

**Holy Thursday****1 Corinthians 10:16-17**

Theme: Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ

- 1) It joins us to Christ.
- 2) It joins us to one another.

*<sup>16</sup>The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup>Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.*

I don't spend as much time as I should marveling at the mysteries of the faith. You know those mysteries, those things that are stated in the Bible but can't be explained logically. I don't spend time in awe of God creating all of this with just his words. All of this out of nothing? How can it be? I don't spend time considering the Trinity, how God is three and yet one. What does that tell me about God? What does that mean as I live in his kingdom? I don't spend time contemplating the two natures of Jesus, that he could be inseparably true man and true God. What connection does Jesus have with me as true man? Where would my salvation be if he was not also the divine God? You might shrug and say, "who cares if you don't spend time marveling at the mysteries of the faith?" But these things are beyond us for a reason. This is God working outside of his created order and outside of his created logic to provide for the needs of an entire world that is deeply needy.

Tonight, we will not consider any of the mysteries I mentioned, but there is one that presents itself to us. What is the Lord's Supper? What are we consuming? What does it mean? What community are we communing with? Let's marvel together to see what God reveals to us in his word.

It was the Passover celebration. God commanded it be celebrated each and every year to remember when he rescued his people from slavery in Egypt. A lamb was sacrificed, and its blood was used to paint the doorpost. A meal with the lamb, bitter herbs, wine and unleavened bread was made. The people sat with their coats and walking sticks in hand, ready to leave at a moment's notice. And that night, God spared the Israelites from the death of the firstborn and set them free from Egypt. Over time, the Passover celebration developed a sort of liturgy to it. Included was some retelling of the original Passover account while sharing multiple cups of wine. It is a tradition that it seems Jesus and his disciples were using as they celebrated the Passover feast on the Thursday of Holy Week.

But at some point during the Passover meal, Jesus changes things up. This meal will not only point to the past. It will also point to the future. At one point during the dinner, he takes the unleavened bread, blesses, and breaks it: "Take it. This is my body." Then he takes one of the cups, prays, and gives it to them: "This is my blood of the new testament, which is poured out for many." What does this mystery mean?

Listen to what Paul writes to the Corinthians in the sermon text tonight. He's trying to show them that participating in feasts to idols links them to those idols. He says, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?" It is in this meal that we are connected with Jesus. We are connected to him in his true body and blood that he gives to us. Jesus himself says this is his body and it is his blood. This is more than merely a representation. It is more than us just celebrating Jesus' death. Miraculously and mysteriously Jesus gives us himself. And Matthew

captures this sentiment in his Gospel account of Jesus instituting the Lord's Supper when he says these gifts are given "for the forgiveness of sins." This bread and wine, being Jesus' true body and blood, as he says, offer the forgiveness of sins.

This miraculous gift from God draws us into communion with Jesus himself. You see those two words in "communion," "common" and "union." As humans, we crave commonality. We crave unity. When you meet someone, you ask questions to see if they have some interest that aligns with yours. This is how we connect. But Jesus offers us even greater unity with him. And the unity is greater because it's based on something more important than personality or interests. It's based on that deep-seated need to be forgiven and loved. This is what Jesus offers. This is the closest thing to heaven you get to experience here on earth is this. It's as if Jesus tears open heaven to reach down and give you this assurance that you are united with him through his death and resurrection.

But do we make too little of it? Sometimes we come forward without recognizing what we are receiving. Do we ever eat and drink without taking in the fact that this is Christ giving himself to us? Sometimes we come up to the rail without grasping our utter depravity because of sin, therefore missing our need for the blessings of the Lord's Supper. Maybe in the busyness of life we lose sight of this meal. When there are so many other things to think about and focus on, do we really have the energy to value and cherish and love this meal?

Yet Jesus invites you to taste your forgiveness. We come here with all these other appetites. All these other things on our minds. All these other desires of what we think we need to give our life fulfillment. But Jesus invites us to this table to fill our deepest appetite, to find that the just wrath of God toward sinners has been redirected, to find that even our sins of making too little of this meal are forgiven in it. Friends, don't make this meal into a only a tradition. Tonight, you dine on Christ, with the promise that someday you will dine with Christ.

