

4.6.2023 Maundy Thursday

Pastor Timothy McKenzie

Exodus 12:1-4, 11-14; Psalm 116: 1-2, 12-19; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35

“Do this in remembrance of me”

*Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Jesus’ words to his disciples at his last meal with them were very clear. He commanded them to do two things: “*Do this in remembrance of me*” and “*Love one another.*” It is Jesus’ desire that we remember him in word and sacrament, and proclaim him in lives of service to others. In every way, we are to be imitators of Jesus Christ. This means that Jesus’ disciples are to live squarely in the here and now. Christ is made known in this world not in theological textbooks, but in his ongoing presence in the bread and wine of his holy supper. Christ is made known in this world, not by glorious edifices or grand buildings, but by the building up of one’s neighbor in loving service.

The themes of Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter are interwoven during these holy days to become the fabric of Christian life. The fabric of our faith is a garment that we wear in loving service to others. This is what Christians have been about since the very beginning. Jesus’ words “*Do this in the remembrance of me*” and “*Love one another*” always place us squarely in the here and now, proclaiming Christ alive. Jesus is present in his holy supper, giving himself as peace and forgiveness. Jesus is present in you when you love one another and serve your neighbor. Jesus is present in the here and the now.

Tonight, is not simply a memorial service, it is the joyful celebration that Jesus gives us himself in his body and blood so that nourished and forgiven, we are strengthened to lead lives of loving service for this world. This is who we are as Christians and as a church.

The oldest record of Jesus’ words at his last meal were written by Paul in tonight’s reading from 1 Corinthians. Jesus said, “*“This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me’. In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”* Celebrating the Eucharist is how we remember Jesus and how we know we are Christians. Jesus promises us his real presence saying, “*This is my body,*” and “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood,*” which he gives to us “*for the forgiveness of sins*” (Mt. 26:28). In his holy supper, we proclaim the true presence of Jesus that we can touch and taste. His presence transforms us into servants for others.

The words “*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death*

*until he comes*” mean that our sacramental life is a life of proclamation. From the beginning, Christians have understood worship as a proclaiming of Christ present in the here and now in word and sacrament. “*As often as you do it*” means his holy supper is to be the very center of our worship life. In receiving the means of grace in bread and wine, we become Christ’s servants and the means of God’s grace in this world.

This is why Jesus also commanded his disciples to love one another with lives of service. The church’s public life flows in loving service from the sacrament of his table. In other words, Christ is present in the here and now in bread and wine, so that he may be present in this world through you, as you become his means of grace in loving service to your neighbor.

Tonight’s gospel from John must be understood as a continuation of the Last Supper narrative. During supper, Jesus got up, took off his outer robe, and put a towel around himself, and began to wash his disciples’ feet. To Peter, who resisted, Jesus said, “*Unless I wash you, you have no share in me.*” Then Jesus said to his disciples, “*I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.*” Jesus extended his words at the table of “*Do this in remembrance of me,*” to mean that we are also to remember him by becoming servants of others.

After receiving the sacrament of the table, we are to live sacramentally for others. The word for Christian worship, “liturgy” (*leitourgia* in Greek), literally means “service” to God – which is why it is translated as “service,” as in the “Sunday Service.” What Jesus instituted at the Last Supper is a new way of worshipping and serving God. Christian worship and service are about the here and the now of Christ present in bread and wine, and Christ present in this world through us in service to others.

Receiving the life-giving body and blood of Jesus knits us into his body the church in service to the world. We leave this sacred space to live sacramentally for others. The “exit” signs in our church could really be changed into “entrance” signs because we each time we leave this church we move outward into service for Christ and our neighbor. We always leave this building to enter again into God’s mission of love in this world. Living sacramentally means loving and serving others. It means our service extends beyond these walls. We continue to worship God as we are sent into the world proclaiming the Lord’s death in loving service to others. We die to ourselves so that Christ might live through us.

Sometimes this is very hard to grasp because we have separated God from the world into these glorious buildings that we call churches. Tonight, we also remember that the word the New

Testament uses for “church” – *ekklesia* – really means “gathering.” This is why we call local Lutheran churches, “congregations.” We are St. Mark’s, people gathered by Christ to serve him in this world. Christ is known in this world through the service of Christians, such as us, gathered at local congregations all over the world.

On Maundy Thursday, we remember Jesus’ example, “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” We are servants who have received grace so that we might become God’s loving grace for the life of the world. The world will know Jesus by your loving service for others.

People ask where is God in the world? Jesus has given his example to you. “Do this in remembrance of me” allow his forgiveness to flow outward through you to your neighbor. The world will know him by your love for others.

Remember and receive him often in the sacrament; love one another as he has loved you.

In doing so, he will transform you to become his means of grace in this world.

Amen.