**1 Corinthians 11:23-29** Maundy Thursday

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** April 2, 2015

*1 Corinthians 11:23 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.*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Prepare to Be Blessed! (The Lord’s Supper)**

At home, I am pretty sure every kid wishes there were fewer rules. It might come as a surprise to kids, but most parents wish the same thing! Yet if we sit down and think about it, we realize there need to be a few. Every house needs rules, just like every road needs traffic laws. But here the problem starts: We get so wrapped up in rules that we forget what rules are for. Rules are supposed to promote love, but it feels like all rules! Parents get disheartened, kids get resentful. What happened to the love?

It can happen in church, too. We get so concerned about rules that the joy of Christianity disappears. That is a distinct danger in the Lutheran Church. We are known to be more strict than most churches, especially with the blessing we celebrate this evening, the Lord’s Supper.

**I. The Blessings of the Lord’s Supper**

But before we start with the rules, let’s start with the blessings. After all, it was that way with each of us, wasn’t it? You were born and your parents smiled. You were the joy of their lives. Only later did the rules come.

So it is with the Lord’s Supper. Jesus instituted it because he wanted to give his disciples a special blessing. Indeed, the Lord’s Supper has been a blessing to countless Christians over centuries.

Jesus, in instituting the Lord’s Supper, said that this Supper ***“is the new covenant in my blood.”*** Do you know what a covenant is? Perhaps the closest we can come to a covenant is a contract, or better yet, a treaty. Like a peace treaty, each side promises to respect the other’s borders and rights. Each side is going to contribute something to a lasting agreement. “You do this, and we will do that.”

Now that is where *this* covenant is different. We don’t pay anything, because the covenant is in Jesus’ blood. His blood made all the payments, and we get all the blessings. It is better than a lottery because you don’t have to buy a ticket. Unlike Publishers’ Clearing House, you don’t have to get a subscription. It is all paid for by Jesus.

It is a covenant which Jesus in Matthew said is *“for the forgiveness of sins.”* In Communion, we receive the forgiveness of sins. It is not forgiveness over and above the forgiveness you received in Baptism or in the Confession of Sins at the beginning of the church service. But it is another application of forgiveness offered by our Savior.

What makes the Lord’s Supper a special Means of Grace is that here God brings together the spiritual and the physical. Think about a sick child. You can give the child medicine. And then you can hug them and hold them close. Is not that physical touch, that feeling of a human hand and warmth more comforting than the bitter, or saccharine-sweet medicine? Would the child get better without that extra measure of love? Oh, probably. But she/he might just need the love more than the medicine.

In the Lord’s Supper we receive medicine for our souls, the forgiveness of sins. But our God knows us so well. He was not content to merely give us his Word—which is mighty and which does save. But for his closest children who must walk through this dark world, he has bound up his word and even himself in the bread and wine of the Lord’s Supper.

In addition to forgiveness, there is another blessing of this most holy food. Listen again to the words of our Epistle reading: *“Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body”* (1 Corinthians 10:17). The Lord’s Supper strengthens our kinship with other Christians. This is a blessing of receiving the Lord’s Supper as a congregation, of coming to the front of the worship area with a group of a dozen Christians. Here we feel the fellowship which God created us to enjoy. Here at the Lord’s Table our differences disappear. We realize that we truly are equals. Our Lord Jesus will not play favorites with his children just because one is more personable, or smarter, or richer, or poorer, or for any other reason. At the Lord’s table we realize that all the human distinctions are made of something lighter than papier-mâché and flimsier than plastic wrap. Here we, for a moment, experience something of heaven that we can experience at no other place in our human existence.

Does this not make you hunger? Does this not make you ask, “How can I come in a way that will make you, the Lord of this table, most happy—beaming with joy at your children assembled around you?”

**II. Preparing Ourselves for Those Blessings**

Well, this is where we need to listen. A place without rules is an unpleasant place, is it not? For good things to be blessings, they must be used well. So Paul warns, ***“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”*** (27).