And dining with Christ is the perfect transition to the second part of the sermon. Yes, this supper unites us with Jesus, but it also unites us with those we share this supper with. Listen to Paul: "Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one bread." This bread we share unites us, it makes us one. But what does it make us one in? As I said before, people want unity. But there has to be something that they hold in common with one another. This supper we take together means we share in Christ himself. We share in his body and blood. We share in his crucifixion and resurrection. We share in all of his teachings.

But this brings us to a tough teaching. I'm sure you've read the blurb that we have at the beginning of the service in the bulletin on communion Sundays. One of the hardest teachings for us to explain is the doctrine of closed communion. Unity matters, and what unites us matters most.

Part of this teaching comes from what Paul says in the next chapter: "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and blood." There is spiritual danger for those who take this meal in an unworthy manner. If we are a spiritual hospital for those who are sick with sin, it would be malpractice to allow someone to receive this meal in an unworthy manner. But what does it mean to take it in an unworthy manner? Paul answers that two verses later, writing, "For if anyone eats and drinks in an unworthy way because he does not recognize the Lord's body, he eats and drinks judgment on himself." If a person does not recognize that they are receiving Jesus' true body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, this isn't a spiritual neutral for them. It's not like they just miss out on the blessings of this supper. No, they eat and drink their judgement. In love for their souls, this is one of the reasons we hold to the teaching of closed communion.

But the other part of this teaching is what Paul centers on here. There is a reason we don't come up to the rail all alone. It's because this meal is not just about our connection with God. It's because, as Jesus says here, we are connected with each other. Whether you think about it or not, you are making a statement to those you share this supper with. And that statement is that you are united in Jesus' teachings. And not just some of Jesus' teachings. As we hear in the Great Commission, Jesus wants us to know and teach "all the instructions I have given you." Jesus says in John chapter eight, "If you remain in my word, you are really my disciples." It is God's desire for us to join together not just based on some of the truths of his word, but based on all the truths that he teaches us.

Why is this so important? Because the fullness of the gospel is pure gospel. When we strip away the teaching that Jesus' body and blood are miraculously present in this sacrament, when we make into only a supper of remembrance, this supper is not gospel. It's not a gracious gift that God uses to bring us closer to him. It's law. It's another thing we have to do and will inevitably fail at. The same can be said about baptism. If it's us dedicating ourselves to God, we'll have a lot of doubts whether we are his when we begin sinning again five minutes later. If it's not God graciously working a miracle through water and word to give us life from death, it's another hurdle that we will stumble on. It's the same case for the origin of faith. If faith is a decision you made, how do you know you made the right decision? How do you know your faith is strong enough? If faith is not from the Holy Spirit, baptism doesn't save, and the Lord's Supper is just a tradition, we've stripped the gospel from our lives and now live by the law.

This is why we hold to this teaching of closed communion. It's because we don't want the gospel to be hollowed out and rob ourselves of the comfort that only it brings. In the pure gospel, displayed for us here in the Lord's Supper, we receive forgiveness. In this meal, we are united to Christ in the most intimate way. But in this meal, we are also united with each other in that common faith of everything that Jesus teaches. And in a sense, we join together at the rail with those who have since gone home to heaven, those who enjoy the full marriage feast of the Lamb while we get just a little taste of it right now.

So let this supper be one of those marvelous mysteries that we can't fully understand, but appreciate deeply. Take it regularly so that you can taste and see and touch and smell that your sins truly are forgiven. This communion unites you with your Savior. And it also unites you to the body of believers here. As we journey toward that marriage feast of heaven together, let us continue to be united to Jesus and united to each other. Amen.

### **Good Friday** **Hebrews 7:26-28**

Theme: The right kind of sacrifice is made.

