

Text: Matthew 26:26-30

Theme: It Is Hidden in the Savior's Feast

Date: April 5, 2007 (Maundy Thursday)

In the Name of Jesus, Dear Christian Friends,

During the Lenten season this year we have been considering this general theme: *Behold the hidden glory of the cross.* As we have followed Jesus through this holy season, one thing that stands out as striking is this simple truth: The more common and the more lowly the words and works of Jesus, the more glorious and the more powerful they are. This truth is nowhere more evident than it is in the truth of the Lord's Supper; the body and blood of our Lord Jesus given and shed for sinners the forgiveness of sins. You know the words of institution by heart; for you have heard them read hundreds of times since childhood and even memorized them in confirmation class.

WHILE THEY WERE EATING, JESUS TOOK BREAD, GAVE THANKS AND BROKE IT, AND GAVE IT TO HIS DISCIPLES, SAYING, "TAKE AND EAT; THIS IS MY BODY." THEN HE TOOK THE CUP, GAVE THANKS AND OFFERED IT TO THEM, SAYING, "DRINK FROM IT, ALL OF YOU. THIS IS MY BLOOD OF THE COVENANT, WHICH IS Poured OUT FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS." Today as we continue to follow our Savior to the cross we see again the glory of the Son of God hidden in the Savior's feast. God's Word reminds us that 1) this feast is so simple that we may miss it's glory, but 2) this feast is not trivial by any means because it is the price of our salvation.

1. It is a feast which is so simple that we may miss its glory

Could anything have been more simple? Jesus is with his disciples in a borrowed room. They have come there to celebrate the Jewish festival of Passover. They have come to the yearly remembrance of Israel's delivery from Egyptian slavery. They have come to recall how glorious it was when the angel of death passed over the houses of the people of Israel who had their doorposts painted with the blood of the lamb being eaten inside. They remembered how that angel of death brought death to the firstborn of every household in Egypt that did not have its doorposts painted with the blood of the lamb.

Passover was the central festival of the Jewish calendar. Everybody looked forward to it. So too did Jesus' disciples. But this Passover was different. In the middle of the Passover celebration, quietly, with no fanfare or fuss at all, Jesus did something new, something different. He instituted a whole new feast. But he did it so simply and with the heart of a servant that we have to wonder if the disciples, at the time, got even a fraction of the significance of what was happening. We strongly suspect that they did not. For as usual, their minds were on other things. They had been so busy arguing with one another about which one of them was most important that no one took on the task of feet washing before the meal. Servants or hosts would do that when people came in from the dusty outdoors. But no one did it that night; no one wanted to be the servant of the others. No one, that is, except Jesus, who took on the task himself and washed the feet of the disciples.

Jesus continued his servant manner as his words move on to speak of his own upcoming death. But again, it was the Passover, a celebration. Who wants to talk about such things at a celebration? And Jesus spoke about betrayal, about the one who was that very night going to sell him out. The disciples were mystified and did not understand. So much was crowded into the evening, so much celebration of Israel's past, so much confusion about the present, so much wrangling over the future. One has to wonder if those with Jesus missed the glory of the feast. It was there but it was hidden in the cross.

Then in the middle of it all, again with no fuss or fanfare, Jesus creates a new feast. It is so simple, so easy to pass by and treat it as though it were nothing. He took bread, the plainest bread possible. He broke the bread and gave it to them to eat. He declared as he did so: **"This is my body!"** He didn't explain it. He didn't say that it was a symbol for his body. No, the words are plain and clear: **"This is my body."** He didn't tell them either to save it up or put it on parade or worship it. He just said, **"Take and eat."** And then with equal simplicity, he took a cup of wine, the cup used in the Passover celebration. And he just said, **"Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."** Again he makes no further explanation of what he means. He does not have to. The words are plain and clear. **"This is my blood,"** he declared. He didn't say that it was a symbol for his blood. Neither did he say that it was something to be worshiped and adored. No, just **"Drink from it, all of you."**

Yes, it is all so simple that its glory may be missed.. Here is the Lamb for sinners slain, the Lamb whose blood redeems the world. Yes, here in this new feast is the solution to the sins the disciples were committing that very night, and in the days ahead. For Jesus comes in this feast to give forgiveness, but not just to the disciples; to all the world. That's what he said: **THIS IS MY BLOOD WHICH IS Poured OUT FOR MANY FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.** Here is the Lamb who gives himself as food for life eternal, food that will satisfy every spiritual appetite.

