

Luke 22:14-23
Maundy Thursday
April 14, 2022

A relative of mine used to maintain that we should only receive Holy Communion on Maundy Thursday since it marks the institution of the sacrament by our Lord Jesus. He felt that we easily take it for granted when receiving it more often. (And that was back when we only had it once a month.) While we could identify a number of holes in that line of thinking, we especially have the Savior's command, "Do this..." which expects continuing action. Recurring usage is also implied with the use of words like "whenever" and "as often as" when the Bible refers to the eating and drinking of communion. Probably the saddest result of his wanting to limit it to a single day was when he fell ill on Maundy Thursday and missed church, leaving a two-year gap between communing times. Skipping usage is not the answer to a meaningful reception and appreciation of the Lord's gift to us. A better way is to review what it's all about. This evening we look at

THE THREE UNIONS IN HOLY COMMUNION

- I. Communion #1: Bread and wine with body and blood
- II. Communion #2: Sinner and God
- III. Communion #3: Believers with one another

Communion number one involves what we see and receive. At a meal we aren't always sure. "What's that?" the diner asks. At a banquet or fancy meal a menu may tell you. Our senses may help us, such as sight and taste. If it looks like an orange and tastes like an orange, there's a good chance you are eating an orange. But did your mother ever add vegetables to an item you liked? Dishes can be prepared in various ways. Take meatloaf for example. The cook may use cracker crumbs or bread or oatmeal along with the ground beef. Some people have very keen taste and detect the difference but others of us who wolf down our food may need to ask for the recipe to be sure.

There is more than what we see as we come here to the Lord's table. What our physical eyes behold are bread and wine. Jesus spoke of the cup contents as "fruit of the vine." So it was a grape product and at that time of the year it would have been wine. Unleavened bread is what was used for the Passover meal and that's what would have remained for use as he began the new gift for his disciples then and ever after.

But he gave something more. "This is my body given for you...This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you." Amazing! The elements

of Christ's body and blood are united with the bread and wine that our senses perceive.

Wasn't he speaking figuratively, you may ask. Doesn't it just make you think of blood with the redness in the cup? If I said, "This is my body" as I gave you a piece of bread, you would have to view it either as a figure of speech or that I was out of my mind. I don't have the ability to be in various places at the same time, but Jesus does. He can do anything. When he says, "This is my body," we accept it as true. It is what the words plainly say.

He called it a new covenant. A covenant is a solemn agreement or binding contract. It requires precise language that says exactly what it means. Jesus knew that his words would later be written down and remembered. He chose them carefully. They say what he intended for us to believe.

We also note what the early Christians of the New Testament believed. St. Paul wrote in First Corinthians, "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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread or drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself." As we partake of this sacrament we need to recognize the body of the Lord. We can't recognize it if it's not there. If we receive it without faith, we sin not against bread and wine but against the body and blood of Jesus that is in union with what we see.

Martin Luther also expressed this truth. "If a hundred thousand devils should rush forward and ask that question (of how bread and wine can also be the body and blood of Christ), we know that all the demons together with all the scholars of the world do not have as much wisdom as God does in his little finger." The words of Christ are clear and stand forever, " This is my body...This is my blood."

II.

This marvelous meal brings communion number two: between the sinner and God. We experience different levels of friendship. We have schoolmates from long ago. We may exchange Christmas cards or an occasional online post. Every so often there is a class reunion or maybe a phone call at an event like when your football coach dies. Suppose in one of those exchanges the other person comments, "We go through your area every so often. Maybe we'll stop by for a weekend." That might give you a jolt. You're not sure you want them in your house for a whole weekend.

There are casual acquaintances, such as the neighbor you greet as you get the mail or walk the dog. You chat a bit but you have never been in their house and likely will never be. You aren't that close. That's getting too intimate. You are not at that level and you both know it.

Some people you would never consider inviting because you don't like them and they don't deserve it. Their dog leaves messes in your yard. He "borrows" your deck furniture for his drinking parties. You won't see him at your table for a four-course meal anytime soon. No way!

That's the way of our relationship with God. It wasn't good. We mistreated him. We shouldn't think of setting foot on his lawn or retrieving our newspaper from his driveway. It's not that God is a grumpy character who gets his joy from crabbing at kids who stray six inches onto his property. He is more of the neighbor who repeatedly had to deal with loud, obnoxious parties. He made a gentle request for you to turn down the volume and instead you turned it up louder. He loaned you a power tool and when he needed it back for a project, you told him to get lost and to buy his own. When we think of how we have treated the possessions with which he has entrusted us, how we have refused to keep his commands, how we gave him rude gestures whenever he came near, we should expect him to go inside his house when he sees us outside. Perhaps he would build a big fence to keep us out. He would not invite us in. In reality, we're the ones who have built a fence between our place and his. We have destroyed any possibility of a relationship with our sins. The Bible uses terms like alienated and enemies to describe our situation with God. Don't wait by the mailbox for an invitation, or you will be like Charlie Brown looking for a Valentine or a holiday card and never getting one.

Yet he does invite us. He says today, "Take and eat...Take and drink." Why? Because that's what this meal is all about. Think of what his body and blood did. He offered them for us; they paid for our sins. They reconciled us to God, Scripture says. The barrier of sin is gone. We now appear holy, free from accusation. He is not concerned that we're going to make a mess on the tablecloth or stain it with our meal. It is "for you, for the forgiveness of sins." He wants us to come and receive. It holds special meaning for us. It is our privilege and comfort. We are on his guest list, in a seat of honor. Perhaps this is the dearest of the three communions. God welcomes us to his table now and wants us forever in his heavenly home.

III.

Communion number three is believers with one another. There are differences among us. When you are invited to a party you may not know who else will be there. When I was about eight years old, I thought I would arrange a surprise

anniversary party for my parents. They found out about my plans before they had proceeded too far. On my intended guest list were two neighbors who did not get along with each other. Fortunately the invitations had not gone out yet. We like to know who else is attending when we are going to a meal. Some people we might find boring. If seated next to someone who only wanted to talk about poetry or wine tasting, I would have little to contribute to the conversation. Or talk about mechanical or scientific matters would probably go over my head. Others might irritate us if they espoused different politics or sports teams than we prefer.

On the other hand, even with differences we might find common ground, with a sense of unity and have a good time, feeling a bond because we share interest in the same hobby or like the same author. We had that experience a few years back when attending a spring training baseball game in Florida where our son was serving an internship. Across the aisle I saw these white legs and figured they weren't southerners, so went to talk with them. Not only were they there because of a nephew in the same program as our son, but it turned out they were also from Wisconsin and had taught with the father of one of our church members. So we felt a unity even though we hadn't known them and multiple differences may have existed.

Jesus' disciples were a diverse group. There were fishermen, a tax collector, zealots, doubters, ambitious individuals, forward ones and others more laid back. Yet they had a unity in Jesus.

Jesus unites us also. We are of different ages, backgrounds and preferences. There are blue-collar workers and white-collar workers, men and women, Republicans and Democrats, those who are pro-union and anti-union. The devil will try to divide us and disrupt our unity but we put aside those earthly differences as we join our voices in worship, speaking the creed and singing hymns, because we are all sinners saved by our glorious Lord.

We experience that unity in communion. "We who are many, form one body, for we all partake of the one loaf," the Bible says. We rejoice in and confess our oneness. Where it does not exist, we are eager to study the Word together so the Holy Spirit can create oneness, which we then will express.

As we join shortly in the reception of the sacrament, recognize the communion of the bread and wine with Jesus' body and blood, be strengthened and encouraged by the communion between yourself and God and rejoice in our communion with one another. "Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."