

Given for You All!

1 Corinthians 11:23-36, John 13:1-17

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ on this most holy night,

A question for you — and not an easy one:

What would you do if you suddenly found out that you were going to die tomorrow? Of all the many things you *could* do, what would be your priority?

It's sobering even to contemplate this, but my guess is that as far as possible, you'd gather your nearest and dearest around you and tell them you love them — hopefully something they've heard from you many times before, but now with ultimate significance — and with such weight that they'll carry it with them forever after, even though they'll never hear it from you again.

This is what healthy families do, of course, if they know that death is coming. They gather and they watch and they wait, conveying their love for one another by word and deed, saying: I love you, and I love you too.

A dear friend of ours knew he didn't have long left so with the help of his good wife, asked friends around for a last meal together, bringing out his best reds to witness to his love.

Peter Kreeft, in a valuable book called *Before I Go – Letters to Our Children about What Really Matters*, says this:

If I knew there was only one minute left for us to talk to each other and after that minute we would never again see each other in this world, what would be the one thing I would most want to say to you and to hear you say to me? 'I love you', of course. But also 'I forgive you.' Because love has enemies, and forgiveness destroys all those enemies.

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Well, this is what Jesus did on the night he was betrayed, the night he knew that he would die tomorrow. He gathered those closest to him, and he told them by word and deed how much he loved them. He dismissed the servants most likely provided with the Upper Room, and did the foot-washing himself, turning a menial task into a profound expression of his self-giving love — love which did not consider even his high and holy divinity as a barrier, but which emptied itself, pouring itself into the foot bath with the water, dirtying itself with the unsewered street-filth of other peoples' open-sandalled feet.

And he hosted a meal for them too — a meal in which he brought out his very best as well — his holy precious blood, soon to flow from open wounds inflicted by cruel soldiers with their whips and thorns, nails and spears; a meal too of his sacred body born of Mary, grown to the prime of life, and then scorned and thrashed and lifted on a cross to die the most horrible of deaths.

He loved them deeply, he loved them to the end, and he expressed that love directly to them the day before he died.

But it wasn't so clean-cut, was it?

The disciples he gathered didn't accept that his end was near — as children will protest when a parent unexpectedly announces that this is in fact their last day together, just as Peter rebuked

Jesus for his earlier talk of death: “Never Lord! This shall never happen to you”, and then trying to prevent it with his sword in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Despite all that he’d taught about the Son of Man having to suffer and die for the sins of the world, when it came to the crunch they couldn’t accept it — adding to his suffering along the way.

And let’s be clear: Jesus suffered every single day he journeyed to the cross. He suffered the deprivations of humanity no longer in harmony with God’s good creation because of the Fall — he suffered hunger and thirst, he suffered pain and fatigue, he suffered the brokenness of society, the tyranny of the strong, the impoverishment of the weak, and the madness of crowds.

He suffered the distress of the sick and disabled, the mentally disturbed, the cruelly oppressed — for all of whom he felt deep compassion — literally fellow suffering, perceiving as only he could the full extent of all that’s wrong with world.

He suffered the grief of parents who’ve lost a child, a wife who’s lost a husband, single sisters who’ve lost their providing brother, a man born blind — and on and on, to the whole people of God, lost like sheep without a shepherd, led astray by charlatans and mauled by wolves.

He suffered his home town disowning him, trying to throw him off a cliff, and his family — even his mother — thinking he was mad, and trying to stop his ministry, so that with broken heart he taught, “A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”

He suffered the leaders of God’s people turning their backs on the one God sent to bring light to their darkness and life to their dying, such that he wept over Jerusalem as it rejected the Messiah it was waiting for.

He suffered every one of his chosen twelve deserting him in his hour of need, their leaders not even staying awake in prayer while he faced the greatest test in Gethsemane, their leader Peter going on to deny him three times — as complete as it can get — and another one of the Twelve actually betraying him for money and having the gall to do it with a kiss! — each of their particular failures depicted by da Vinci in his magnificent painting of the Last Supper.



In short, Jesus suffered the sins of the whole world, subjectively, experientially, as well as objectively when God the Father counted them all against him.

And to that suffering was added the intensity of temptation only he could experience — the temptation to break free of his unity with sin-filled humanity, and draw on his divine power to force good on the world instead, saving his own skin in the process, but of course then failing in his mission to bear the sins of the world himself and save it by forgiveness.

So when Jesus gathered those he’d prepared to continue his mission after his death, he must have felt like a farmer leaving the family business to children who can’t tell a tractor from a telephone pole, who’d rather go surfing than sowing, and whose hearts are simply not in it, leading him at one stage to cry out,

But when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?

Luke 18:8

Yet what does he do? He tells them he loves them, and that he forgives them, despite it all. And he institutes his holy supper not just to help them along the way, but to replace the whole Mosaic covenant established when God freed his people from slavery through the sacrificed blood of the Passover lamb. He institutes a new covenant in his own blood, and for what? For the forgiveness

of sins — of *all* sins of *all* time, ours too which still cause Jesus to suffer as the forever-wounded Lamb of God.

“I love you and I forgive you, even as in ignorance and weakness, you sin against me time and time again.”

This is what Jesus says to you today — to you personally and to us all together, for we are all included in the Lord’s Last and Ever-lasting Supper, beautifully depicted by da Vinci leaving this side of the table open for us; included explicitly by what Jesus actually says there in the Upper Room and which he repeats here when, in faith and obedience, we do this in remembrance of him, for when he says,

Take and eat, this is my body which is given for you,

and

Drink of it all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins,

he’s actually saying, Given for yous all, and Shed for yous all, the Greek being in the plural.

This matches God giving the saving Passover to the whole people of Israel, to be put into practice by families collected together in households, not by each individual on their own. This way the Lord both saved the children of Israel, and gave future generations the means by which to participate in that salvation — the annual Passover feast, done in remembrance of it.

This is what Jesus was leading, the night he was betrayed — functioning as the head of the household, with his disciples as his gathered children — in the process transforming the Passover into something else — the saving meal of the new covenant he was creating by shedding his own blood on the cross, not only expressing his love and forgiveness through it, but giving them his last will and testament too — a new testament to supersede the old, as we will prepare a will to care for our loved ones when we die.

This is important for us, as the household of God collected together in this particular Christian congregation. It’s to us collectively, in the plural, that our Lord serves the sacrament. We don’t conduct the Lord’s supper privately in our personal devotions but together as St Paul’s Lutheran Church, Box Hill.

When Jesus says, “For you”, in our service with communion, he means for us all together — so much so that we become his body in the process, as St Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10,

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all participate in [we all commune in] the one bread,

signified by the single wafer held by our pastor when consecrating the elements.

You cannot be a Christian alone, Jesus says. You belong in a household and must participate in it. Communion is communal, a fellowship in Christ.

It’s into this communion that Jesus says, “Love one another,” giving his collective meal to go with his collective commandment — where we are to notice, consider, care for, and sacrifice for the other here with us.

So look around when you commune. Pay attention to who exactly the Lord has given as your closest brothers and sisters in him, and lift this family up in prayer. Receive love from your holy-communion-family too, and love it back, forgiving it as well, because ‘Given for yous all’ it is, with the love and forgiveness of our crucified and risen Lord!

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding and comes with holy communion together, keep your hearts and minds safe in our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Video of the service including the above address: <https://youtu.be/LXwDnzzKkQ8>