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

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** March 28, 2018

Dear Friends in Christ,

Has anybody here been in a doctor’s office recently? I think I saw a couple of you roll your eyes, “I spend more time in doctors’ offices than my own house!” Well, I hope your doctors have listening ears and that they answer your questions. How reassuring it is when a doctor gives a diagnosis and explains the diagnosis, when he gives a treatment and explains the treatment, all the while being sure that you understand him and he understands you.

That is how the physician of our souls *always* cares for us. Never is God in a rush to get to the next patient. Never does he dismiss our concerns as silly worries; he listens! On the other hand, God does give us directions that we need to follow. He does confront dangerous behaviors. As the divine physician, he is in authority.

Tonight, I invite you to think of our reading as such an encounter between patient and physician. Listen as God hands us an important medication for our souls, Holy Communion. [Read text.]

*23I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” 25In 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.” 26For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 27Therefore, 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. 28A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

God’s concern this evening is that when you are handed the wafer of bread with the words, *“Take and eat, this is the body…”*, that it will be a blessing, a medicine for your soul. So this evening, on the night Jesus instituted the Holy Communion, we review what our heavenly Physician says about this medication. He says,

**“Do This, Remembering”**

*I. What We Receive*

Through the Apostle Paul, the Lord tells us what we receive. He says, ***“This is my body… This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”***

This is no ordinary meal. By and large, God is content to operate in our lives in ways that look “natural.” The rain comes, the wheat grows. We use the flour to make bread. We eat bread, our bodies strengthen. In this one meal, however, God has promised a miracle. Jesus spoke an eternal miracle into being when he told his disciples, ***“This is my body… This is my blood”*** and then told them, ***“do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.”*** What Jesus did on that first Maundy Thursday was a miracle that happens every time we celebrate Christ’s holy supper. Here we receive Christ’s body and blood.

Now the scientist looks at it under a microscope and says, “It looks like wine to me.” The philosopher considers Jesus’ words and says, “Say what he wants, it can’t be body and blood. That’s not possible. Maybe what you mean is, ‘This represents Jesus’ body and blood.’” No. Jesus did not say, “represents” or “symbolizes”. He said, ***“This is my body.”***

Which is why God’s Word says, ***“Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.”*** God says that this special meal, this spiritual medicine if you will, is unlike any medicine your doctor will give you. A pill of amoxicillin does not require you to understand how it works. It just works.

But taking Communion without faith and knowledge is dangerous. The Lord’s Supper is something so special that God has declared it to not be taken in ignorance, nor in unbelief, nor even in mistaken belief. As God writes out the prescription for Communion he says, “Now recognize, understand what is going on here. Realize that what you are here receiving is the body of the Lord!” Do not come forward casually, treating it like another meal or a stick of gum. This is special and to be treated as such. This is Christ’s body, his blood!

*II. What It Is Given For*

Jesus also explained the purpose of Communion. He explained this after he had given the wine. ***“[It] is the new covenant in my blood.”*** Jesus’ new covenant ended the old sacrificial covenant. Before Jesus, the actual sacrifice for the sins of the world, the Lord was content to let the sacrifices of the Mosaic law to be the medium through which he received his people. Those were not the real sacrifices. But they were, as God’s word calls them, shadows of things to come. They demonstrated the truth that one will be punished in our place. They relied on a forgiving God.

When we receive Christ’s blood in the wine, we receive the very thing that has bought us from sin. If we were righteous and holy, no sacrifice would need to be made. But the new covenant between us and God, the covenant that opens the gates of heaven, that covenant is established by Christ. He paid the price for our sins. He cleared our debt. We did not deserve it, Christ simply gave it to us.

This is one of the grand themes of the New Testament. *“It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed… but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect”* (1 Peter 1:18-19). *“God presented [Christ Jesus] as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood”* (Romans 3:25). *“Jesus Christ… loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood”* (Revelation 1:5). The blood is no mere symbol. Jesus’ blood is the very thing that wrenched us out of Satan’s claws and saved us from the torment of hell. We receive and participate in that when we receive this precious supper.

Our reading says, ***“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.”*** This gift is too precious to be taken without self-examination. We need to realize our *need* for the forgiveness offered in Communion. Communion is not offered for perfect people, but for sinners. Let the person who feels no sting of conscience, who thinks, “I’ve been pretty good this week,” let them stay in their pew during the distribution. This is for sinners! Yet it is not offered to all sinners, but only to those who sorrow over sin and yet trust in Jesus as their Savior.

So in our reading, our Physician tells us that we ought to be “worthy” when receiving this meal (27). Being worthy means 1) understanding what we are receiving (29) and 2) repentant self-examination (28).

*III. How Our Liturgy Prepares Us for the Sacrament*

You have noticed something strange about this evening’s service. This service begins with the sermon. There is a reason for that. The high point of our service this evening is the celebration of the Holy Communion. By putting this sermon, this explanation of Communion, at the beginning it gives us a chance to experience how our entire liturgy is designed to highlight Communion. The liturgy is a crescendo leading to Communion as the high point of worship.

Sometimes people think of the Lutheran liturgy as calisthenics; that some busybody just couldn’t stand to let people sit in their pew and maybe doze off. But liturgy serves a purpose. On Communion Sundays, a significant purpose of the liturgy is that you and I, like patients following a doctor’s orders, may receive this sacrament to our benefit. In this eating and drinking we receive the assurance of the forgiveness of our sins and the strengthening of our faith in Christ’s sacrifice. We are assured of eternal life.

To this point, I want to highlight two points of our liturgy.

First Corinthians 11 tell us ***“A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.”*** That is exactly what our liturgy does. Think about it. The first thing after the opening hymn, usually, is the confession of sins. It will be the first thing after this sermon today. When we speak the confession of sins, we are examining ourselves. Even if we don’t realize it, we are preparing ourselves for the sacrament. We admit our sins. We confess our guilt. We express a sincere desire to change our ways, to leave our sins. The confession of sins, thoughtfully done, is self-examination.

The liturgy also prepares us for communion when, before the distribution, the presiding minister speaks the words of institution: *“Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed…”* These are the words of power that Christ spoke into every successive observance of Communion. These words, thoughtfully heard, teach us to ***“recognize the body of the Lord.”*** Jesus’ words of institution remind us that this *is* his body and that this *is* his blood in the sacrament. So again, our liturgy serves us so that we can receive Communion in a worthy manner.

Having thus begun our service, may this evening’s worship service be for your good. And when it comes to Holy Communion, remember our Physician’s direction: “Do this, remembering what it is, and why it is given.” Amen.