Paul was dealing with real problems in the congregation which received this letter. To summarize what you can read in verses 17-22 of this chapter, many Christians were receiving the Lord’s Supper in a bad way. We must realize that our customs have developed over many many centuries. In the first century church they didn’t even have churches! They met at houses. Likewise, the way they celebrated the Lord’s Supper was quite different.

Without established church customs, they had to come up with their own customs. In such circumstances, you start with what you know. This was a problem in Corinth. In the pagan Greek religion, prostitution and debauchery were part of religious practice (sorry, but we don’t have polite words to describe their religious practices.) But even in the pagan world, Corinth had a reputation for being a very immoral place. In Corinth some did not leave their pagan ways at the door when they became Christian. At communion some were drinking so much wine that they couldn’t walk straight. Some went ahead and celebrated while latecomers got nothing. Cliques developed about who would receive the Lord’s Supper with whom, and who you really didn’t want to be seen with.

These abuses, Paul said, were worthy of the Lord’s judgment. They displayed disrespect for God and lovelessness toward people. We may not have such abuses. We can thank God for that. But the same principles, rules if you will, which Paul used to reign in the Corinthians are still valid for us. We, too, need to be guided and reminded how to receive the Lord’s Supper properly. Our sins and temptations are different perhaps in degree, but not different in kind.

Basically Paul gives two guidelines. First he says, ***“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup”*** (28).

“Examine yourself.” Years ago, one Sunday, an elderly member did not receive Communion. Later, privately, I asked him about it. He explained, “Well, this morning I had a big argument with my son. So I did not think I should receive the Lord’s Supper.” I can really respect someone with a conscience that sensitive. With the sin of anger still echoing in his heart, he did not feel worthy to come to the Lord’s Supper.

But let our thought never be, “I can come to the Lord’s table only if I have not sinned today.” If we think that we can only take the Lord’s Supper when we don’t sin, then we really don’t understand sin. Dressed in the tattered rags of our own good works, we will never be “good enough” for anything God gives us. But that is not the point.

The point is not the sin, but our attitude toward sin: do we love sin or loathe it? Treasure it or hate it? Are we willing to leave sin? Or are we hiding it in the secret place of our heart?

Again, when we come forward with not a thought about any of these things, whether sin or grace, we have failed to examine ourselves. This supper is not to be received as nonchalantly as a food sample in the supermarket. Let us examine ourselves before coming.

The second guideline Paul gives us is in the last verse of our reading. ***“Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself”*** (29).

When Jesus told the disciples, *“This is my body,”* he meant what he said. He didn’t say that the bread *represents* his body. He said it *is* his body. So, too, with the cup and his blood. By faith, we accept Jesus’ words as the truth. Because of Jesus’ words, we cannot accept what most Protestants say about the Lord’s Supper. Out of deference to human reason, most Protestants have said that this bread only “represents” Jesus’ body. But their practice betrays the weakness of their position. Many Protestants distribute the elements with the words, “This represents the body of Christ.” They cannot stand to repeat Jesus’ words for fear that someone might understand the very thing Jesus wanted understood. No, we do not eat imaginary body and blood of Christ. We receive what Christ said we receive: his body together with the bread, and blood together with the wine. Here we simply take God at his word.

This understanding of the Lord’s Supper is so important that Paul says someone who does not ***“recognize the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.”***

So we have two basic qualifications for receiving the Lord’s Supper. Each of us must be able to “examine” himself. We are sinners who desire to leave that sin, and trust in Jesus for forgiveness. Secondly we must understand that in this meal we receive Jesus’ real body and blood.

We must stress these requirements, these rules, because that is what God’s teaches us to do and believe. But let us now leave the rules behind. Let us return to the love of our Savior who invites believers to his supper.

Let us come forward to joyfully receive the Supper our Savior has prepared for us. Let us relish with delight, as our favorite meal, this heavenly food. Here we receive the forgiveness of sins. Here your faith is strengthened. Here your kinship with your brothers and sisters in faith is renewed. Amen.