

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

First Presbyterian Church of Delanco, NJ
Thursday, April 9, 2009, Maundy Thursday

Christ's New Covenant...For Us!

On this anniversary of the Lord's Supper, in these words of Paul to the Corinthians, he reminds them and us of how the Lord's Supper was instituted, and its original purpose. First, the Lord's Supper, also called communion, is rooted in history. It is a certain Man, our Lord Jesus, a certain night, on the night when He is betrayed, and a certain event in which He takes real bread and wine and institutes this sacred rite.

Second, the Lord's Supper is about God's gift. We recognize the work of sacrifice in Christ's words, "This is My body which is broken for you." Christ identifies Himself with the Paschal Lamb, the lamb sacrificed at Passover as the Jews prepare to flee from Egypt. We remember that Christ's death brings life. We also remember His life and teaching, His Resurrection, and the hope He brings.

Christ wants us to remember everything about Him – His love for us, His forgiveness, His purpose, His hope, His presence, and His power. It is only when our thoughts and prayers, connected with communion, begin reaching out to remember these things that we begin to find ourselves cleansed and renewed through our participation.

Third, the Lord's Supper celebrates a new covenant, Christ's new covenant. The history of Israel is the story of a covenant God initiated with them. When Christ says, "This cup is the new covenant," He is announcing that He is entering into a relationship with those for whom He dies on the Cross.

We enter into and renew the same relationship with God through the Lord's Supper, every time we receive the sacrament.

Fourth, there is a proclamation in the observing of the Lord's Supper. Christ tells His disciples, every time they take communion, they "proclaim the Lord's Death until He comes." This is a word of evangelism and a word of hope. Through the Lord's Supper, Christ gives the church another way of preaching the Gospel, a way for the eyes to see and the ears to hear.

There is also a wider sense of Paul's meaning of proclaim. When people live fully in the new life in Christ, our faith makes itself known and our living of our faith makes an impact on others. The story we tell in words and actions becomes contagious. Paul sees participation in the Lord's Supper as an act of proclaiming.

One Sunday evening, the Rev. Kenneth Chafin saw a large group of visitors in the back of the sanctuary who were from the International Seamen's Center. He realized these sailors may be from different countries and possibly limited in understanding English. That night, the service was devoted to observing the Lord's Supper. He was concerned. A few days later, he was surprised to receive a letter from the chaplain who attended with the group relating how meaningful the service had been for them. He told how they were unable to understand the sermon because of their limited English, but they were able to grasp clearly the symbolism of the Lord's Supper. As Christ anticipated, they followed the service with their eyes.

Paul explains that the Lord's Supper, by what it embraces and proclaims, illustrates the entire story of redemption in Christ and reviews for believers the way of life we are called to live together. If we live our lives according to God's will, our lives will be a proclamation of the Gospel to the world.

The Lord's Supper itself contains the simple and direct words connecting the ordinary sharing of bread and wine with the death of Jesus and its importance for all of us. The bread signifies the body of Christ, broken in death. The cup signifies the blood of Jesus, poured out in death. Through Christ's death comes a new covenant; and through participation in the meal, comes the remembrance of Jesus. Because there is one bread, we as believers are one body in Christ.

In the celebration of the Lord's Supper itself, the church engages in the preaching of the Gospel. This is not just another meal. It is the celebration and proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ and His death. We celebrate Christ as a divine messenger and proclaim our confidence that Christ will come again in God's final triumph.

In the context of the church's observance of Maundy Thursday, this passage recalls the events of Holy Week including The Last Supper, Christ's arrest, His trial, His death on the Cross of Calvary, all leading to His Resurrection on Easter. This is no simple commemoration. This remembrance, especially the Lord's Supper, serves to proclaim the death of Jesus Christ once again, as the church continues to live between His death and God's final triumph when Jesus comes again.

The Lord's Supper is a continuing reminder that there is forgiveness for sinners and strength for the weak and weary. May we celebrate this joyful feast of our Lord and Savior as we come to His Table to share the meal He has prepared for us, to share the Gospel, and to love one another. This we do in remembrance of Him. Amen.