

Maundy Thursday  
1 Corinthians 11:23-28  
*He said so.*

St. Paul's seat at the Lord's Supper is an interesting one. He was not there, but He knows from the Lord Himself what happened. No Apostle told Him. Jesus Himself revealed it to St. Paul, and now St. Paul delivers it to us. And so let's dig in. And, as we do so, let's use the Small Catechism, both as an aid to our study, and to remind ourselves once again that the confession of the faith that we have received from the Lord through the Lutheran Confessions is none other than what St. Paul received from the Lord: the very Word of God.

Luther asks four questions regarding the Lord's Supper in the Small Catechism and then gives us the Scriptural answers. Let's begin by reading the first question together, comparing it with what is said here by St. Paul:

*First: What is the sacrament of Holy Communion?*

It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ for us Christians to eat and to drink.

*Where is this written?*

The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and the Apostle Paul tell us: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

What we receive in the Lord's Supper is nothing other than the very Body and Blood of our Lord, together with the bread and wine. As truly as the Israelites ate the actual Passover Lamb sacrificed for death to pass them over, we eat the very Christ sacrificed for death to pass us over, not only now, but forever. Sts. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and here St. Paul make that clear.

Notice that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the night He was betrayed. This was a serious moment: the most serious moment. This was the last He would see His gathered Apostles until after the Resurrection. Serious times call for serious words. There were no words to waste, there was no time for beating around the bush. Jesus is clear: This bread is My Body; this wine is My Blood. God is not a liar, and nothing is impossible with Him, and so there is no reason to doubt that what He says is true. How can this be? We'll get to that. For now it is enough to know it is.

We join to read the second question:

*Second: What blessing do we receive through this eating and drinking?*

That is shown us by these words, "Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." Through these words we receive forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation in this sacrament. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

We've had the what, now the why. We need no more reason to receive this Supper than that Christ has commanded it, but Jesus doesn't want us to receive it simply because of His command. He wants us to hunger for it because of what it gives. In the Lord's Supper we receive the forgiveness of sins. And, just as the wages of sin is death, the gift of God is eternal life, eternal life that flows from this forgiveness. We were saved on the cross, but we receive salvation in this Supper. Jesus won life for us on the cross, but Jesus gives us life in this Supper. Jesus earned our forgiveness on the cross, but Jesus gives us forgiveness as a free gift here in this Supper. You can't go back to Calvary, but you can go to the Supper, and in so doing you are set at the foot of the cross as the very Body and Blood hung on the tree there is placed and poured into your mouths wide open with awe. ***"This is my body which is for you,"*** Jesus promises. And it was for you on the cross. And it is for you today.

But how can this be? It sounds so far-fetched, so impossible. Well, nothing is so far-fetched that God-given faith can't reach it, and nothing is impossible with God. We read together the third question:

*Third: How can eating and drinking do such great things?*

It is certainly not the eating and drinking that does such things, but the words, "Given and poured out for you

for the forgiveness of sins. "These words are the main thing in this sacrament, along with the eating and drinking. And whoever believes these words has what they plainly say, the forgiveness of sins.

One of my favorite parts of being a parent is being able to say those words I used to hate to hear my parents say: "Because I said so." And do you know what? That is answer enough for my little ones. That is all they need to know at this age. And that is answer enough for the believer, that is, when Jesus gives it. "How can this be," we ask the Savior. "Because I said so," He replies. And there is nothing left for us to do but nod and taste His mercy. Faith is like glue when it comes to the promises of God. It sticks to His every Word. That is the definition of faith. It is trust. Should God tell us to eat straw, faith would start walking to the nearest barn. Should God tell us to drink water from the Tittabawasee, faith would grab a cup, even if every sign seemed to tell us that doing so was foolish. Not even dioxin can poison God's promise. What God ordains is always good. "**Jesus said**"—that is all the proof we need.

And now the fourth question:

*Fourth: Who, then, is properly prepared to receive this sacrament?*

Fasting and other outward preparations may serve a good purpose, but he is properly prepared who believes these words, "Given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins." But whoever does not believe these words or doubts them is not prepared, because the words "for you" require nothing but hearts that believe.

This is an important question. St. Paul's warning is real: "**Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.**"

Remember now, you can't sin against what's not there. St. Paul reinforces that we truly, really, actually, physically receive Christ's Body and Blood when we come to the Lord's Supper, believer and hypocrite alike. The difference is not in what anyone receives; it is in what that receiving works for them. For the believer who examines himself and recognizes the Body and Blood of the Lord, the Supper works forgiveness, life, and salvation. For the hypocrite, that is, one who profess faith but does not have any, or even for the believer who denies this part of Christ's teaching, that His Body and Blood is truly present, this Supper works condemnation. That is why we are so careful about whom we invite to the Supper, why I hope you are so careful about how you come to receive it.

We are not to fear the Lord's Supper. It is a wonderful gift of God. Far from fearing it, we should run to it as often as we can. We ought not fear the Lord's Supper, but we should indeed take it seriously and fear the prospect of handling it in an improper way.

First, we're to examine ourselves. St. Paul makes that clear. But what does that mean? To examine oneself is to consider one's life in light of the Ten Commandments. Have I loved God above all else and my neighbor as myself? The answer every time will be the same if we examine ourselves honestly: no. Should the answer on this side of heaven ever be yes, we ought not approach the altar, because we are not right with God. The Apostle John makes that much clear in his first epistle, when he writes: "**If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.**"

The reason we should go to the Lord's Supper is precisely because we have sinned, because we need forgiveness. Those without sin are not worthy of the Supper, just as they are not worthy of Jesus. He rebuked such blind hypocrites most sternly when He walked the earth. No, the sinner is the one worthy of the Supper, worthy of the Lamb who is indeed Himself most worthy, having been slain for our sins.

Second, we're to know what we receive: not just bread and wine, but something far holier, the Body and Blood of Christ. That's why we're not in fellowship with those churches that say the bread and wine only symbolizes Jesus' Body and Blood. Their teaching may seem more reasonable, but the fact is that it is *their* teaching, not Christ's. We cannot kneel at the altar with those who deny the very words that call us there. No, Jesus words are clear, and faith doesn't expect Jesus' words to fit into its way of thinking, no, faith wants to think in no other way Jesus' than the way Jesus things. Faith says "Amen" to Jesus' Word, not "I don't like how that sounds," sinks its teeth into God's promise and chews on it, instead of asking Him to season it some more or cut off the fat.

So are you ready? Jesus wants you to be. That's why He gave us the Supper after all. He wants you at His table. He wants you at the foot of His cross, from which this Holy Meal flows. Confess that you are an unworthy sinner, and then know that you are His most worthy guest. And rejoice in what you receive there, because while

bread and wine have never saved anyone, Jesus' Body and Blood have saved all those who believe, precisely because they are Jesus'. Believe. Nod in faith to God's promise and speak an "Amen" to His words. He did say so, after all. Amen.