

Holy Communion
Pastor Jim Cords
October 16, 2022

This Sunday's texts:

Exodus 13:3-10

1 Corinthians 10:15-17

Luke 22:7-20

The holy gospel for this day comes to us from the Gospel of Luke, the 22nd chapter:

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, where I make eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, all furnished. Make preparations there." They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover. When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God." After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, "Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you, do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, allow us to recognize the good news of your sacrifice for us that brings to us the promise of forgiveness and life everlasting and makes us one with you and your family. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper, all refer to this sacrament that we celebrate here at St Timothy's at least twice a month. A sacrament, by the way, that we will also celebrate next week as we do the ordination and installation of a pastor, recognizing that in our ministry and in our calling, we are fundamentally and always dependent on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that our ministry is actually an outpouring of the grace of God we receive when we serve in gratitude for that grace we have received.

Sometimes, however, in the church today, we think about the Last Supper when we hear about Holy Communion. We think about Jesus and his twelve disciples in that upper room and we forget to remember that what Jesus was doing, at that moment, was celebrating the Passover meal. This idea of the Passover is critically important to the identity of God's people. Listen to what "the Lord said, 'I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt ... and I am concerned about their suffering.'"¹ This is the beginning of the Exodus story, where God comes in the burning bush and shows up to Abraham and He says I

¹ Exodus 3:7

know the struggles of my people. I hear and I will do something about it. There's a resonance that causes us to recognize that we have a God who hears us and who rescues us. This Exodus story then, where Moses is sent to say to pharaoh who is enslaving the people of Israel "let my people go" is indeed one of the movements of the character of the God we serve. He is a God who always rescues us, to set us free. So the freedom in Christ we talk about, especially in the epistle to the Galatians, is a recognition that God we serve is a God who rescues. God we serve is a God who saves.

In these days in the life of the church when we say "Jesus saves" or "I am saved" – not that Lutherans talk in those terms very often - sometimes we want to fully spiritualize it and miss the reality that the promise of salvation is a promise of wholeness. It isn't simply spiritual but it's physical; it's spiritual; it's relational. It's all those things as we're invited to experience the fullness of life as God intended. We have to try to work on our thinking here in the West, not to separate out or compartmentalize that which is spiritual with the rest of our lives. In the scripture, if you read it with that compartmentalization in mind, you totally miss what's there in the lives of the people. They didn't do that. They didn't separate that which is spiritual from that which is physical or relational or emotionally. It was all one, the wholeness of the people, very much a part of the Hebraic mindset.

So what happens is this Exodus story, this Passover story gets repeated over and over and over in both the Old Testament and the New. Even before the Ten Commandments are given to Moses, he begins the Ten Commandments with the words remember "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery."² As we begin this question of God's instruction, we are to begin by remembering who God is, God who hears our cries and rescues us. Out of the freedom of that rescue, we live out our lives seeking to be a witness, seeking to be grateful, seeking to use our freedom to bless others and to bring honor and glory to God.

The people of Israel are told to remember the Passover. When the father is given instruction for how he is to carry out the Passover, when the children ask why you are doing this, the language of the father is language that says God rescued me. I was rescued. It's personal. Now I don't know about you, but I've never been to Sweden, but if people ask me, I tell them I'm Swedish. There's more to it than just that ancestry, of that inheritance, when we're talking about this in a scriptural way. This idea of remembering and we use the words "do this in remembrance of me" again as we go back to a Hebraic mindset, to remember is to be connected afresh to something. It's not just the story of my father, my grandfather, my ancient ancestors. It becomes my story. As I remember it, it's a part of who I am. It's part of my identity. I am one who was rescued because God continues to be a rescuer, not just for my great-great-grandparents, but for me.

This remembrance at the table for the Passover with Jesus is a remembrance that God rescues. It's a remembrance of their Journey as God's people and they are a part of it.

² Exodus 20:2

They are recognizing who they are and so we, too, are invited to remember, that is, to be reconnected to what has been done for us, to what is our family's story. When we come forward to receive communion, it's not just to grab a bit of bread and to take a little wine. It's to be connected afresh to the work of God in and for us and a part of that connection is both the forgiveness of our sins and the communion, the community as God's children that we are a part of.

