

Date: April 14, 2022 (Maundy Thursday)

1. Texts: Exodus 12:1-14; Ps. 116:1, 10-17; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; John 13:1-17, 31b-35.
2. Subject: evangelism.
3. Topic: Holy Communion as evangelism and an evangelistic way of life.
4. Aim: challenge.
5. Proposition: "As Paul has received and passed on the Lord's command, so do we receive and so must we pass it on."

## TONIGHT THE HOLY COMMUNION

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread,<sup>24</sup> and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."<sup>25</sup> 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."<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.<sup>1</sup>

"For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you..." St. Paul passed on to the Corinthians his knowledge and experience of the Lord's Supper. I think what he wrote has some astounding implications for our faith and its practice today.

Maundy Thursday is traditionally the evening when we celebrate the institution of the Lord's Supper alongside the foot washing. Most parishes like to emphasize the foot washing, with its themes of servanthood and leadership. But, in a time of pandemic with the spread of an airborne virus, the need to maintain physical distances is inhibiting such a commemoration. We moderate our traditions and ministries to fit our circumstances so that we might minister to people now. So, tonight, we focus on the institution of the Lord's Supper.

St. Paul wrote the Corinthian letters sometime in the late 50s, early 60s, some 15 to 20 years after his conversion through that famous "Damascus Road" experience. The timing is important. It clearly means that Paul—or Saul, as he was then—was not at the Last Supper. He was not an eyewitness to the institution

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

of the eucharist. Its reality and importance had to be revealed to him — and that revelation occurred through the resurrected Christ. We don't know when or how, but Paul claimed divine inspiration for his knowledge of the holy communion.

Paul also put his own “twist” on the Lord's Supper.

We Anglicans, being a somewhat individualistic people, usually think of the holy communion as our personal communion with God. Through the bread and wine we share in God's divine presence, power and love. The forgiveness which Christ won for us on the cross is communicated to our spirits through the elements of the communion. It's a deeply personal and intensely spiritual act.

But that's not what Paul said about it. He wrote, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.” Reception of the elements may well be a deeply personal and intensely spiritual act, but it is primarily proclamation. Receiving communion is evangelistic.

[**Explosive sound.**] Our minds are officially blown. According to Paul, we don't receive communion so that our spiritual experience is improved. We receive communion to proclaim to others that Jesus died for our sins. Our communion tells others not only that Jesus is God, but that God sacrificed himself for our sakes. Our communion is proclamation.

That proclamation is to take place continuously until Jesus returns at the end of time.

Given the passage from First Corinthians, it seems that the only proclamation that concerned Paul was that in the holy communion. Elsewhere he wrote about other forms of proclamation, in, for example, the spiritual gifts of First Corinthians 12 to 14. But in this passage, his primary concern was our proclamation through the reception of the Lord's Supper.

That proclamation is not intended for the non-Christians of our world. The guest who attends our Easter services will not understand the proclamation.

They won't possess the necessary background to perceive the proclamation. Most guests won't have the faith to understand much of any proclamation.

In addition, Paul was not writing to or even about non-Christians. Paul wrote his letter to his own congregation at Corinth. "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes," was written to and for the Corinthians. They are proclaiming to one another the Lord's death. They were sharing in the proclamation.

Tonight we are proclaiming to one another the reality of Christ's life and death. We are telling one another that Christ died for us, and not for "us" as individuals, but as part of the Body of Christ. The Lord's Supper and our proclamation unite us as a congregation and as part of the universal and apostolic Church.

I think I can only hint at what this actually means.

You see, the Lord's Supper is always and only a communal act. No one can celebrate the communion on his or her own. The eucharist requires a community.

Thus, our proclamation of the Lord's death is to and by the community. We are upholding one another in this common and shared proclamation.

This all means that Christ's death is for the community. We are forgiven. We are saved. We are joined to one another in a common fellowship of love and sacrifice.

This is what we proclaim to one another in the Holy *Communion*.

As we take the bread and wine, we reinforce the reality of Christ's crucifixion in the community and we reinforce our commitment to living as that community. We dedicate ourselves anew to the reality of Christ's sacrifice in the community. "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for one's friends." This is the proclamation we make to one another in receiving holy communion.

That's what it can mean to celebrate the institution of the Lord's Supper on Maundy Thursday—without the distraction of the foot washing. May we make our proclamation to one another this night and then live in the strength of that proclamation tomorrow.

AMEN.