*<sup>26</sup>This is certainly the kind of high priest we needed: one who is holy, innocent, pure, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup>Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices on a daily basis, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. In fact, he sacrificed for sins once and for all when he offered himself. <sup>28</sup>For the law appoints as high priests men who have weaknesses. But the word of the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been brought to his goal forever.*

I grew up only a couple miles from the Mississippi River, where it flows from east to west and divides Illinois from Iowa. For quite a time, on the main bridge that joined the two states there was a toll bridge. Thankfully, by the time I started driving, they had yanked the tollbooths out and made the bridge free. But I

remember sitting in the back seat crossing the bridge while my parents were driving. They were not always prepared with the toll ahead of time. So, there we would be, sitting at the toll while my mom or dad fumbled around in some compartment for the right change to pay the toll.

But what about the toll that God requires? I picture myself pulling up to a tollbooth. I look to see what God requires for me to pass. It's steep. I don't know if I can pay. I scrounge around. No! I don't have what's required. I need the right sacrifice, but I don't have it.

In the Old Testament, their worship to God did not involve tollbooths, but they did need to pay up. The people recognized they were sinners. They knew in their hearts they had done wrong against God's will. But they also had the law. They could read the Ten Commandments, realizing like a checklist, they had broken every one of them. They could look at the ceremonial laws, those laws that told them how to worship and how to remain spiritually clean. But knowing these laws meant they also knew how much they broke these laws. If they were off by just a little bit, just a degree, they had missed the mark and sinned. God had given them his law, and they had broken it. And it wasn't just a few times they had broken his laws. Find a page of narrative in the Old Testament, outside the poetry or law-giving, where a person does not sin. You won't find many, if any. Thought they had God's law, the Israelites still could not keep it.

This meant they needed to make sacrifices to God. But there was a problem. They could not make the sacrifices themselves. Their hands were unclean and would pollute their sacrifices with sin. This is where the Old Testament priests would come in. These priests would make sacrifices for the people, having made sacrifices to cleanse their own sins first. And being a priest in the Old Testament would have looked less like a modern-day pastor and more like a butcher. Each day the priests would accept the animal sacrifices from the people, slaughter the animals, then make whatever sacrifice to God the people were trying to make. It was bloody and disgusting, and the smell of slaughtering, butchering, and burning up animals all day probably didn't smell the best.

One day a year, the Day of Atonement, the sacrifices took a different form. The High Priest, the priest that oversaw all the other priests, would begin by slaughtering a bull, whose blood he would sprinkle on the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle. This bull's blood was to cover his own sins and the sins of the other priests. He then took two goats, casting lots for which of the two roles each would take on for that day. The first goat was slaughtered too. Just like the bull, its blood was sprinkled on the Ark, this time for the sins of the people. He would then go to the second goat, placing his hands upon its head and calling upon God to cover over the sins of the people. This goat was taken out of the tabernacle and set free in the wilderness. This is where we get the modern term scapegoat from. As you can see, there was a lot of sacrificing happening in Israel throughout the Old Testament.

But these sacrifices were a stopgap. The people had to make them over and over again without end. It could not have been all that comforting to walk home after one sacrifice, just to think about the next one you have to make for your sins. Ultimately, we find out that the blood of these animals did not actually pay for the people's sins. Just three chapters after the sermon text today, the writer to the Hebrews states this: "Instead, these sacrifices reminded them of their sins year after year. The fact is that the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins." Maybe you can see where these sacrifices fell short. The sacrifices didn't last. They needed to be made over and over again. The priests who were making the sacrifices fell short too. These were supposed to be the go-betweens between God and his people. But they were sinners in need of constant sacrifices too. Their hands were just as unclean as the people they served.

We turn to ourselves, and we are not all that different than the Israelites. We are sinful too. We've broken God's law. Each commandment we have trampled under our own feet. We have not loved God with our whole hearts and we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Our hands are unclean.

