

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-29

For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

When my family left Alaska in 1986, the other pastors in the state gave us a gift to remember them by. It was a gold pan! You may have seen it hanging in my office. Can any of us ever forget the people we've treasured in our past? I hope not. But one of the ironies of life is the human capacity to put the past in the past. I suppose it's necessary. We can't spend our entire lives aching to see people we once knew and loved. Our brains are hardwired to move on. Yet sometimes we want to recall those people and their love, even if it hurts to miss them. The gifts they've given us help bring back all that we knew and treasured about those people. So that we might always treasure what Jesus has done for us, he gave us something to remember him by—the Lord's Supper. Tonight, we stand with Jesus in the upper room, and we hear him tell us:

Do this in remembrance of me.

- 1. Holy Communion is a real presence remembrance.**
- 2. Communion is a gospel remembrance.**

1. Holy Communion is a real presence remembrance.

How do we choose the tokens of affection we give to the people we love? Sometimes we choose things that have personal meaning. When someone close to us dies, we often receive possessions of theirs that we associate closely with him or her. Sometimes we choose things that just "fit" – that gold pan fit because it reminds us of the people we served with there. But sometimes you kind of scratch your head when you see the gift someone gives you. Is that the case in the Lord's Supper? Now, I'm sure you're saying, "Of course not!" We treasure the gift Jesus gave us. But Jesus said, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" What is the "this"? It's the eating bread and drinking wine. Jesus wasn't trying to remind his disciples of the good times they had had together. Jesus called the bread his body and the wine his blood. How would bread and wine symbolize Jesus' body and blood?

The truth is, they wouldn't. If Jesus were looking for a symbol for his body and blood, he could've chosen something more obvious, but Jesus chose bread and wine. They were on the table in front of him because he was celebrating the Passover. Two elements of that meal were unleavened bread and wine. However, the heart of the Passover was the lamb. At the first Passover, the blood of a lamb painted on the doorframe saved the lives of God's people. And the Passover meal commemorated that deliverance for the next 1,500 years until Jesus gave his own life and by his blood delivered the entire world from sin and death. So the meat of the lamb would've made a great symbol for the body of Jesus, the Lamb of God, but that's not what he chose for Holy Communion. He chose the unleavened bread and the wine. Why? In the case of the bread it might be because in the Bible yeast often represents sin. Jesus came here as a man without sin, represented by bread without yeast. The wine perhaps recalls the spilling of his blood, because drops of wine are spilled at various points in the celebration of the Passover. But that's conjecture. God doesn't tell us why he chose bread and wine, but he does tell us what they really are.

Jesus said, "*This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.*" And "*This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.*" Jesus put his real body and blood into Holy Communion. Now that doesn't mean the bread and wine are gone. They're present too. But Jesus' body and blood make this the perfect gift. And it's ours when we "do this." In other words, the body and blood of Jesus are not present on the altar right now, but when we come forward and receive the Sacrament, we receive the real body and blood of Christ in, with, and under

the real bread and wine. When we're done, all that will be left on the altar is bread and wine, but we will have received the gift Jesus gave.

Jesus gave this gift to us. St. Paul says, *"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you."* When did Paul receive Holy Communion from the Lord? Not on Maundy Thursday. Paul was not yet a disciple then. If he was in Jerusalem, he was eating with Pharisees. If he was thinking about Jesus at all, he was wishing the authorities would do something about him. Yet Jesus personally passed this on to him. When? Do you remember the story? Paul was traveling to Damascus to arrest Jewish Christians.

Suddenly, Jesus appeared to him, and he made Paul a Christian. After that, the Holy Spirit led Paul into the wilderness and for three years Jesus instructed him there. Jesus told Paul what he had done in the upper room, and he commanded Paul to pass this gift on to every church he founded. Jesus gave this gift to all Christians everywhere.

In our celebration tonight, we will proclaim the Lord's death. We will proclaim that God became man. God the Son joined himself to a human body and soul so that he could die and rise again. We will proclaim that after living a life of perfect service to God, Jesus died to pay for all our sin and weakness. Three days later, he rose to give us eternal life. That life and death and life again are what Jesus gives us in this gift.

