
A NEW COVENANT IN JESUS' BLOOD
Sermon for Maundy Thursday 2022
Luke 22:7-20

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon tonight is our Gospel just read, Luke 22:7-20: ⁷ **Then the day of Unleavened Bread came, when the Passover lamb had to be killed. ⁸ Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, “Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat it!”**

⁹ **They asked Him, “Where do You want us to prepare it?”**

¹⁰ **He told them, “Look! When you have entered the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters! ¹¹ You shall tell the owner of the house: ‘The Teacher asks you, “Where is the guest room, that I may eat the Passover in it with My disciples?”!’ ¹² He will show you a large, furnished room upstairs. Prepare for it there!”**

¹³ **They went, found it as He had told them and prepared the Passover. ¹⁴ When the hour had come, He and the apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ He told them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I shall certainly not eat it again until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.”**

¹⁷ **Then He took a cup, gave thanks and said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves! ¹⁸ For I tell you, from now on I shall certainly not drink what comes from the vine until the kingdom of God comes.”**

¹⁹ **Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me!”**

²⁰ **In the same way He took the cup after the supper, saying, “This cup is the new Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.”**

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“This cup is the new Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you,” are words Jesus spoke on the night when He was betrayed, that Holy Thursday when He instituted the blessed sacrament of His body and blood.

So when Jesus says, “**This cup is the new Covenant in My blood,**” what does He mean by that?

“Covenant” is not a word we use every day. What is a Covenant? Simply put, a Covenant refers to a solemn relationship between two parties. In its broadest usage, it can mean something like a contract entered into by two parties, two *equal* parties. But in the ancient Near East, a Covenant could also refer to a relationship between two *unequal* parties, like between an emperor lord and a subject king. In the wording of the Covenant agreement, the superior party would recount what he had done for the lesser party, like rescuing the people from danger, and would promise to do certain things in the future, like offering protection from enemies. In return, the lesser party would promise loyalty and obedience to the superior. The Covenant would then be sealed with an oath, a solemn pledge, and there would also be a ceremony of some type, some sacred act, perhaps a Covenant meal, to seal the deal. That was one particular kind of Covenant in the ancient world.

However, when we move to the Bible, the concept of a Covenant takes on some *special, distinctive characteristics*. It is certainly *not* a contract between two equal parties. God is God, and His people are not. In a biblical Covenant, the LORD God takes the initiative and calls to Himself a people *who otherwise would not know Him*. God takes a people for Himself and enters into a special relationship with them, purely out of His grace and unmerited favour.

We have a clear picture of this in the Old Testament. Think back to the Covenant the LORD had entered into with Abram, later to be called Abraham. Abram did not know God, and he did not have any children at that time from which to form a nation. Yet the LORD called Abram to Himself and established a Covenant of blessing with him. “*The LORD had told Abram: “Leave your land, your relatives and your father’s family and go to the land that I shall show you! ² I shall make you into a great nation. I shall bless you. I shall make your name great, and you will be a blessing. ³ I shall bless those who bless you and shall curse him who curses you and in you all the families of the earth will be blessed”* (Genesis 12:1-3).

So the LORD made of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob a great nation. Jacob’s sons, the children of Israel, left the land of promise when a famine hit, going down to Egypt, where they grew in numbers. But over time, the Egyptians

enslaved them, and there they were stuck, in bondage. The LORD, however, remembered His Covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and acted to make good on His promise. He sent them a deliverer in the person of Moses. Moses brought the people out of Egypt on the night of the Passover. The LORD Himself was going throughout the land of Egypt and would strike down the firstborn in every home. However, by the sign of the blood of the sacrificed lamb, death passed over the homes of the Israelites, and they were spared. There was a special meal instituted that night to mark the occasion, the Passover meal, from then on to be observed every year on that day, so that Israel would always remember what the LORD had done for them that night. The LORD remembered His Covenant and delivered them out of bitter bondage.

But there was still that Promised Land that was part of the Covenant, and the LORD was going to bring them up into that land. First, however, they would make a stop at Mt. Sinai. There Moses went up on the mountain to receive from the LORD a way of life for God's people - how they were to live as His chosen people out of all the world. Moses then told the people all the words of the LORD, and they responded, "*We shall do all the things that the LORD has spoken*" (Ex. 24:3). The Covenant was then sealed with a solemn ceremony. Moses took the blood of sacrificed young bulls "*and sprinkled it on the people and said, "Look! The blood of the Covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these Words"*" (Ex. 24:8). Then there was a sacred meal. Moses and the elders of Israel went up on the mountain and ate and drank in the very presence of the LORD. This, then, was the Covenant at Sinai.

The people of Israel had said, "*We shall do all the things that the LORD has spoken,*" but that is not what they did. They were not obedient and did not do all that the LORD had spoken. The LORD would graciously bring them into the Promised Land and deliver them from all their foes, but the people were not obedient. They broke and did not keep God's commandments. They worshipped other gods. They did not treat their neighbour with love and justice and dignity. Time after time the LORD would send Israel prophets to call the nation to repentance, but the people, priests, and kings alike resisted God's Word and His will and departed from the way of righteousness. Israel did not

live as God's distinctive people in the world but became just like all the other nations.

So it is in that context, the context of Israel breaking the Covenant that the LORD had established with her, that the prophet Jeremiah would come with this Word from the LORD: *"Look! The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I shall make a new Covenant with the family of Israel and with the family of Judah. ³² It will not be like the Covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by their hands to bring them out of the land of Egypt. They broke My Covenant, although I was a husband to them"* (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

The previous Covenant, the Covenant made at Sinai, in which the people pledged, *"We shall do all the things that the LORD has spoken"* - that Covenant the people had irretrievably broken. Their sins had made a sham of it. So it was time for a new Covenant. The days were coming when a new sort of Covenant would be initiated, in which the forgiveness of sins would be paramount, and the obedience of the people would flow from a new heart that the LORD would give them.

