

1 Corinthians 11:23-26²³ ***For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,***²⁴ ***and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."***²⁵ ***In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."***²⁶ ***For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

In A.D. 1570, a little book was published at the city of Jena, in Germany. The author was the Lutheran reformer Martin Ambrose Chemnitz. The name of that book: *Concerning the Lord's Supper*.

He begins this beautiful treatment of what went on this evening so many years ago with these words: "*The Son of God commended to his Church the words of institution of the Supper in the form of a last will and testament—at a time of high emotion, with the most fervent prayer, and under the most serious circumstances on the night in which he was betrayed. Therefore, these words should be observed with the greatest reverence and piety and in the fear of the Lord by all people, for they are the words of the testament of the Son of God.*"

There is a time to speak in parables and figures of speech. For example, when you have the luxury of time, you can use parables to reveal mysteries of the faith to those who believe while hiding them from those who reject and ridicule. When Jesus was teaching his disciples in mixed company—with his enemies right there—that was the time to use parables and figures of speech.

But not when he was about to die. Not when he was about to be betrayed. Not when his disciples were being sifted as wheat. Peter boasted in that upper room that he would go to prison and even die with Jesus. But hours later he swore horrible oaths that he never knew Jesus. Now was not the time for parables. Judas was headed for the depths of despair with his neck at the end of a rope. A third would run away naked rather than be captured with Jesus. Those who survived this evening would find themselves shut behind locked doors in hopeless terror.

Jesus was about to die. When you are saying goodbye to loved ones—when you are pouring into their hands all you have left, every last thing you can give them—you don't use figures of speech. "*I, being of sound mind, hereby bequeath to my offspring the chrome chariot sitting in the garage.*" No. You say, "*I hereby give my...2006 Honda Odyssey to my son, Isaiah.*" You don't say, "*I give my humble abode to my wife,*" because someone might argue that besides a house in the city, you also own a cabin up north. So you say, "*I hereby bequeath to my wife, Nancy, my house on 6333 N. 69th Drive.*"

Because when emotions are flying and the stakes are high, that's when you have to speak in the clearest of terms – no irony or figures of speech. Then there will be no doubt that your last will and testament will be carried out the way you meant it to be. How much more important was it when our Lord Jesus, on the night before he died, gave to the Twelve, and all of us, his dearest possession: his very body and true blood to assure us that he removed the one obstacle between us and God?

When you consider the significance of the moment and the inheritance, is it any wonder that the last will and testament of our Lord Jesus Christ was recorded not once in Matthew 26 but a second time in Mark 14 and a third time in Luke 22? In these three instances, the foundation of all our comfort and forgiveness in the Lord's Supper came from the mouth of Jesus himself. They were spoken in the intimate circle of believers. Jesus took the bread of the Passover, gave thanks, told the disciples what they were receiving in no uncertain terms: "***This is my body, given for you for the forgiveness of sins.***" If he had meant something different, there were ways of speaking differently about this meal. But considering the seriousness of the moment and the weakness of his disciples' flesh, Jesus made his language simple and plain. "***In the same way, after supper he took the cup.***" What is in the cup at Passover? It is today what it has been since the time of the first Passover in Egypt—the fermented fruit of the vine. So we are drinking wine. But Jesus did not stop there. He blessed it and gave it to them saying, "***Drink from it all of you. This cup is the new covenant in my blood which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.***" Again, if he had meant to say that the wine was something different from his blood, he could have said it in so many different ways. But in this solemn moment, he said precisely what he meant. This wine is his blood, which would be poured out for them the following morning.

Sinful human reason breaks in and raises every kind of objection. "*How can Jesus give them his body and blood when he hasn't even died?*" Then it takes out a tape measure, figures his approximate size and jokingly concludes, "*Jesus wasn't that big of a guy – there wouldn't have been enough of him to last past the first century!*" Or, "*Do you realize how disgusting that sounds? The idea of eating flesh and drinking blood! What are we – cannibals?*" If you want to dispute this sacrament because it's illogical or distasteful, just be careful of the dangerous ground you're treading on. The Holy Spirit has given us a thousand other mysteries that are just as contrary to reason and offensive to 'enlightened' 21st-century

people. Remember the questions we asked earlier this Lent? How can Jesus be fully God and fully man at the same time? How can a virgin be a mother? How can God be three and at the same time be one? We've got a theme going here – the way God hides his gracious power behind teachings that seem so foolish and unreasonable!