As we did our confession this morning in the traditional words at this service, we're told in the end that we're forgiven and God gives us the Holy Spirit, so that we have the power to become children of God. Holy Communion is not just between me and Jesus, although it is that. It's also between us as a community. The forgiveness that we receive is not just for our sins. It's a forgiveness of the sins of the community, so that we can be restored and reconnected. It's a powerful moment to remember.

I don't know about you, but there are times when I've come to communion discouraged. There are times when I come to communion and there are issues going on in my life or in the lives of people I love and I don't see resolution and I'm kind of heartbroken. Most of you may have heard, in the prayers and so forth, that Marilyn's brother, Lee passed away last week. Marilyn and I were very close to Lee. He was a great gift of God for us. We continue to wake up in the morning and just be stunned by the reality that he is no longer in this world. Now, we know he was suffering. We know that suffering has ended. We know he is in a better place. But the loss we feel in our lives brings grief. It brings sorrow. I remember sitting with Marilyn in the Jacuzzi a couple of nights after we learn that Lee passed away. I just turned her and I said I don't know why he had to suffer the way he did. I don't know why God let that happen.

And why I'm telling you the story is for two reasons. Number one, I think many of you have had similar thoughts of loss in your own life. I want to say to you it's okay. The second thing I want to say to you is that God can come to us in those moments when we don't understand and he can save us. He can comfort us. He can give us the strength we need to carry on for the new day, as we remember our loved one is with Him and as we remember that God is with us and that we are a part of the family.

You may remember the topic of the sermon today. Holy Communion. Let's not miss the promise that that sacred right, that sacramental moment connects to the deepest realities of our lives. It speaks to our identity. It speaks to our losses. It speaks to our pain. And it speaks to a God who hears the cries of his people and comes to them. That's a part of the reality of this sacrament that we practice each day. I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt and in San Jose and I am concerned about their suffering.

As you think about the religions of the world, as you think about even people who are really not very religious, but have thoughts about God, very often it's difficult for them to come to the place where they can accept and, even for us Christians, sometimes we struggle to accept this reality. God cares about our suffering. We are not insignificant to

God. We matter to him. He hears our prayers and he responds. Listen to these words again. This is from 1 Corinthians 11: “For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you. The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when you had given thanks, he broke it he said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’”³ Do this to be renewed in your connection to me. Take part in what Christ has done, in sacrificing himself for the forgiveness of our sins. Remember that the God we serve is the God who hears our cries and rescues us, even from our own sin and shame. Even if we haven't experienced physical slavery, most of us have experienced things in our lives that we feel stuck in, trapped by, unable to get out of. That's the bondage that God would rescue us from.

Then listen to these words again from 1 Corinthians: “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?”⁴ Now I don't know if you can read it on the screen, but on the bottom, it says NIV uses the word “participation.” King James' version uses the word “communion.” Is this not a communion in the blood of Christ? What I want to suggest to you is this is not just a motion, an action that we go through. It is a being joined together as a community of faith, and with God. A part of that wholeness, that salvation, that forgiveness that we're promised is restorative to our relationship with God. It's a reminder that we can pray and he will hear. It's a reminder that God is active and involved and participating in our lives as we join in the life of Christ.

Listen to this from Ezekiel 36: God said through the prophet Ezekiel “I will also sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will remove your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”⁵ This promise of God is transformative. It changes who we are as we experience the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives, as we experience the truth of the forgiveness that is given to us through Christ.

Then I remind you and, today especially, I remind you because at the second service today, we actually have two baptisms. I remind you of these words in the baptismal sacrament: “In Holy Baptism, we are joined to the death and resurrection of Jesus.” Brothers and sisters in Christ, as Lutheran Christians, we remember that salvation comes by God's act, that God is the initiator, that he claims us, that he restores us, that he brings us back into relationship with him and one another. This rite that you're going to be participating in, this sacrament of the Lord's Supper is a reestablishment, a renewal daily of our faith, so that we remember not our lives but his life given for us and now the freedom of our lives in the love and presence of Christ each day. In the body of Christ, in the blood of Christ, we receive Christ anew in this holy sacrament. As you come today, remember, be reconnected, be strengthened in your faith for your life. Thanks be to God. Amen.

³ 1 Corinthians 11:23-24

⁴ 1 Corinthians 10:16

⁵ Ezekiel: 36:25-26