

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the Host of our Holy Meal, Jesus Christ, Our Savior, amen.

Well friends, we're almost to the end of this year's Lenten Journey. When we think of Maundy Thursday, we usually think of Jesus giving his disciples a new command, "To Love One Another," or Jesus washing the feet of the disciples to show them that loving someone means serving their deepest needs. Those are images from the Gospel according to John. John's Gospel is the different one. It's unique in so many ways. Tonight, we heard from Luke's side of the story. Luke is more like Matthew and Mark's Gospels, that's why they're called the synoptic Gospels. They agree on things like the timeline of the events of Holy Week. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke Jesus celebrates the Passover meal with his disciples and gives them a new Covenant. In John's Gospel Jesus is killed on the day before the Passover, the same day the Sacrificial Lamb is slaughtered as a scapegoat for the sins of the people of Israel. In John's Gospel Jesus is the new scapegoat who takes on the sins of the whole world in our place. That's what it means to be a scapegoat. In John's Gospel, when John the Baptist sees Jesus on the shore of the Jordan River, he shouts out for all to hear, "Behold, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" None of that happens in Luke's story, nor in Matthew's or Mark's.

In Luke's Gospel, this day has a different meaning altogether. The meal Jesus is eating with his disciples had its origin all the way back to the time when God, through Moses, led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. Remember all those plagues of locusts, boils, frogs, and rivers turning to blood? There were ten plagues total and the final one involved the angel of death coming in the night and taking the firstborn of every family, including all the livestock firstborn as well. God instructed Moses to tell the Hebrew people to slaughter a whole lamb and to prepare a meal that was to be eaten in preparation for their Exodus from slavery in Egypt. The blood from that lamb was to be painted above the doors of every Hebrew household. On that night, when the angel of death came and killed the firstborn those with the lamb's blood over the doors would be passed over. The people were then told to make a symbolic meal every year to remember the mighty acts of God, who brought His people out of their bondage to slavery into the freedom of the promised land.

When Jesus said this is my body, given for you and this is my blood shed for you he was literally becoming our Passover Lamb covering you with his holy and lifesaving blood and marking you so the angel of death will pass over each and every one of his disciples. When you partake of this Holy meal, that today we call Holy Communion, or the Lord's Supper, or the Last Supper, you are being once again covered by that same Holy and lifesaving body and blood of God.

I know that's a lot to take in and try to wrap your mind around. I'm not saying Jesus didn't take away our sins or the sins of the whole world, as it says in John's Gospel. What I am saying is that's not the story Luke wants us to understand. Luke wants us to know Jesus opened the way to everlasting life and by his death and resurrection He became our Passover Lamb. Jesus commanded us to remember Him by repeating this new ritual to accomplish our salvation. In Lutheran lingo we call this meal the "Means of Grace." God provides everything we need for our eternal salvation in this grace filled Holy meal. Communion is the means by which God imparts His love and mercy to us. I look at it like this... Suppose I want to go on a wonderful vacation to Hawaii. In order to reach my destination, I have to ride in a Jumbo Jet to get there. If Hawaii is Eternal life, then the Jumbo Jet that provides the means to get there is Holy Communion. It's the means to the end.

I know we've haggled over how often we need this Means of Grace in our Worship life and once the Covid Pandemic has passed, we'll probably get back to that discussion, but that's not what I'm talking about tonight. As we examine Luke's version of Jesus instituting Holy Communion for His disciples, I noticed Jesus doesn't mention this nasty business of the one who will betray him until after He has instituted the new Covenant. In Mark and Matthew's versions they have the discussion about the betrayal before they break bread and eat and drink from

the cup of Salvation. It seems as if Luke wants us to notice Judas is invited to the final Supper to receive God's Grace and indeed partakes of the forgiveness Jesus offers even though Jesus knows full well he will soon lead the Roman soldiers to arrest him. IN Matthew and Mark this is a little less obvious... Even boastful Peter is there eating the Body of Christ and drinking his blood despite the fact, as Jesus points out he will also betray and deny him before the rooster crows. No one is excluded. That's a main point for Luke. I mean who hasn't betrayed or denied Jesus? As we confess, if we say we are without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If there was a means test for entrance into the table of God's Grace, Jesus would be eating alone... Thankfully, there is no means test! Jesus gave the cup for all to drink. The President of Trinity Seminary, when I was a student there, was very fond of reminding us that all mean all. If Jesus set the table for the likes of Peter and for Judas, then surely, he set it for the likes of me and for you.

May we never lose sight of our Passover Lamb and never tire of celebrating this Holy Meal which gives us eternal life. May God's Meal of Grace be shared with everyone who desires it from Pitsburg Ohio to the ends of the earth. Let us leave here tonight joyful and grateful hearts because Jesus was willing and able to cover us and protect through the live-giving body and blood of His Last Supper. Amen.