Just like the Israelites, we need a priest too. Any sacrifice we would try to make would be polluted by our sinful hands. We need someone pure to make it for us. And just like the Old Testament believers we need sacrifice for our own iniquities. But what kind of sacrifice is required? What is the toll God demands? We could certainly go back to the bulls and goats and doves. You could go to a local farmer, buy a bull, and we could make a nice big mess up here in front of church. But this would have even less value for us than those sacrifices had for the Israelites.

And so, in God's perfect plan to set sinners free from sin, he sent his only Son into the world. This is what the writer is talking about here. Jesus is the Great High Priest that makes every other priest obsolete. And we see just how superior he was to those priests in the Old Testament. There was no need for him to cleanse himself before the sacrifice. Our author of Hebrews says that he's holy, innocent, pure, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. None of those things could truly be said about the priests. He also would be superior to the priests in regard to his work as the go-between. No longer would mankind's connection with God be through a sinful human being. It would be through the God-man himself. Because of Jesus, we don't need someone to tell us what God says. Jesus speaks to us directly in his word. No longer do we need to have someone go to God on our behalf. We can go to the Father in prayer through the merits of Jesus.

But not only did the Father send the Son to be the Great High Priest. He sent him to be so much more. And it's here that we come to what tonight is all about. Jesus is not just the sacrificer. He is also the sacrifice itself. In so many ways, Jesus is the better version of those goats on the Day of Atonement. The sins of the people are placed on his head and sent out into the wilderness. Jesus carries the sins of the world, your and mine included, upon his sinless soul. And it's out in the spiritual wilderness that he calls to the Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Jesus is also the other goat too. His blood is shed to cover over sin. As I'm sure you know, crucifixion is a bloody way to die. And as the blood drips down from the crown of thorns on his head, it meets with the blood flowing from the nails driven through his hands. It joins the blood seeping from the nails in his feet and falls to the earth. There, underneath it, our hands are soaked like under the faucet. Here our sins are covered over. Our hands are made pure. And not just our hands, but our eyes and ears and mouths and our very souls and all that we are made innocent.

This sacrifice by Jesus is also superior in how long it lasts. This is not an animal we find hanging from the cross. This is God's own Son. His sacrifice for sin counts for all time. What does that mean for you when caged in by some sin you've committed, when you are sick to your stomach because of your offense against God, when you avoid the mirror because you just can't look yourself in the eyes? It means he died for those sins! I often have people say to me, "Pastor, I just can't forgive myself for some of the things I've done." Maybe you feel that way at times too. But brothers and sisters, did Jesus die on the cross? If so, it's too late for you to not forgive yourself. Christ already has. That sin you mourn over has already been paid for at the cross. It is already forgiven!

Jesus' sacrifice brings him to his goal. God's greatest promise to redeem the world from sin is finally paid off at the cross. Think about it. God's goal in all of human history is that you would be his forever. It's easy for us to look at the cross and see that Jesus was not doing this for himself. But how often do you look at this scene and say, "this was for me"?

It is finished. Sin has been destroyed and heaven is ours. The toll has been paid, and there is no need to fumble around to find the right sacrifice. But this isn't the end of the story. The writer says Jesus is exalted above the heavens, but we surely don't see that tonight as he dies to do the will of his Father. You'll have to come back Sunday to see what happens, but for tonight, how grateful we are to have such a Great High Priest! Amen.

**Easter Sunday**  
**Job 19:23-27**

Theme: I know that my Redeemer lives!

- 1) ...even when he seems dead.
- 2) ...and I will not keep quiet.

*<sup>23</sup>Oh how I wish that my words were written down,  
Oh how I wish that they were inscribed in bronze,  
<sup>24</sup>that they would be engraved in rock forever  
with an iron tool and letters filled with lead.  
<sup>25</sup>As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,  
and that at the end of time he will stand over the dust.  
<sup>26</sup>Then, even after my skin has been destroyed,  
nevertheless, in my own flesh I will see God.  
<sup>27</sup>I myself will see him.  
My own eyes will see him, and not as a stranger.  
My emotions are in turmoil within me.*

Do you know what day tomorrow is? It's the day for practical jokes. It's the day for tricking people into believing things that are not necessarily true. It's April Fool's Day. And I have to tell you, I hate April Fool's Day. It's hard to keep up with the news, since you have to wonder what's real and what's a joke. You have to look at every text or email you receive with a level of skepticism, making sure you are not going to be the butt of anyone's joke. I'm not a fan of April Fool's Day because there's so much that isn't real.

