

Devotion for March 26, 2024– Maundy Thursday

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 EHV

Theme: Holy Communion

- 1) Unites us to Christ.
- 2) Unites us with each other.

*<sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

Have you ever just wanted to be held? I often do – even as an adult. However, the comforting embrace I desire most is neither my wife’s (although that too is very nice) nor my parents, children’s, or friends. I want to be held by Jesus and hear him say, "Don't worry about the future. Everything is going to be OK." Haven't you felt the same way?

Even though we will probably have to wait until heaven to get a physical hug from Jesus, did you know that He has provided a way to comfort us with the reassurance we so desperately need? Let us meditate on where and how he does this under the theme: **Holy Communion:** 1) It unites us to Christ. 2) It unites us with each other.

Part One: Holy Communion unites us to Christ.

Our sermon text is part of a section from 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians, in which the Apostle Paul tells Christians not to partake in fellowship meals dedicated to other gods. Why not? Because of the union we share with Christ. While the primary purpose of the apostle’s argument is to warn against unintentional idolatry, I want to focus on the comfort Paul’s description of Holy Communion offers us.

Our text begins: *<sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ?*

The apostle Paul calls the wine of Holy Communion the “cup of blessing” because, when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, he offered a special prayer of thanks to His Father – thereby blessing the bread and wine for all time. This prayerful blessing of the sacrament is why the Lord’s supper is not a mere meal but a communion with Christ’s actual body and blood.

Did you know that none of the four evangelists recorded the words of Jesus’ prayer but simply stated that he “gave thanks”? Why is that important? Because it reminds us that the words of institution that the pastor speaks are not what make Christ’s body and blood reside within the bread and wine. No, the words Jesus said on the eve of his crucifixion are the power behind it. All I accomplish when “blessing” the bread and wine of Communion is to remind you what Christ already did. Yes, Jesus’ unrecorded thanksgiving, spoken moments before distributing the bread and wine of His Supper, makes Holy Communion what it is.

And what, exactly, does Jesus accomplish in Holy Communion? He unites us to himself in the most wonderful of ways, as Paul states:

*<sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?*

In, with, and under the bread and wine of Holy Communion, Jesus has placed himself – giving us the very body and blood he used to purchase our forgiveness on the cross. Could there be any greater gift?

Think of it this way: imagine that an active shooter came into your school when you were a child. As you hid for safety, a young police officer saw you. Knowing that he couldn't get you out of harm's way in time, he gave you his bulletproof vest. Just then, the gunman came in spraying bullets – one of which hit the vest you're wearing. The police officer was able to take down the gunman but got fatally wounded as he did so. His family wanted you to keep the vest so that you would remember how he sacrificed his life to save yours every time you put it on.

If you can imagine such a scenario, you can understand what Jesus is doing for you in Holy Communion. What does it mean to “commune”? It means sharing something or having fellowship with someone. When you go to the Lord's Supper, you “commune,” that is to say, you have fellowship with the very body and blood Jesus used to save you from certain death in hell. It is like putting on the policeman's vest, which I mentioned in the example. And, as we share in Christ's body and blood, God shares with us the blessings Christ won for us when he offered his body and poured out his blood on the cross: forgiveness, life, and salvation.

But here is another thing to remember about Jesus when taking Communion: he is not dead but alive – resurrected to the right hand of God the Father. Therefore, since we commune with Christ's living body and blood, receiving the Lord's Supper is even more intimate and comforting than getting a simple hug. He is really present in the LORD's supper, uniting himself to us in a way that defies all human understanding. Holy Communion is Jesus' way of holding us tightly and saying: “Don't worry. It will all be OK. I have already kept my promise and paid for your sins. My body and blood are meant to remind you of that! And since I have done this, you can rest assured that I will keep the rest of my promises and deliver you to my Father's house, where I am preparing a room for you. Do not worry or fret. I love you. I am with you. I will deliver you.”

Now that we have reviewed the incredible comfort that Holy Communion offers us by uniting us to Christ let us consider how it also unites us with each other.

Part Two: Holy Communion unites us with each other.

Our sermon text continues: *<sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

When Jesus instituted Holy Communion, he intended it to be a family meal in which we partake with fellow believers in Christ. And this, too, is a great comfort. Let me explain why.

When the Holy Spirit brought us to faith, he allowed us to find each other, uniting us in a common belief in the Gospel. He did this so that we could be part of a family — encouraging and being encouraged by one another. Truth be told, the Spirit did more than unite us as a family; he formed us into one body, of which Jesus Christ is the head. When we partake of Holy Communion, we are, therefore, proclaiming our unity. We are confessing our common faith. We are finding our joy in Christ together as one body.

This is how I picture it: having lived most of my adult life away from my parents and siblings, I always treasured the times we could get together for a family meal. Just being with everyone was encouraging. Holy Communion is similar. As we partake of Christ's body and blood, we are united uniquely — encouraging each other as we eat and drink Christ's body and blood.

Later in his letter, Paul will explain how we, as members of one body, ought to use the individual gifts God has given us in loving service toward one another. Do we do this perfectly? Sadly, no. Just like a regular family, our sinful natures often get the better of us, and we fight. For this reason, the apostle Paul encourages us — again and again — to consider who we are in Christ and the unity we share through faith in him. He calls us to repent and look to Him for forgiveness. And, in the peace of our forgiveness, He encourages us to foster that unity with each other. Just as regular dinners together help foster unity within a family, our coming together for Holy Communion does the same for us as a congregation — uniting us to Christ and each other.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this sermon, there are times I wish I could feel Jesus' arm around me and hear him say: "I forgive you. I still love you. Everything is going to be OK." While I probably will not be able to experience a physical hug from Jesus on this side of glory, the LORD has, in fact, given us something better. He has given us Holy Communion: a special meal that unites us to His actual body and blood and reassures us of our forgiveness. It is a meal that unites everyone who confesses a common faith in Christ together as a family. May the Holy Spirit lead us ever to treasure Holy Communion for the great blessing that it is — moving us to approach the LORD's table together with repentant and joyful hearts. Amen.