

Thursday, March 24, 2016
Maundy Thursday

John 13:1-17, 31b-35

¹Now before the festival of the Passover, Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart from this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. ²The devil had already put it into the heart of Judas son of Simon Iscariot to betray him. And during supper ³Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴got up from the table, took off his outer robe, and tied a towel around himself. ⁵Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was tied around him. ⁶He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" ⁷Jesus answered, "You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand." ⁸Peter said to him, "You will never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no share with me." ⁹Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" ¹⁰Jesus said to him, "One who has bathed does not need to wash, except for the feet, but is entirely clean. And you are clean, though not all of you." ¹¹For he knew who was to betray him; for this reason he said, "Not all of you are clean."

¹²After he had washed their feet, had put on his robe, and had returned to the table, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you?" ¹³You call me Teacher and Lord—and you are right, for that is what I am. ¹⁴So if I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. ¹⁶Very truly, I tell you, servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them. ¹⁷If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

^{31b}"Now the Son of Man has been glorified, and God has been glorified in him. ³²If God has been glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself and will glorify him at once. ³³Little children, I am with you only a little longer. You will look for me; and as I said to the Jews so now I say to you, 'Where I am going, you cannot come.' ³⁴I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. ³⁵By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Dear disciples of Jesus:

When we were meditating on the Seven Habits of Jesus, we took one Sunday to mediate on the Habit of Preparing.

We mentioned that we should prepare ourselves before coming to worship to listen to God's voice through Holy Communion.

“When God offers us forgiveness through Holy Communion, he is purifying, cleansing, and removing the sins that separate us from a healthy relationship with God and one another. The forgiveness that we receive in Holy Communion:

Reconciles our broken relationship with God, and

Reconciles our broken relationship with others.”¹

Through Holy Communion God's Gospel voice becomes a loud proclamation of forgiveness and reconciliation. When God forgives us, God is reconciling our broken relationships with Him and others. And yet, when we prepare to receive God's gift of forgiveness we will be able to properly identify the forgiveness and reconciliation God offers to us.²

The Bible says: “If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” 1 John 1, 9.

Confession and absolution are two practices that we celebrated today. We started this service with the laying of hands in absolution and now we are remembering that this night we also commemorate the institution of the Holy Communion as a Sacrament of reconciliation and forgiveness.

¹ The Seven Habits of Jesus. P 197

² Idem p. 197

This is a very important element of our Lutheran faith. We do not see the Sacrament of Holy Communion as a special reward for the ones who are healthy Christians or super spiritual ones. We do not see the Sacrament of Holy Communion as a Sacrament reserved to the Christians that are following all the rules and do not have issues, sins or brokenness to heal. We are part of a Lutheran tradition that sees the Sacrament of Communion as a cure for the sick, forgiveness to the one who seeks God, strength for the weak. Our communion table is not a table open only to the super spiritual, our communion table is open to all, and, specially, to all those who feel that they need forgiveness and renewal.

Some people believe that they need to be a super spiritual Christians before coming to communion, we do not believe that. We believe that if you are in need, if you are weak, if you are broken, if you have doubts, if you have more questions than answers, if you are confused or if you are experiencing lack of faith, you need to come and you need to receive Christ in the Holy Sacrament, because the Eucharist was instituted for you and for me to receive forgiveness and healing.

That is why the Catechism says:

What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?

The words "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin" show us that forgiveness of sin, life, and salvation are given to us in the sacrament through these words, because where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation.

How can bodily eating and drinking do such a great thing?

Eating and drinking certainly do not do it, but rather the words that are recorded: "given for you" and "shed for you for the forgiveness of sin." These

words, when accompanied by the physical eating and drinking, are the essential thing in the sacrament, and whoever believes these very words has what they declare and state, namely, "forgiveness of sin."

Tonight we remember the institution of the Sacrament and we do it in a sacrificial thanksgiving mode. We give thanks that this is Sacrament is "given for you", "given for us".

We do it sacrificially because we want to give to these words "Given for you" the answer of a disciple that wants to give himself or herself to Christ. We receive forgiveness of sin and also life and salvation. And the best way to be thankful for this forgiveness of sin and life and salvation is trusting in the power of forgiveness and embracing life and salvation completely.

We embrace life and salvation completely when we are ready to live our life in a way that permanently reveals the presence of Christ in our words and deeds. We celebrate life and salvation when we are ready to live as a saved people.

This is the joy of salvation, the possibility to live as a saved people, in the spiritual freedom that we have as children of God living in the experience of community and love, in prayer, in generosity and in tender and charity for God's people and God's creation.

This is the night when we can give thanks to the Lord for his sacrifice that opened the door to grace, life and salvation. We are invited to taste a piece of this grace and salvation tonight when we receive the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation. Jesus is present specially tonight because tonight we remember that this night was instituted for us to remember our liberation from the slavery of sin and separation.

In the same way that the Israelites celebrated Passover as a memorial of the liberation from the slavery in Egypt, we are tonight celebrating that we are free in Christ and one body as children of God.

The Eucharist tonight is a reminder of that freedom. When the Israelites were liberated the blood of a Lamb was a mark on their doors, a symbol of sacrifice for freedom. Tonight we remember that Jesus, the Lamb of God was sacrifice for our sins and gave us in his sacrifice eternal life.

In gratitude to our Lord, let us prepare tonight to celebrate this miracle of abundant life and forgiveness, let us open our life to the presence of the Lamb of God who took away the sin of the world.

These are the Good News for us tonight.

Thanks be to God for this abundant grace.

Amen.