But let's not pretend that the uncertainties of April Fools don't apply to other days too. Maybe we're not so worried that people are going to mislead us, but there are plenty of things we are told and promised that don't work out the way they were sold to us. Have you ever replaced an old, faltering appliance, expecting the new one to do a better job, only to find that it doesn't work as well or breaks early? Have you ever taken a trip somewhere, expecting it to be this wonderful time, only to say, "It looked much nicer in the pictures"? So few things in life are a certainty. We've got too much April Fool's in our day-to-day. But God shows us something certain here. Even though so much of what we experience in life is fake and embellished, we join together on this greatest day of the year to celebrate a fact, to celebrate the reality that our Savior lives.

You might already know the story of God's servant Job. In a matter of hours, he tragically lost all his wealth and his kids. Later, he begins to have health problems. Boils cover his body head to toe. His wife isn't helpful. She tells him to "curse God and die." Then his friends show up, and instead of comforting him in his despair, all they want to do is talk about what Job had done wrong to deserve all this destruction. Job knows he's a sinner, but he also knows that this was not punishment for any particular sin. Job's in a bad spot. Over the course of his friends' accusations, Job's tone begins to change. He becomes less focused on defending himself and more focused on who the blame must fall on. Of course, he begins to blame God. Job thinks this may not all be the fault of God, but he begins to wonder where God is to help and comfort him.

You are probably not dealing with a body full of festering boils or the loss of nearly every earthly possession you own. But you're here this morning for a reason. You're here, yeah, maybe because you come every week and this week just happens to be Easter. Maybe you're here because it is Easter, and you know this is one of the important ones. Maybe you're here because somebody dragged you out of bed this morning, and while you're not thrilled to be here, you are here. But there's a better reason why we're here besides those things. We're here because what we receive here cannot be found out there. Let me explain.

We deal with a lot of "fake" in our lives. People will say one thing to our faces, but later we'll find out they weren't telling us the truth. The media we take in is fake. People post to their Instagram accounts all these beautiful pictures of the things they do and the lives they live, then we talk to them and find out they're actually very unhappy. News companies report on stories, get taken to court for lying, and make the claim in court that they have the right to embellish stories since they are entertainment. I see pictures of Hollywood celebrities who have so many plastic surgery procedures that they don't resemble what they looked like even five years ago.

In so many ways the world we live in is a facade. It's a filter to make our lives look better than they actually are. But are they perfect? I'm sure you usually answer, "how's it going?" with a "Good!" But if we looked into the deep recesses of your soul, would we find good? Or would we find worry? Would we find mourning? Would we find anger? Would we find depression? The reason we come here is because in a world where so many things are faked, where so much is covered with a veneer of insincerity, what God offers us is the real deal.

What Job struggled with is the same thing we often struggle with. If God loves me, and if he promises to look out for me and keep me from harm, then why does harm find its way into my life so often? The simple answer is sin. Our parents, Adam and Eve, brought sin into the world when they rebelled. Unfortunately, this original sin was passed down from generation to generation. We have a sinful nature because we are a product of our parents. The less simple answer is that God uses hardship for his purposes. For Job, it was to prove to Satan and to all who read the book of Job that God's people know his faithfulness. And we see that understanding of God's faithfulness here with Job's own words.

Though he had been through all kinds of hardship, though he had even started wondering where God was, he says, "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the end of time he will stand over the dust." He knows his Redeemer. He knows the one who will buy him back from sin. While there are no historic names of people or places in the book of Job to know when he lived for sure, many scholars believe that the events of this book took place close to two thousand years before Jesus came. And yet Job is talking about the one who would redeem him from sin and death two millennia later. He knows the promises of God. He knows the Messiah God had promised, and he knows that while the answers many of his questions in life were uncertain, his Savior was. What would his name be? When would he come? Job doesn't know. But he knows he's coming.

