

Written Copy: Mark 14:22-25 "Return to the Table"

Maundy Thursday
Thursday, April 1st, 2021

Text: Mark 14:22-25

²² And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." ²³ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. ²⁴ And he said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." ²⁵ Truly, I say to you, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

The text's intent

Show that Jesus is in charge of all that will follow. As God made flesh He has come to fulfill the original Covenant agreement with His Old Testament Church by perfectly obeying our part of the agreement, and then taking the wrath and punishment we deserve for breaking it. He seals us in the fulfillment of this Covenant by giving to us His body and blood in, with, and under the bread and wine of the Passover Meal. In doing so He transforms the Passover celebration into the reality it was intended to point forward to. Jesus is the ultimate Lamb of Sacrifice and His body and His blood earn for all mankind the right to be declared righteous and deserving to join with the Lord made flesh in His Sacramental Supper now, that is and of itself the foretaste of the eternal feast to come.

Focus Statement:

We are invited to join in this celebratory meal by Christ Himself, through our Baptismal faith which has given to us all that Christ earned for us in His death and resurrection. He is the God who desires to have fellowship with His children and does so in a manner that is safe for us, as we are saints that are still sinners. He is truly present with us in this meal to bring us assurance and strengthened faith that all Christ won for us on the cross is "for me". He is present in His body and blood, which testify that He has won my forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

Like the Disciples we are not worthy of a place at the table of the LORD. As disobedient sinners we should be considered enemies banned from His presence instead of honored dinner guests. As we recognize our sinfulness we doubt where we really stand before Him, if He really can forgive us, and are we really His precious children.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Join Him since we have been invited and made good enough by faith. Enjoy the personal and intimate fellowship we have with Him through this Sacrament, and the intimate fellowship it fosters in our fellow worshipers who share our confession of faith as outlined in the Small Catechism.

Subject Sentence: Declared worthy for the Royal Banquet

Introduction: Invited to Banquet with the Queen

Picture yourself on your average day during the week. It's that lull on the calendar when there are no special occasions or celebrations coming up. You head out to the mailbox and grab the mail, not because you're excited at all by what may be in it. Quite the contrary, you're expecting to see the usual assortment of flyers, advertisements for things you don't need, and of course the obligatory amount of bills. It's a bit chilly out so you don't waste time, you just grab the whole kit and kaboodle from the mailbox and walk back into the house, tossing it on the kitchen counter where you promise you will sort through it soon enough. Soon enough is a very flexible time frame. And it takes more than a few trips walking by the kitchen table before you stop, sit down, and decide to sort through it. The wastepaper basket is by your side, which is where you expect most of what you brought in to end up.

But then, as you are sorting through your mail, one particular piece captures your attention. It's an envelope that is different from all the rest. It's of a heavier construction, and larger in size than the rest of the normal business size envelopes. And how its addressed to you appears to be handwritten yet inscribed with a flowing calligraphy that reminds you of letters you see in the movies. There's no return address, but you can tell that whatever this is, it's from someone special. You carefully open it and find it's an invitation to a Royal Banquet hosted by the Queen of England. You begin to read through the details but then stop, chuckling to yourself, wondering how the Queen has heard about you, let alone how she could expect you to drop everything and travel halfway around the world to attend. It's incredulous; you've never met her, so how could you possibly be worthy of an invitation. Then you pull something else out of the envelope, airline tickets, already purchased in your name, with you seated in the first-class section, nonetheless. And there is more, hotel reservations purchased in your name, at one of the grandest hotels in London, in one of the finest rooms, already paid for. You turn back and continue reading the invitation and discover that this event is a strictly black-tie affair, very formal dress is required. Well, you say to yourself, that certainly counts me out. But when you turn the invitation over you discover that waiting for you at the hotel are formal attire already purchased for you, all in your correct size, right down to the shoes. Everything is provided, you only need to show up.

Now perhaps a formal banquet with the Queen of England doesn't float your boat. No problem. So instead of her, pick someone else on this earth who you would find it a great honor to be invited to spend an elegant evening at a banquet in their honor. All expenses paid, including formal attire, all you need do is show up. The question must be asked, how am I worthy of such an honor, and the answer would be, I'm really not.

