**Mark 14:22-26** April 1, 2021

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Maundy Thursday

 *Mark 14:22While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” 23Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it. 24“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. 25“I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”*

**Jesus’ Parting Gift**

Dear Friends in Christ,

 Here in Kentucky, it is bourbon distilleries. If you enjoy the stuff, take a tour of the distillery, let them explain all that goes into putting that fifth of bourbon on the store shelf, and you will have a whole new appreciation for every sip. Finding out what’s behind the product is enough to make even someone who doesn’t like bourbon, like me, kind of wish they did. Wineries, cheese factories, carpentry shops, even automotive shops give you a whole new appreciation for the goods and services you buy.

 My job as a preacher is not to take you to the pastor’s study and give you a tour of the sermon writing process. My job is to speak to you God’s word. Yet today I would like to take you to my study for just a moment.

 As usual on Maundy Thursday, the night of Jesus’ betrayal, God’s word speaks on the Lord’s Supper. At first, I wanted us to meditate on the reading from First Corinthians. It is a most excellent reading. But this year, it just didn’t seem right. You see, the book of First Corinthians is written to a beloved bunch of Christians… who just couldn’t seem to get much of anything right, including the Lord’s Supper. They turned their frequent celebrations of Communion into squabbles where the only thing anybody walked out of church thinking was, “Can you believe the way Maude carried on, making sure she was the first one up to the altar? And what about Harold? He took the cup of wine right out of pastor’s hand. And I’m sure he took two pulls!” That’s what Communion was like with the Corinthians. And so, while the 1 Corinthians reading is invaluable to us, there is this tone of stern instruction you just can’t get away from. It is a good reading; I will probably preach on it next year on Maundy Thursday. But this year I just couldn’t do it. In this year of being tossed about by the storms of the past year, I felt like we (or at least I) need not 15 minutes of stern instruction, but 15 minutes of wide-eyed watching, simply watching Jesus he bless his disciples.

 As I mentioned, Maundy Thursday is Jesus’ last evening before his death. In your last moment, what would you like to do for those around you? I suppose some of us, many of us, hope that one day we will be able to leave an inheritance to our children. But we also know that an inheritance has its limits and problems. Some, careful with money all their life, late in life have sudden and large expenses, medical or otherwise. All those careful years of saving up come to naught. Sometimes the inheritance is successfully handed off to the next generation, and they squander it. Neighbors say, “If their parents knew how they are spending their 50 years of hard-earned and hard-saved money, they’d roll over in their graves!” More than one inheritance has shattered families with dishonest executors, quarrelling siblings, grudges.

 We know that inheritances *can* be a blessing. We also realize there are better legacies than money. Some kids tell their parents, “Mom, Dad, enjoy retirement. Spend what you have. If there’s something left, great; if not that is fine too!” Those kids already have a better legacy.

 I remember being a high schooler, walking into a hospital room in Mason City, Iowa. The shades were closed. My dad had taken me to see my grandpa. It would be the last time I heard him talk. At the bedside my dad introduced me to my grandpa, not because we had never met, but he was not entirely clear minded and his eyes closed, “Dad, here’s Peter.” “Oh, the one with the dark, curly Martin hair.” “Yes, Dad. That’s him” my dad smiled. We talked for a very short time. I don’t remember the rest. But I still think how that shared trait drew me together with him through the generations.

 You remember one or two of your last conversations, don’t you? Treasured words, short words, words that you never tire of playing over and over again in your mind.

 Jesus knew all about the power of last words and deeds. So Jesus, having the blessing and the curse of knowing his last moment, knowing that this was his last meal with his disciples, Jesus carefully chose his last words and last blessing. He would leave them the kind of thing every person wishes they could leave their loved ones: not a pile of money, but something with an immense power to draw them together and toward God.

 He did this because Jesus could look into his disciples’ future. At the meal he told them some of what he saw: He told how one of them would betray him. He warned how another would repeatedly disown him. Jesus spoke of a hard life for all of them, *“If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world… That is why the world hates you.”* (Jn 15:19). Jesus knew that through those times of hatred he would not be able to be with them, at least not physically. So, he left them a physical token for that time.

 Jesus looked even farther into the future than that. Jesus also foresaw us. He saw us living in our times of sorrow and distress. Jesus saw us in times when the world around us is so divided, and cold, and we feel so untreasured; a time when that the Word of God holds less and less sway and commands less and less respect; when we look at our own lives and have a sense that we too are wandering, that we should have done better, spoken better, been less self-centered. He saw that we would have our moments of self-awareness and realize that while we love to rail against the way things are, we are a large part of the problem. We have participated in what God hates.

 Jesus saw all of that. He saw that as long as his people live in this world we will battle against Satan and the world on the outside, and our own sinful impulses on the inside. As a result we will stand under the condemnation of our own sins. So Jesus, in his last meal with and some of his last words to the splintering band of Twelve, he bequeathed to them a gift, a gift worthy of the moment. It is a gift which has in itself a power to draw God’s people together, and draw them toward God, not just in feeling but in blood-bought forgiveness fact…

 ***“Take it; this is my body… This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”***

 Dear Christians, please, always treasure what Jesus is doing in this sacred act. Guard Communion as a special treasure. So many, even Christians, misunderstand what is going on; they think we are making some sort of declaration for God here! So many others underestimate and diminish Communion; they think it is nothing more than remembering Jesus. Others mock Communion as nonsense or even an offense—Body!? Blood?!

 It is so much more. ***“Take it; this is my body… This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.”*** Watch the flow of power in what Jesus is doing here. Ask yourself where power is coming from and where it is going. This is a “grace” moment – where the unearned favor of God flows through Jesus body and blood, through this sacred act, this sacrament, to his people. Jesus’ disciples were not pledging themselves to Jesus here – No! Jesus had just let them know how weak and needy they were by themselves. Having made them aware of their need, Jesus supplies that need. He draws them to God by giving forgiveness.

 We also see how this special inheritance from Jesus, draws us together. For this special meal Jesus brought together those who knew him well. He did not, as he did at other times, draw only that inner circle of Peter, James and John (even as he would soon draw these three close to him in the Garden of Gethsemane to pray with him), but he drew them all, making it clear as every good parent does, that there are no favorites. He desires that they share in God’s goodness equally, realizing each other as equally needy and equally blessed. Then he showers them with his blessing.

 And then, Mark signals that in handing the blessed legacy of Holy Communion to his disciples, Christ has performed his last public ministry to his disciples: ***“He said to them. ‘I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.’ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”***

 What a blessed inheritance Jesus left us in his last moments. May we always treasure it, especially on this night when Jesus bequeathed it to us. May we treasure how it draws us to God, and draws us to one another. Amen.