

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobonier, Illinois
Maundy Thursday
April 1, 2021
1 Corinthians 11:23–26

The Remembering Word

For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23–26 ESV)

In the name of Jesus, the only Savior of the world,

It's Passover night, the night before the children of Israel walk through blood-stained doorways into freedom and life as God's people. This is the paschal night, the night of the remembrance meal—the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the roasted lamb. The lamb's blood is painted on the doorposts. It's the night of judgment and death. Under the blood of the lamb, you're safe. Death passes over. Without the blood you're dead. It is neither safe nor salutary to deal with God apart from the blood of the lamb.

This is a night of remembrance as the Lord commanded, "This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast" (Ex. 12:14). In this meal, you remembered the Lord and His saving work; and the Lord remembered you, His Israel. You remembered who you were and who God is, and in remembering, your identity was sure as you ate and drank in solidarity with your fellow Israelites. It was a holy communion of a holy community.

Jesus reclines at the table with His disciples, His Twelve, His Israel. It is the Lord's Passover. At this table, Jesus gives to His disciples in two ways. First, an example of humble service as He washes their feet. The Lord and Creator of all bends down to do the work of the lowest servant. The Master becomes the slave. He came not to be served, but to serve, and to lay down His life as a ransom for the many.

But Peter refuses, "You shall never wash my feet" (John 13:8). Pride gets in the way of Peter being served by Jesus. It gets in the way of our being served too. The old Adam in us is too proud. We don't like being given to; we don't like losing control, we don't like being dependent. Thus, a doctor makes a terrible patient; a pastor has a hard time hearing the Word; we are all reluctant receivers. But Jesus, ever patient, ever lowly, gently persists in His giving: "If I do not wash you, you have no share with Me" (John 13:8). Peter must learn the way of receiving, the way of faith, the way of Baptism. So must we. Before you can give of yourself in service, you

must receive the Lord's service. He must wash you before you can wash others. Certainly, that's what happens in Baptism. And this is what the Divine Service is all about – being served by Jesus.

Thus, the pattern for service that Jesus gives flows from Him through us — “that you also should do just as I have done to you” (John 13:15). This is what it means to live under Him in His kingdom and to serve Him. This King bows before His subjects and washes their feet. So also you lovingly serve others in their need as you have been served by Christ.

The second way that Jesus gives is not by way of example but by way of sacrifice. He takes the bread of the Passover meal, the hard, unleavened bread of affliction that the Israelites ate on the fateful night of freedom. He gives thanks, breaks it into pieces, and hands a piece to each of His disciples. The morsel grants them admittance, acceptance. “This is My body, which is given for you” (Luke 22:19). His words tell what we could not know for ourselves by way of our reason and senses. This bread is Jesus' sacrificial body, which would later that day be given into death on the cross. Here bread finds its highest and holiest utility in divine service to deliver Jesus' body to our bodies, the bread of life, living bread come down from heaven as manna to feed His people.

He takes the cup of wine after supper. He lifts it, gives thanks, and gives each of His disciples to drink. This is “the new covenant in My blood” (Luke 22:20). Here wine finds its ultimate purpose, delivering Jesus' blood to the disciples' lips, binding those who drink of His cup in a blood covenant. Blood is life, as God says, “The life of the flesh is in the blood” (Lev. 17:11). This blood of the new covenant is the blood that was poured out for you, in your place, for the forgiveness of your sins. Where the blood of the Lamb flows, death passes over. This is the food of immortality. Eating and drinking, we live forever.

This is also a food of remembrance. “Do this in remembrance of Me” (Luke 22:19). The Greek text could also be translated, “Do this for My remembrance.” So which is it? “Do this so that you will remember Me?” or “Do this so that I will remember you?” Might it perhaps be both? “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes” (1 Cor. 11:26). To eat the body of Christ and to drink His blood calls to mind all that He is and all that He has done for you—His incarnation, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension. Thus Jesus wishes to be remembered by our receiving the fruits of His cross as our food and our drink.

This is also how He remembers us. We are one body and one blood together with Him, and He will not deny His body and blood. This food of remembrance marks us, just as Baptism marked us. We are redeemed by Christ, the Crucified One. We carry these tokens with us as a remembrance of who we are and who God is for us. We take Jesus' Body and Blood into our lives and into our death, and He remembers us. Remembered, we are forgiven and raised. Washing feet was Jesus' example, something the disciples could do for one another. But giving His body to eat and His blood to drink—that was something only Jesus could do for them. He unites them with Him in His death and life. He is the Vine; they are the branches. His body and

blood, His death and life, flowing into them, making them fruitful servants. Apart from Him, they can do nothing. Nor can you.

He gives His all to you to save all of you. Nothing stands outside His forgiveness. Nothing can separate you from this self-giving, self-sacrificing love. No greater love is there than this Servant's love that lays down His life for another. In His Supper, at His table, He lays before you the gifts of His cross and says, "These are here for you. Do this for My remembrance."

And from this food and drink you arise refreshed, renewed, restored—in faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another. Faith trusts in Christ alone; love bends down in service of the neighbor—both friend and stranger. Faith receives Jesus' service; love seeks to serve Him in the least, the lost, the lowly of this world. Faith receives the washing of sin; love washes the feet of a fellow sinner. Faith remembers His love; love remembers His service.

Let us pray: For Your becoming the Servant of all, for Your washing the disciples' feet, for the gift of Your body and blood, for our remembrance of You and Your remembrance of us, we give You thanks and praise, most holy Jesus. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

(From Words of Life from the Cross, CPH, 2010)

Rev. Timothy J. Landskroener