The Israelites Royal Banquet before the LORD

This is even more true for the Israelites in our Old Testament Lesson. The LORD came to them when they were lowly slaves in Egypt. Many had given up on faith in God alone and succumbed to the temptation to worship the gods of Egypt. But the LORD displayed His mighty power to save through 10 plagues that afflicted the Egyptians but left the Israelites for the most part untouched. Then there was the last plague, where the angel of death visited all the houses in Egypt and killed all the firstborn sons of the Egyptians. Yet all the firstborn Israelite sons were spared, not because they or their families were any better than the Egyptians. They complained and doubted God's love and power to save. Yet the angel of death "passed over" their houses. They were saved by God's grace. He told them to sacrifice a lamb, and to paint its blood over the doorposts of their houses. The angel of death, seeing the blood, would pass over that house sparing the firstborn inside according to God's merciful promise.

These are the Israelites that God, through Moses, led from Egypt into the wilderness, and to Mt. Sinai. Even after experiencing miracle after miracle of God's gracious love, care, and provision, they doubted Him the whole way, and complaining, even threatening to revolt. Yet God loved them and called them to be His precious chosen people out of all the people on the earth. He made a Covenant with them: an official agreement. The LORD would be their God, providing, protecting, and leading them as His own precious children. They on their part promised to obey His commands and worship only Him as God. The agreement was sealed with the shedding and sprinkling of the blood of a sacrificed animal. And then, the LORD called 70 of them, a representation of the whole people of God, to join Him on the mountain where He appears before them cloaked in a visible manifestation of His glory that would not harm them. In what was a great honor, they are allowed to eat and in His presence.

Now the setting may not be a fancy ballroom. But the company they ate with far exceeds any company we might banquet with on earth. They banquet with the LORD, the God of all creation, the One who gives life to all, the one who has saved them, and has forgiven them even though they are undeserving. And who are they? They are a bunch of undeserving guests. And not just because of their attitude and actions preceding this banquet. But the LORD who knows all things knows that they will not be able to keep their promise to fulfill their part of the Covenant agreement. They won't even make faithful use of His gift of the priestly sacrifices that are His means of removing their sins and granting them grace. And yet he invites them to join with Him and eat with Him, not as enemies-which is what their actions show them to be. They eat with Him as His family, His beloved children. The LORD does this because while He is holy, and sinful man cannot stand in His unmitigated presence, He still loves them and desires to have personal fellowship with them.

The Disciples Royal Banquet Before the LORD

Fast forward 1500 years. The same LORD God still desires to have intimate fellowship with His sinful creation. So, He came down and became one of them, because a human being that has the divine essence within Him. It is this Godman, Jesus Christ, who arranges to have a banquet with His Twelve closest followers. And he arranges for the place and opportunity for this banquet by His supernatural knowledge and power.

It takes place in an Upper Room. Not exactly a fancy banqueting hall. But once again, the One who is present more than makes up for the commonplace setting. The meal they gather for is the Passover Meal, a continued celebration and reminder of the miraculous salvation of their forefathers in Egypt, especially the gracious sparing of the firstborn children. We are not quite sure today what exactly that celebration looked like, since it has changed and grown over time. But what they celebrated in Jesus' day to remember that first Passover was a more a more intricate and leisurely celebration than the original one was. That original one was eaten in haste, with the participants ready to move out at a moment's notice. That original Passover meal would've been a scary and tense time. But in Jesus day it had become a joyous celebration as they recalled God's mighty saving acts for them by reading from the Scriptures how their LORD graciously saved them from their enemies and promised to do so again.

But then, this particular Passover meal takes an unexpected turn. Jesus speaks of His betrayal at the hands of one of them, one of the Twelve. The joyous celebration is gone, replaced by emotional distress and fear. Darkness is encroaching upon them, and things will get worse before the night is over. There will be His arrest. And despite their solemn promise to stand by His side no matter what, when the powers of darkness are allowed to take Him, all of them will flee from Him. Just like the Israelites who banqueted before God on Mt. Sinai, these 12 men are likewise unworthy to be sharing this special banquet with God in the flesh. And yet this is the God whose heart's desire is to have personal fellowship with them. And He will take this Passover Celebration, and turn it into a Fellowship Meal for all men to celebrate in His presence.

