

Maundy Thursday  
9 April, Anno Domini 2020  
St. John 13:1-15, 34-35  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Our Lenten sermon series this year drew our attention to the various ways in which people saw Jesus. Tonight, it's not about the eyes of those around Jesus, but the eyes of Jesus Himself. Jesus knew what was about to begin in the next few hours - the betrayal, the arrest, the unjust trial, the crucifixion. But Jesus' eyes weren't turned in on Himself like ours are most of the time. All that He gladly suffered because His concern, as it always has been, was on those whom He loved. He knew how confusing and terrifying the next few days would be. He knew the agony of their hearts. He knew the tremendous guilt that would consume Judas and Peter. He knew the persecution that would continue after His ascension. He knew how sin and death would continue to suffocate this sinful, dying world until His final return in glory. He knew diseases like COVID-19, the Spanish flu, and the bubonic plague would ravage the world and cause widespread fear and panic. That is why His beloved disciples were what mattered in that moment. That is why His beloved Church was what mattered in that moment. That is why you, His beloved Baptized children, are what mattered to the Son of God as He prepared for His death. He loved us all to the very bitter end.

That's how it has always been. Jesus' concern has always been for man, even after man rejected Him and chose death instead. Before the foundations of the earth were laid, God had prepared the means of our salvation. That is who He is: He is the Lord. He is the Deliverer who frees man from his bondage to Satan and the chaos and carnage the ancient serpent sows on a daily basis. He is the Helper who helps in every time of need.

But deliverance is not free. It comes at a very high price. When God brought Israel out of Egypt, vengeance was poured out against Egypt's idols. "On the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments". The Lord God is a jealous God. He does not stand for idols to rule over us. Every idol is nothing more than a front for the devil. The price was the firstborn of every man and beast in Egypt. Blood had to be shed in order to set Israel free. God had to attack Pharaoh so that Pharaoh would release God's children. Through Moses and the plagues God had called Egypt to repentance but Pharaoh and his Egypt would not heed the word or the great signs. And they suffered the just judgment of God's wrath. It is not that God

desired it. Egypt chose it. Let us heed this warning that we do not resist the Word of God and invite His just wrath.

God did, however, provide a means of protection for His people that they would be spared. You see, they were no less innocent than the Egyptians. They too had their idols which became much more evident in the wilderness. They imagined that the flesh pots of Egypt would have been better. They fashioned themselves a golden calf to worship. They had the same sick, sin-filled hearts as the Egyptians. That, however, doesn't make God abandon His promises. And so, as He always does, He provided a means of deliverance. He commanded the lamb to be sacrificed, the blood to be spread on the doorposts and lintels, and the sacrifice to be eaten. By this God delivered His people from the Destroyer. When God saw the blood, He passed over the house and they were spared. But without the sacrifice and the blood and the meal, there was only death.

It was this very deliverance, this great work of God for His people, that Jesus was celebrating with His apostles on the night when He was betrayed. Imagine reclining at the Passover meal that evening. At twilight the lamb was slaughtered and prepared. At the table around the unleavened bread and bitter herbs, Jesus recounted the exodus and was teaching the disciples what it all meant for Israel. And in then in the middle of that teaching, Jesus took bread, broke, and gave it to the disciples and said something that would have been completely shocking - "Take, eat; this is My Body which is given for you." Then the same with the wine "Drink of it all of you; this cup is the new testament in My Blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins." This would have caught the disciples completely off guard. But what Jesus was doing was clear. The Passover deliverance wasn't about Egypt and the Promised Land. It was about Him. He was the lamb whose blood would be poured out. It was His Body that would suffer the roasting fire of God's judgment against our idolatry. It was His Blood that would mark the doorposts of our lips so that God's wrath might pass over us. Jesus is the Lamb. Jesus is the meal. His Body and His Blood are the food of deliverance. We aren't dealing in mere signs and symbols but in real things - real sin, real judgment, real death, real Body and Blood, real forgiveness, real life and salvation.

In His great love for us, knowing the affliction and trials that would beset God's people after He ascended to the Father, there was nothing better that Jesus could give than this precious meal - Holy Communion. He left for us as true life-giving food Himself, the Lamb of God who was offered on the altar of the cross. His Body and Blood are the atoning sacrifice for our sins and now, this very hour, sit in

majesty at the right hand of the Father, graciously ruling over all things in heaven and earth. This Body and Blood of Jesus, which He gives to you are His pledge of the forgiveness of all your sins and that your body will rise triumphant from the grave just as His did.

Nothing was more important to Jesus than that you have this meal and by this meal feast on your deliverance, not from earthly tyrants but from hell's tyrant who would see you suffer, body and soul, in endless torment in hell, suffering because of your sin. The Lord Jesus Christ is the great deliverer and He has, by His innocent death, provided deliverance for you. And He gives that deliverance to you in this meal which He instituted, bread and wine, Body and Blood for the forgiveness of your sins. The value of this meal is so great that Jesus commands it to His children "Take, eat and drink. Eat My Flesh as true food and drink My Blood as true drink." And hearing such a gracious invitation, faith eagerly hungers for this gift and will stop at nothing to have it. Where Christ provides a means of salvation, faith runs because this food satisfies our daily hunger for the righteousness of God.

If you want evidence of the importance of this food, just look at how the devil attacks it. He throws every roadblock he can think of into your path. He uses disease to try to keep God's children away. "You'll get sick. You might die. Keep your distance." He uses false teachers to undermine Christ's own words, teachers who say "It can't be Jesus' Body and Blood. Bread and wine can't forgive sins." He stirs up your flesh to grow bored and disinterested and distracted so you begin to think you don't really need it anyway.

What a terrible position we find ourselves in. Here, tonight, we are celebrating the very meal of our salvation, but it has become so hard to receive it. The hurdles are high. But there is opportunity. On Good Friday and Holy Saturday, Christ's Supper will be available. On Easter, you may come after the Divine Service and partake of the feast. Come as you are safely able. Take the time and receive the antidote to the madness and death that are consuming the world. It is because we live in such a world that our Lord gives this gift. By it, He strengthens and preserves us in both body and soul. By it, we are assured again of our final victory over death and the life everlasting in the presence of God. Come and be healed by the love and mercy and forgiveness of the Lord Jesus Christ. But if you are truly not able to come, do not be afraid or let the devil trouble your conscience. Holy Communion isn't given to be a burden but a gift and blessing. Believe the promises of Christ when He says that He has given these things for your salvation. In so believing you have exactly everything that your Lord has promised in them.

Let faith be nourished by the Words of your Savior. Rest in the promises of your Baptism where you were made to participate in Christ's death and resurrection. And pray fervently that our Lord would soon bring an end to this plague so that all God's children may return to our Father's house with loud shouts of joy and praise and thanksgiving and sit at His table to feast on the Holy Communion together now and forever.

In the Name of +Jesus.