We will eat the bread and drink the cup and proclaim Jesus' death until he comes. We will proclaim the forgiveness of sins and life in God's name because when we eat and drink, we share the very body Jesus offered on the cross and the very blood that ran down his face and out of his side. We share the price God paid to free us from death and hell. We call this teaching *real presence*. Jesus' body and blood are really present here in Communion. I can't explain how. I can't whip out a microscope and show it to you. But Jesus tells us this is true. And he tells us to treasure this gift until he returns. Jesus said,

"Do this in remembrance of me." **Communion is a real presence remembrance.**

2. Communion is a gospel remembrance.

Not long before the grandmother of a young mother died, she gave that young mother a set of crystal dishes. One day, one of the young mother's children was swinging on the doors of the cabinet that held that crystal and he dumped it out. It was all destroyed. His mother wept when she lost those tokens of love. The Lord's Supper is more than a token. It's more than just something by which to remember Jesus. It's the visible preaching of the gospel. It's the real body and blood of Christ given to us every time we kneel here.

What if someone abused that? The congregation in Corinth had been abusing the Lord's Supper. Some of them were even getting drunk before they celebrated it. So Paul said, *"So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord."* Do those words send a chill up your spine? What does Paul mean by "unworthy"? Sin makes us unworthy—but Jesus has washed all our sin away. That's what the cross was all about. So only one thing makes us unworthy: unbelief. Only one thing makes us worthy: faith. If we trust in Jesus and in the promises he attaches to Communion, we are worthy. If we don't trust in Jesus, we aren't worthy.

Practically speaking, what are we talking about? An unbeliever can't be a worthy communicant. He can't trust in Jesus to make him perfect in God's sight. In the same way, a Christian who is not repentant can't be worthy. If you're guilty of sin and you refuse to confess your guilt or to turn from your sin, you are unworthy. That's why the drunkenness and the lovelessness of the Corinthian celebration were so wrong. There's one more way to be unworthy. St. Paul says, *"Those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves."* If you do not recognize the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine—if you don't believe in the real presence—you do not receive the blessing God put into this sacrament. Instead, you receive judgment.

Jesus is present in this sacrament whether we believe it or not. We receive Jesus' body and blood when we eat and drink whether we repent of our sins or not. If you receive the sacrament without faith or repentance, the Bible teaches that you

receive judgment instead of forgiveness, death instead of life. That's not only true with the Lord's Supper. It's true anytime I proclaim forgiveness to someone who doesn't recognize his sin. For that reason, it's a very dangerous thing to come to the Lord's Table unprepared.

That's one reason why we practice close or closed Communion. We only admit those who can examine themselves. Paul says, "*Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*" What does that mean? In the hymnal, there's a section called "Personal Preparation for Holy Communion" to help you do it. It really comes down to three questions: Do you know you're a sinner? Do you trust that Jesus paid for your sin and rose to forgive you? Do you trust that his body and his blood are in the bread and wine to give that forgiveness to you personally? If you answer, "Yes, yes, yes," then you are worthy.

Perhaps a question is rising in your mind. What if I haven't been worthy in the past? Am I going to hell? No. Did you receive judgment instead of blessing? Yes. But Jesus didn't give us this gift to torture us with doubt and guilt. He died and paid for all our sin. He gave us Holy Communion to comfort us and to stifle the accusations our own hearts throw at us. That's what it means to do this in remembrance of him. It means remembering that we are forgiven for all our sins, even for all the times we didn't come to Holy Communion in faith. It means hearing Jesus speak to us as we eat and drink. He says, "This is the new covenant." He says, "This is for you." That means he has taken away all our sins. Come, trusting in the forgiveness even of the sins that torment you most. Come, trusting in his promises and receive the blessing of the body and blood of our Lord. Jesus said, "*Do this in remembrance of me.*" **Communion is a gospel remembrance.**

Jesus put his body and his blood into bread and wine. No one could have ever guessed that he would do that, but he did. It would be sad if we didn't come regularly and receive that blessing. It would be sad if we ever forgot what Jesus said or failed to trust in his promise and so rob ourselves of this blessing. This is a treasure from God. It's not like the treasures of this life. Would you ever stop treasuring the gifts of love you've received? It happens. Sometimes, we find something we haven't looked at in years and when we try to remember why we treasured it, it no longer moves us. That cannot happen with Communion, because the power is not emotion. It's not nostalgia. The power is the body and blood of Christ given by Jesus' word and command to take our sins away. That gives us peace, no matter how unfaithful we may have been in the past. **Do this in remembrance of Jesus.**

Amen.