

Maundy Thursday  
Text: John 13, I Cor 11  
Trinity Lutheran, Worden, IL & Zion Lutheran, Carpenter, IL  
Pastor H. R. Curtis

✠Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ ✠

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Nine plagues have come and gone, and still Pharaoh's heart is hard. So finally God sent his destroying angel to kill every first-born in Egypt from the heir to Pharaoh's throne to the first-born calf of each cow. All would die in Egypt that night. Blood would flow.

But for the sons and daughters of Israel there would be protection. The destroying angel was coming, and he was coming to demand the blood of the first born, but in Israel God provided an escape. The Israelites were to slaughter a young lamb or goat without blemish and spread its blood – the blood of the covenant – on the door frames. Then, as they sat down to eat the body of the lamb, roasted whole and without broken bones, the destroying angel would see the blood on the door posts and pass over without causing harm. There was salvation in the lamb of the Passover, in its blood and in its flesh. And by that blood the children of Israel escaped from Pharaoh and his tyranny. With that blood, the children of Israel were bought away from Pharaoh's kingdom and into God's.

And each year the twelve tribes of Israel were to remember this great saving act by living it through once again in the Passover meal and liturgy. As our text

says for this evening: "It is the LORD's Passover." Since it is the LORD's ordinance, no man dare change it one bit. It is the LORD's Passover, his meal, his ceremony, and it was celebrated year after year by the faithful in Israel for about one thousand, four hundred, and 80 years. And then something happened.

On the night when he was betrayed, Jesus led his 12 disciples up to a nondescript dining room as the head of each household in Israel did every year. It was the Passover meal and Jesus was going to lead his disciples through it once again. But this time, Jesus said some words that were not in the script: Take eat this is my body. What? What did Jesus say? Didn't he know that this was the LORD's Passover? What's he doing? Take, drink, this is my blood of the New Testament. Whose blood? There is supposed to be blood at Passover, but its supposed to be on the door, not in the cup.

What is Jesus doing to the Passover? The most holy time in the year for each family in Israel. The time when the family gathers round the table to celebrate the LORD's Passover with words hallowed by a millennium and a half of usage. Jesus is changing everything. He's treating this meal like it's his meal. And that is the point. Jesus is changing everything – or rather fulfilling everything, because this is his meal, because he is the LORD.

Jesus is LORD and he is here with the 12 to institute the New Testament, for the Old Covenant, the Old Testament, is about to be fulfilled so fully that it will

burst right out of existence. In the Old Testament a lamb was slaughtered once a year to cover and protect each family in Israel. In the New Testament, the one and only Lamb of God will be slaughtered once for all for the forgiveness of the sin of the whole world. In the Old Testament that lamb's blood was painted on the door and its flesh eaten by the Israelites to prepare them for the earthly journey ahead. But in the New Testament things are wondrously different. In the New Testament Jesus, God in the Flesh, gives his life saving body and blood for life-saving food and drink. This is what that old shadow of Passover had always been pointing at. This is the fulfillment: the true Lamb of God would come and fill the people of God with his own life-giving-blood and feed them for eternal strength with his own flesh.

For some this is too much to believe; too good to be true; too miraculous to be true. After Jesus in John chapter 6 had told some folks that he would give his Flesh and Blood for real food and drink for the life of the world the people asked, "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" How? By simply saying so.

Remember it is the LORD's Passover, now become the LORD's Supper. And what the LORD says goes. He said let there be light, and there was light. He said This is my body, and it is. As the hymnist says: Thy body and Thy blood, once slain and shed for me, are taken here with mouth and soul in blest reality. Search not how

this takes place, this wondrous mystery, God can accomplish vastly more than seemeth plain to thee!"

So this holy night, dear Christians, draw near and take the body of the Lord. And drink the holy blood for you outpoured; Offered was he for greatest and for least, Himself the victim, and himself the priest. Our High Priest Jesus sacrificed himself as the greatest sacrificial victim once and for all. But he continually gives us the fruits of his cross to eat and drink as the medicine of immortality for our souls and bodies. What wondrous love is this? That the Lord of lords in human vesture, In the body and the blood, will give to all the faithful, his own self for heavenly food.

This is the greatest service that He Who came to serve, not to be served, ever gave. In John's Gospel we don't hear the Words of Institution themselves, instead, we see other miracles and hear other words of Jesus that hint at and explain the Lord's Supper. So we see this powerful Jesus who has no problem changing water into wine with a mere word. A Jesus who can do this should have no problem making the form of wine convey his true blood. So we see Jesus feed thousands with just a few loaves. A Jesus who can do this should have no problem feeding all the children of God for the rest of time with his very flesh. So we hear Jesus speak of himself as the true Bread of Life who came down from heaven to give his Flesh and Blood as real food and real drink.

And we see Jesus tonight in our lesson in the upper room. We see him strip to the waist and gird himself with a slave's towel and do a slave's duty: washing feet. But not just any feet; he is washing the very feet that would, just a few hours later, trample over one another to run away from Him and hide, the feet that would run to collect 30 pieces of silver as the price for the Lord of Life, the feet that would carry cowardly Peter to a fireside where he would deny his Lord three times. This Jesus has indeed come to serve, not to be served. He has come to give his life as a ransom for many. He who is Lord of all has come to be the slave of all.

And that is what makes Jesus' new commandment new: his self-giving love. We cannot comprehend his command to love one another apart from this new and fulfilled Passover, this Supper of the Lord where the Lord himself is host, and food, and drink, and serving slave. He is all in all. And we all gather on an equal plane to partake of him. All of us bowing down, all of us receiving the one body and drinking of the one cup of the New Testament filled with his blood. Since we all partake of his body, we are all made into his body. And what person ever hated his own body? Now, all we who come forward to bow and receive the holy mystery of the body and blood are united in the holy mystery of the Church. Christ in us and we in him. And as he is in us, we are empowered to live his life of love to the other members of his body and bride the Church. When we err, when we fall, when we like those disciples run away with the very feet our Lord has washed,

when we curse his name and deny him with the very mouths that have received his body and blood – he is there still, calling us to repent, offering us forgiveness anew, telling us again to come to the table with repentant hearts and take, eat, this is my body, this is my blood, for the forgiveness of sin.

All you who have felt the weight of the world, who have felt the need to be cleansed, all you who have hungered and thirsted for a righteousness you do not have, come to the table, take and eat the Living bread of heaven, the flesh of the risen Lord, come and drink the life giving blood of the Lamb of God.

Jesus, source of lasting pleasure, truest friend and dearest treasure, peace beyond all understanding, joy into all life expanding: humbly now I bow before you; love incarnate I adore you; worthily let me receive you, and so favored never leave you. Amen.

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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Now the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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