

Holy (Maundy) Thursday

April 9, 2009

Ex. 24:3-11

A Meal For the Wounded

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Did they realize what they were agreeing to? “All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” We don’t need to think about all the Lord had commanded to realize how helpless the Israelites were. We can think of the two chief commandments, as our Lord gives them from the Law: Love the Lord your God with your all and love your neighbor as yourself. “We will do it. We will be obedient!” Really? With your all? From the very inmost parts of yourself? Not just lip service? Not just faking it outwardly?

Have you ever tried it? To love God with your all, I mean. Your heart undivided by competing loyalties, but given to God and to Him alone. Your only desire to enjoy His presence and to do His bidding. Your only fear that you will cause Him some displeasure. To take time to spend in His Word. To enjoy the creation He has made for us. To take hold of the forgiveness of sins as if it was something given just for YOU, not as some abstract thought. Tonight, why don’t you go and give it a try, and tomorrow let me know how it goes for you. And then your neighbor, the one made in God’s image like you. Love this one as yourself. Put their cares before yours. Don’t gossip about them, don’t complain about them, stand up for them when they are put down, provide and support them. Do to others as you want others to do to you. Have you ever given it a try? Or could you care less about your neighbor? You most certainly should give it a try.

But I'm afraid you and I would end up about as successful as the people of Israel who put up the big promise, then promptly fell flat on their faces. Their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land was hardly marked by love of God above all and love of neighbor as self. Instead, there was the present grumbling against God and the way He took care of them; distrust that He would provide them water and food; neighbor squabbling neighbor and wearing Moses out as he sat on the judgment bench from dawn to dusk to try and settle their petty squabbles. "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, we will be obedient." Yeah, not so much.

So despite their words, despite their foolish trust in themselves and in what they could muster, the covenant was sealed with blood. Part of the blood went on the altar; part on the people. And with blood went forgiveness. For there is no remission of sins without the shedding of blood. And it was as blood sprinkled the people that Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders climbed the mountain to see the wonder of God's glory. They saw Him, and the beauty wounded their hearts. There He was upon His throne, and at His feet a pavement as of sapphire, blue and crystal clear as the sky. And in God's presence, as blood-covered ones, they were able to sit down and eat, and they didn't die, but lived-though they knew they had no right to see such holiness and continue breathing.

They lived despite the fact that they didn't keep their end of the covenant. They lived despite the fact that love for God didn't characterize them all. They lived despite the fact that they didn't love their neighbor as themselves. They lived because they were under the blood, and under that blood the presence of God came to them as an experience of life, not death.

Today is Maundy Thursday. We are well aware that we have failed to keep this covenant of the Lord. The Ten Commandments, which spell out the show of love in our lives, accuse us without end. No, we do *not* love the Lord with anything close to our all. We still complain and bicker about the Lord not providing for our needs. No, we have *not* loved our neighbors as ourselves. We still don't defend our neighbors when they are wrongfully accused. Our eyes are still enticed away from our spouses when we think we see something more beautiful. I still think wicked things toward neighbors just as the Israelites thought toward Moses at times. Yet Jesus still comes to us this night and readies a gift for His people that has been on the heart of God from before time began and that will go on sustaining His own until the day of His glorious appearing. He would provide a meal for His wounded people, His broken people who do not live up to the covenant of love. He would feed them with His own body and blood so that they might live, so that they might be forgiven, healed, and restored.

And do you realize why there is life in that body and blood? Because it is the body and blood of the One in whom there was nothing but love-love for His Father with all His heart, mind, soul, and strength, with His all. And just as surely, there was love for the neighbor, for you and me and for every member of our fallen race. Tax collectors, prostitutes, drug addicts, pastors, teachers, postmen, parents, children and oil field workers. Jesus loved us as Himself, indeed more than Himself. For us He will allow that body to be nailed to the tree and that blood to stain the earth, wiping out the curse of the Law that is against us. You see, the Law can never condemn Him, for His whole being-His every word and thought and action-was always and only love. And He calls us to live under that blood.

To live under that blood is to taste something better than the food Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the other seventy elders of Israel

knew. We not only eat and drink in the presence of the All Holy One, but also through His promise in the bread and the wine do we eat and drink, He-the God of Israel, who appeared in glory to the ancients, who is now made flesh-comes to us with His body and blood, to enter us with His forgiveness, and to plant within a wounded people a life that death cannot overcome. We live because of what He gives us to eat and to drink: the body and blood of Him who is Love-Love incarnate, Love crucified, Love Risen and triumphant and coming in glory.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you.” The strength of your love for one another and for Jesus will now always pour into you from this gift of His love for you. His gift in the Eucharist guarantees that what you now enjoy in a hidden and mystical way will be your eternal joy in the life to come. His gift gives you the courage and strength to sing and pray, even as death comes to you:

Be Thou my consolation,
My shield, when I must die;
Remind me of Thy passion
When my last hour draws nigh.
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee,
Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold Thee,
Who dieth thus dies well. (LSB 450:7)

Enfolded in His cross, marked with the blood of the covenant, fed with the body of Him who is immortal Love, you will be prepared for your passion, suffering, and death whenever it comes. You will be held by a love that is stronger than death and a forgiveness that is greater than all your sin. To Him alone be glory forever-our Lord Jesus, who gives us this meal to heal the wounded with His Love.

In Jesus Name.

Amen.