But our sinful nature still wants to be the teacher, to explain to God what he really meant – 'the way it should be.' It happens so naturally, that we question God's Word. But when we try to pick and choose what makes sense and what doesn't, that's not trust in our Savior or his Word, is it? It's a sin that can rob us of eternal salvation, because it robs us of the one true faith in Christ who is the only way, truth and life.

If we just sit at Jesus' feet and listen, his promises drive away all of our doubts and Satan's empty lies. And that's what he was giving in this Supper – his promises! He wasn't giving us another law. [*Moses gave you ten commandments, so why not an Eleventh? You must eat this bread and wine to remind yourselves of how I will die for you!*] No! Jesus wasn't trying to be a new Moses. He didn't come to bring more laws. He came with grace and truth; with relief from a troubled conscience and weak faith. He came with the gift of forgiveness and a meal that is **"given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."** It's not a burden or an obligation, but a loving invitation to share in Jesus' gift – given and poured out for the forgiveness of sins! Heaven's eternal banquet is open to us.

Luther once said that if we were handing out gold coins at the altar, the balcony would collapse under the weight of those who would be waiting in line. *"Blind people would swim across rivers"* to get such treasure! But at the Lord's Supper is a treasure that moth and rust cannot destroy and thieves cannot break in and steal. Here we have the body and blood of our ascended and glorified Jesus! The body and blood hidden under the bread and wine serves no other purpose than to rescue us poor sinners from the guilt, punishment, and control of sin.

And just as his forgiveness is greater than our sin, so his body and blood continues from generation to generation. Since Jesus ascended bodily to fill the whole universe (Eph 1:23; 4:10), he reassures each of his believers in every generation, **"My body . . . my blood . . . given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins."** In this way, the Son of God, our brother, spans the centuries and gives to you his most precious possession—his body and blood sacrificed on the cross and raised up as the proof of your salvation.

Notice that St. Paul did not merely quote Matthew 26, Mark 14, or Luke 22. He received it directly from Jesus. He says in our text, **"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you."** Thirty years after that night in the upper room, St. Paul reminded the straying Corinthians that the Lord's Supper was an ongoing table of comfort for sinners. Jesus' meal was for the Twelve; it was for the Corinthian Christians 30 years later; and it's for believers throughout the ages. For twenty centuries this priceless inheritance has been passed on, so we can receive its everlasting benefits still today!

Our Creator made us to receive information through all five senses. And the forgiveness that Jesus' body and blood gives you surrounds all of your senses with this new life!

At the Lord's Table, Jesus offers us what the Lutheran Confessions call a visible gospel. The Lord attaches his words of promise to the eating and drinking of bread and wine. God's promise, **"given and poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins,"** fills our ears and moves our hearts to faith. His grace touches our lips. We, quite literally, **"taste and see that the LORD is good"** (Ps 34:8). We can even smell his divine assurance. After a week of struggling with sin, God gives you that personal assurance that what was done on Calvary is yours today!

I sometimes wonder if, on non-Communion Sundays, after the pastor has absolved our sins "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit," someone might be thinking to himself, *"Yes, Pastor, you have forgiven the sins of many people in this building. But if you knew my sins, you would not say that to me."* That can't be said on a Communion Sunday. When our Lord Jesus, by the hand of his called servants, places his body and blood into your mouth, there can be no mistake whose sins are forgiven. **"...given and poured out FOR YOU for the forgiveness of sins."** And you know without a doubt that you are a beloved child of the heavenly Father, because of what Jesus offered for you.

This Holy Supper is the gospel filled with God's love. How it takes place is another mystery of the cross that we hold onto by faith alone, trusting in the One who gives himself to us with such unmistakably clear and plain words.

Examine your heart daily, confessing your sin openly to your heavenly Father. Embrace with confidence the sure promise that your sins are forgiven through this blessed supper! And when we do, we will soon see that the table spread before us today is but a prelude to an even more glorious banquet in our eternal home. Amen.