All that is about to happen to Him, His arrest, His suffering, and His death, will serve to make them worthy to be in His presence, worthy to participate in this meal, worthy to live in His kingdom now and forever. He goes to suffer and die, to shed His blood as the payment for their sins, to die their death, to stamp on their account before the Father that the debt that they owe has been "paid in full". His body given on the cross and His blood shed on the cross serve to earn forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life for them, as well as for all mankind. They don't realize or understand it now, but that's what will be shown and confirmed to them and to all mankind when Jesus rises from death.

Their faith is faltering. And as the evening progresses it will continue to be stretched almost to the point of breaking. So, Jesus gives them the gift of this special meal, to be celebrated not just that night, but going forward, even after He has been resurrected and ascended back to the Father. It is no longer the Passover Meal; it has been transformed to be the fulfillment of all that Passover pointed to. In this meal they receive the very body and the very blood of the Passover Lamb sacrificed for all men. They receive the very means that earned for them the declaration of what they could never be on their own, sinners who are forgiven and declared to be in right standing with God, declared to be so by God in the flesh who earned it for them.

Your Royal Banquet Before the Lord

That same banquet that was offered to the Twelve is what is offered to you this evening. It is the Royal Banquet in the Real Presence of our Creator God. I know it doesn't look like it. This is not a fancy ballroom with all the trappings. There is no fancy table set with exquisite china, and you do not appear to be decked out in formal attire. But when we are talking the LORD's Supper, appearances can be quite deceiving. What you will be offered looks and tastes like a plain tasteless wafer, and ordinary wine. But the reality of this meal is so much more. According to the Word and command of our Savior, what we truly receive is not only bread and wine, but His body and His blood. He doesn't explain how this can be, how He can be truly present, just as He doesn't explain how He, the God of the universe could be born into the world as a baby. It's a truth attested to by God Himself, one that we can only hold by faith in the one who declares it. And by that faith we confess and believe that just like the Disciples on that Thursday evening 2000 years ago, we receive the very means that won for you and for me forgiveness of sins, salvation, and eternal life.

By giving His body and His blood on the cross He gives these gracious gifts to you through the means that are the Lord's Supper. He is the Creator God who is truly present with you, His creation, through these means. He is present but hidden in them, fully present with all His power, yet cloaked for your protection. He comes to you out of the greatest love anyone could have for you. And by His real presence we have the most intimate fellowship we can have with our Creator God this side of eternal life. His presence serves to unite us intimately with Him. And because we all consume the same body and the same blood, all of us who dine at the communion rail are united in the same faith towards Him. It's the faith we were taught from Holy Scriptures as outlined in the Small Catechism. He comes to grow and strengthen that faith and that unity we have with Him, and with one another, through this most royal banquet we call The Lord's Supper.

Conclusion

Like the Israelites, as well as the Disciples, we come as those who are unworthy of the One whose presence we are in. We are unworthy of the gracious gifts He has to give us. We come as those who doubt what He declares to us about this banquet. We come as those who have shown ourselves unworthy by disobedient thoughts and actions. But the very one who is present in this Sacrament is the one who has done all that is necessary to make us worthy. His death and resurrection declare us to be what we cannot be without Him, worthy to be in His presence, worthy to receive His gifts, worthy of eternal life. In this meal He strengthens our faith and our place before Him. He gave the gift of this meal to His Disciples knowing times of testing were shortly to come. This meal was His gift to prepare them and protect them from falling away. Likewise, He knows the trials and temptations that will beset you in your life this coming week. He loves you. He wants to have fellowship with you now and leading to the eternal fellowship to come. And so, He offers you this meal, to draw you ever closer to Him, and to your fellow Christian brothers and sisters, and to strengthen your faith unto life everlasting. Come to the table of His most glorious banquet, all you sinners ruined by the fall, but made right with God by your faith in the work of His Son, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.