Job also knows what awaits him when he meets his Redeemer. He says, "at the end of time he will stand over the earth." He knows that life here might not last, but he also knows who would outlast this world. His God. And he also knows that he, Job, would still be around at the end of time. Listen! "Then, even after my skin has been destroyed, nevertheless, in my own flesh I will see God. I myself will see him. My own eyes will see him, and not a stranger. My emotions are in turmoil within me." Job knows about the resurrection of the dead at the end of time. Though the Old Testament does not make many explicit references to the resurrection, we hear many comments that show us believers knew eternity was theirs. Again and again, we hear that believers were "gathered to his people." They were not simply buried with their relatives. They still exist to this day, souls in heaven awaiting the resurrection of the body. Jesus himself says in Matthew eight that Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob are at home in heaven. King David knew he would be raised, bringing it up a multitude of times in his psalms. Believers from the first promise of the Messiah have known with certainty that they will be raised.

But these people lived thousands of years ago. And just because some believed in the resurrection doesn't mean it is going to happen, right? Fair, so let's skip ahead. Jesus, the Son sent from God, had been crucified on Friday. He had died. The soldiers had stabbed a spear in his side to make sure he was dead before they took him down from the cross. The women had started the burial process. Then nightfall came. It was the Jewish Sabbath, and no work, even embalming bodies, was to be done during the Sabbath. The women who had been preparing the body went home with plans to meet and finish preparing him for burial on Sunday morning after sunrise. But going to the tomb Sunday morning, they found the stone placed in front had been moved to the side. And in the tomb, there was an angel. He had a message for the women: "Do not be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him."

Jesus had not remained dead. Those words, "it is finished," which could have been so easily confused as a cry of defeat had proven to be the cry of victory. Jesus had risen from the dead, a clear statement that sin, death, and hell could not hold the world in. This is the Redeemer Job was waiting for, real and in the flesh. This was the one who would be left standing in the dust and ashes of a sin-destroyed world. This is the day we boldly confess along with Job that we too know that our Redeemer lives. And that gets us to the next point.

Job cannot keep quiet. As his friends drone on in the background about Job's hidden misdeeds finally catching up with him, as he wrestles with some anger toward God for allowing these hardships, Job is bursting at the seams to proclaim the truth: "Oh how I wish that my words were written down. Oh how I wish that they were inscribed in bronze, that they would be engraved in rock forever with an iron tool and letters filled with lead." If only he could carve these words into stone to be preserved until the end of time! Ironically, these words have in fact been retained for the world to see. Job knows the truth about God. But this truth is too wonderful to keep it to himself. In front of his friends, in front of God, and in front of all of human history going forward, Job proclaims the resurrection of the dead. And Job tells the world that because the Redeemer stands in eternity, we will stand in eternity too.

At Jesus' empty tomb, we see the same zeal. The women are amazed at the sight of the angel and at the fact that Jesus isn't there. Then they are given the task: "But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" In a sense, these women are the first Christian missionaries. They hear the good news about Jesus, they see all the marks of his resurrection, and they go to tell.

This truth causes us to burst at the seams too. When we get so conditioned to the fraudulence of the world – the being told you're forgiven just for someone to use it to stab you in the back later, the hearing that you are priority just to find out that they really meant last priority, the being led to believe that it's all smooth sailing from this point, then this one, then this one – when we're used to being sold a bill of goods, we find something real here. Here at the empty tomb, we find real forgiveness of sins. God has removed them from us. They're gone. And he's never going to bring them up again. Here we find that we are not just important to him, but we are truly his first priority. You are the reason the Father sent his Son to endure the pain of sin and hell. And here we find that while our lives will not be easy, we can rest assured that the casket is not the end for us. In fact, it is the beginning, all because your Redeemer and my Redeemer and the world's Redeemer lives. Amen.