" in the Lord's Supper. You, who are troubled because of your sins. You, who fear God's wrath. You, who hunger and thirst for righteousness because you haven't got any. What is described there is a pretty poor and miserable sort of person, for whom this sacrament has been instituted as a special comfort.

But maybe you don't feel that way about yourself. Maybe you aren't troubled because of your sin. Maybe you don't fear God's wrath or hunger and thirst for righteousness. That wouldn't be surprising.

This is perhaps the easiest and commonest way that we abuse the Lord's Supper. We receive it by rote--thoughtlessly and carelessly. Receiving the Lord's Supper in this way is an abuse of what Jesus has instituted because he says *this body is for you. This blood is for you.* When you receive the Lord's Supper while not being troubled by your sin, not looking for comfort, you are denying the body and the blood. It is as though you don't need it.

And what might you be thinking about instead? Instead of thinking about what Jesus is doing you might be thinking of who knows what. Isn't it insane that we should think about "who knows what" when the Son of God is giving us his body and his blood that was sacrificed to redeem us from sin, death and the devil? What Jesus said from the cross seems to apply to us quite well: "**Father, forgive us, for we know not what we do!**"

But our inadequacy should not drive us away from the sacrament. Our carelessness and unbelief should show us how badly we need it. It is, as Jesus says so emphatically, "**for us.**" Jesus, unfortunately, did not have the privilege to die for fine, upstanding, pious people. He died for bad people like us. He even died for those who have treated his sacrament thoughtlessly and carelessly.

Therefore, count yourself among those poor and miserable folks who are so desperate. Count yourself among those who have no hope of ever being saved except in the body and blood of this Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

The highlight of our service will be in a few minutes when we receive Jesus's body and blood in the Lord's Supper. What are my words or your words or anybody's words compared to the words that the Son of God says? What he says, he says to you: "**Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you,**" "**Drink of it all of you, this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.**"

May God bless your holy communion with Jesus tonight!