But sometimes we miss the glory hidden in the feast. Not because Jesus makes it so difficult to find, but because our sinful nature gets in the way of simple saving faith. Jesus says that in the Lord's Supper we receive for things: 1) bread 2) wine 3) the real presence of Jesus body 4) and the real presence of Jesus' blood for the purpose of assuring us that He paid the demanded price for our salvation. But sometimes human reason asks the question, *"How can this be the body of Jesus when it tastes like a wafer and how can this be the blood of Jesus when it too tastes like the earthly element of wine?"* Following the thread of human reason, some Christians have theorized that this bread and wine are only serving the purpose of representing Christ's body and blood so as to remind you of his suffering and death. But the simple words of Jesus teach us otherwise. Jesus says, **"Take and eat, this [this bread] is my body....take**

and drink, this cup [this wine] is my blood.” The simple words of Jesus teach us that this bread is the very body that was crucified on Calvary’s cross for our sins. The simple words of Jesus teach us that this wine is the very blood that poured from our Savior’s bloody body. It’s not a representation. It’s the real deal. Jesus doesn’t want us to miss the meaning of his Holy Sacrament. Jesus’ words are unmistakably clear: **THIS IS MY BODY. THIS IS MY BLOOD, GIVEN FOR YOU, GIVEN FOR THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.**

II. It is a feast that is itself the price of our salvation.

While the words of Jesus are abundantly clear concerning his body and blood, God doesn’t want us to trivialize what we receive in the Lord’s Supper because it is the price of our salvation.

Are you mentioned in someone’s will? Are you an heir to an inheritance? Way back when the disciples were squabbling with one another, way back when Jesus got not a shred of sympathy or understanding from them, way back on that night in which he was betrayed, Jesus spoke his last will and testament. He gave no stocks or bonds. There is no family silver to bequeath, no family china, no homestead. There is nothing in Jesus’ estate at all that is worth talking about—except, that is, Jesus himself! And so in his last will and testament, having nothing else to give, he gives everything, he gives himself! **“This is my body; this is my blood given for you,”** he declares. Yes, and to whom is it given. Jesus says, “for you”? On this most holy night of nights when there was so much on Jesus’ mind; on this most holy night of nights when the scourge and the crown of thorns, when the nails and the spear were already clearly before his eyes; he thought about—you. **He spoke his last will and testament, and he made you his beneficiary.** Having nothing else to give you, he gave himself to you and for you.

The price of our salvation cannot be measured in earthly means like stocks and bonds, real estate or investments; No, the price of our salvation is much more costly than that. The Bible says, **“No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him – the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough” (Psalm 49:7,8).** Instead, the Bible teaches that the only possible price for salvation is blood. No just any blood; holy blood, precious blood, innocent blood. The price for salvation is blood. In Jesus’ last will and testament he gives you and me his body and blood. **“This is my body; this is my blood.”** Again, God’s word teaches us, **“You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ... but with the precious blood of Christ” (1 Peter 1:18,19).** The blood of Jesus, God’s own Son, purifies us from every sin.

You were on Jesus’ mind when he composed his last will and testament. You were on Jesus’ mind when on the next day he cried out from the cross, **“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”** And the answer, of course, to this most painful question is this: God would forsake him because God wanted your salvation. God would forsake him because Jesus wanted to suffer the torments of hell itself on the cross for you, for me. All around him the people cried out, **“If you are Son of God, come down.”** Why didn’t he? Because the night before, he had willed and bequeathed himself to you. Why didn’t he? Because the night before, he had declared in his unalterable will that he should never be separated from you. And the only way that that goal could be reached, the goal that we be forever united for time and for eternity in this sacred supper, was for him to be abandoned by the Father. The only way was for him to pay for the sin that separated us from God. The only way was for him to endure the torment of hell on the cross as our substitute.

And so, in anticipation of what he is going to do on Good Friday, Jesus declares to us on the night before, **“This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”** Ordinary food and drink have, by God’s design, the ability to preserve our bodies and to give them strength. But look what is in this food and drink! It preserves not just the body but the body and the soul for life eternal. For here is Jesus the living bread from heaven. Here is Jesus the cup of salvation. Here is Jesus, who now gives us the very price that he paid for our salvation—his true body and true blood. He declares that it works; it works now and forever for the forgiveness of sins. That’s why he came down from heaven in the first place, to win our forgiveness. That’s why he suffered and died, to win our forgiveness. That’s why he has ruled all things in heaven and on earth, so that in Baptism he could wash us clean, and in this Supper he could feed us with himself, to preserve our union with him for time and for eternity.

- Therefore, come with hearts that are broken because of sin and guilt and shame.
- Therefore, come with souls that are starving for food that will strengthen for the ongoing battle with the devil, the world, and the sinful nature.
- Therefore, come with a heart parched with a thirst for salvation. Come and eat and drink the price of your salvation in this feast of feasts.

Then go. Go to hold him fast who had nothing else to give this most holy night than himself. Go and hold him fast who, on the night in which he was betrayed, had no one he would rather think about than you. Go and forget him never, who in his last will and testament made you for all eternity his heir of the heaven he would purchase with his body and his blood, the very same that he gives you this night. Go with the gift of his body and blood that strengthens and preserves you for life now and for life eternal. Amen.