

SERMON – PASTOR GREG
28.03.2024

Maundy Thursday. 1 Corinthians 11:23-25. *For I received from the Lord, what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, "This is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after the 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.*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Maundy is from the Latin word- *mandatum*- from which we get the English word- *mandate*. It means 'command'.

Whenever I teach Holy Communion I always have the people, young and old, look at the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and then this passage from 1 Corinthians. More often than not someone says: 'They all say the same thing' and they are right. I then point out that if the same thing is written in four different places by four different writers it must be important, especially when the words are nearly identical. It was so important that the early Christians celebrated it very early on and used the same words which we use today- two thousand years after the first Supper and of course thousands of kilometres away from Jerusalem.

A little aside: someone also usually asks: "What about the Gospel of John?" And I point them to John 6:43-59.

The gift which our Lord Jesus gave us is known by different names in the different Christian denominations: the Mass, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, Holy Communion, and Meal of Remembrance for example. And every Christian church celebrates this wonderful meal. Some celebrate it every week, others less often and some celebrate it only a few times a year- but all Christians partake of the Meal at some time during the year. A few years ago, Alicia and I went to SE Asia and visited friends in Singapore, Malaysia and Sumatra. All were pastors of various Lutheran Churches. In Singapore the church celebrates HC every Sunday because it is so special while in Sumatra they only celebrated HC four times a year- again because it was so special!

What is this meal we celebrate and how on earth can bread and wine be body and blood?

The antecedents for this meal are various and they include the Passover Meal (Exodus 12), the confirmation of the First Covenant (Exodus 24) where we hear: *Moses took half of the blood and put it in bowls and the other half he sprinkled on the altar. Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood and sprinkled on the people.* And just after this we have the account of Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu and the seventy elders of Israel going up the mountain- seeing God and eating and drinking!

One and a half thousand years later Jesus was celebrating the Passover knowing that he was about to be arrested, charged, condemned and killed- one of his last acts was to have a meal with his closest followers- including the one who would betray him. *He took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and said, 'this is my body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of me'. In the same way, after the 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.*

We call this thing a sacrament- a means of grace- whereby God comes to us through physical things to bless us. Of course the other sacrament is Baptism. Christ gave these two precious gifts to unite us sadly these are among the many things which divide us. All Christians celebrate HC but we have different interpretations and how can it be that common bread and common wine become the body and blood of Jesus Christ.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that once the bread and wine are validly consecrated they cease to be bread or wine but have become fully and substantially the body and blood of Christ. The Baptist churches believe that the bread and wine remain and that the meal is a wonderful meal of remembrance. The Lutheran church and the Anglican Church believe that once consecrated the bread and wine remain but that they also become the body and blood of Christ. But even among us- the Lutherans and the Anglicans there is some disagreement. We say that once the bread and wine are consecrated they become body and blood and anyone who receives them receives Christ himself. But the Anglicans teach that the bread and wine must be received in the faith to become body and blood. For us if an unbeliever partakes of this holy meal he or she receives the very body and blood of Christ but for the Anglicans that teach that an unbeliever receives only bread and wine. So traditionally the Anglicans invite all who are present to receive the Sacrament while we have taught that only confirmed members of the LCA can commune with us. We believe that the bread and wine becoming the body and blood is dependant solely on the words of Christ while the Anglicans believe that faith is necessary to receive the gift.

Closed Communion is based on the teaching given in 1 Cor 11:27: *Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats the bread or drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself.*

But in recent years we have practices what is called `responsible communion' for various reasons: so as not to give unnecessary offence. To show the unity we all have in Christ. To show that we are not arrogant and so on.

Many names, many teachings but the most important thing about HC is that God comes to us- Christ gives of himself- to bless us and forgive us. Amen.