"Look! The days are coming" and *"Look! The days are now here,"* declares Jesus, as He picks up on the prophecy of Jeremiah in the words that He speaks on that Holy Thursday. *"This is the new Covenant that Jeremiah was foretelling. This is the new Covenant that I am now fulfilling. This is the new Covenant in My blood, which I am pouring out now, in this cup and on the cross."*

Jesus draws on all the Covenant history of Israel in this new Covenant He is establishing this night. The Covenant with Abraham - Jesus is the seed of Abraham in whom all the families of the earth are blessed. The Covenant with Moses and Israel at Mt. Sinai - Jesus seals the Covenant with His blood and invites us to a sacred meal to eat and drink in His presence.

And don't forget the Passover meal: Jesus is the Passover Lamb, the Lamb of God by whose blood death passes over us, and we are spared and brought out of the bondage of sin. Remember, it is the Passover meal that Jesus is eating with His disciples on this night, when, at the conclusion of it, Jesus institutes this new meal, to be done in the church from that time on and which we share in once again tonight: ¹⁹ **Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it**

to them, saying, **“This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me!”**

²⁰ In the same way He took the cup after the supper, saying, “This cup is the new Covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you.”

Yes, this is the new Covenant in Jesus’ blood. All the blood of bulls and oxen and goats could not redeem a single soul. But these were ways that God the Father was pointing ahead to what would be fulfilled in Christ His Son. For Christ’s blood, the blood He has shed on the cross for you, the holy precious blood of the very Son of God - this blood cleanses you from all your sins and redeems you from the curse of sin and death.

This is why Jesus has come - to do this for you, to do this for the whole world. This is the new Covenant, in which the forgiveness of sins is won and obtained by the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross, and in which His very Body and Blood, with that forgiveness, are distributed now to you in this holy meal.

As we learn from Luther’s Catechism, *“Where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.”* You are cleansed by Christ’s blood. You are made new in Him. You and I are God’s holy people now. He gives us the Holy Spirit so that our obedience will proceed from a new and willing heart. Love and forgiveness will mark our way of life as God’s people. Drawn by the power of God’s grace toward us, worship and loyalty, and faithfulness to God will mark our path. God’s promises, His Covenant of blessing, will give us hope to carry on in the midst of struggle and adversity. This meal, this blessed Sacrament, will refresh our souls as we journey on till finally, we shall enter into the fullness of the kingdom, where we shall eat and drink in the heavenly banquet meal forever.

“This cup is the new Covenant in My blood,” Jesus tells us once again tonight. Dear friends, come and receive Christ’s body and blood, given for you for the forgiveness of sins. Amen.

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

PRAYER FOR MAUNDY THURSDAY

Almighty God, heavenly Father, we thank and praise You for Your goodness and loving kindness in sending to this needy world Jesus Christ, the bread from heaven. We praise You that you have enabled us to know You through Him.

Open our eyes that we may see ourselves as we really are in the mirror of Your holy Word, and grant us a sincere repentance. Nothing is hidden from You. You know our secret sins. Therefore we cast ourselves down before You, trust in Your mercy, and cling only to this, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from every sin. Forgive us our many transgressions. Grant that by faith we may grasp what Christ has done for us, and rejoice in the perfect peace of His pardon. Do not take Your Holy Spirit from us, but continue to make us glad that You have saved us. Satisfy our souls with the bread of life, and grant that through faith in Him we may never hunger again. Do not cast us from Your presence because of our faithlessness, but through Christ keep us for Your eternal kingdom. Help us to overcome pride and self-will, which disregard Jesus' example of humble service. Give us a ready mind and a pure heart to follow in His steps.

Bless Your Church, O Father. May all Your people be nourished by the true manna, which has come down from heaven, and given them the vision and strength to do Your will. Help Your Church to appreciate and use Your Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper, through which Your Spirit brings salvation to all people.

May Your blessing rest on all who feel the burden of a guilty conscience, the pain of sickness, the ache of sorrow, the sadness of separation, and the sting of death. Give to all who seek Your gracious help the assurance of Your love and comforting presence, and, at the end, entrance into Your eternal glory.

As now we proclaim our Lord's passion and death in the communion between bread and Jesus' body and wine and Jesus' blood at His Table, unite us with Him and with each other in faith and fellowship. For there we are one body in Him. Assure us again of Your presence and Your mercy. Increase our joy and hope of heaven. Let Your Word and the Lord's Supper continually strengthen us during our pilgrimage on earth, until we finally share in the

marriage supper of the Lamb for ever. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ, whose saving death is our peace and hope until He comes. Amen.

MAUNDY THURSDAY

Jeremiah 31:31-34

³¹ “Look! The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I shall make a new Covenant with the family of Israel and with the family of Judah. ³² It will not be like the Covenant that I made with their fathers when I took them by their hands to bring them out of the land of Egypt. They broke My Covenant, although I was a husband to them,” declares the LORD. ³³ “However, this is the Covenant that I shall make with the family of Israel after those days,” declares the LORD: “I shall put My teaching inside them and write it on their hearts. I shall be their God, and they will be My people! ³⁴ Each one will no longer teach his neighbour or his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD!’ For they will all know Me, from the least among them to the greatest among them,” declares the LORD. “For I shall forgive their wickedness and not remember their sin any longer.”

Hebrews 10:15-25

¹⁵ The Holy Spirit also witnesses to us. For, after He has said, ¹⁶ ““This

is the Covenant that I shall make with them after those days,’ says the Lord: ‘I shall put My Laws on their hearts and write them on their minds’,” ¹⁷ He then adds: “I shall certainly not remember their sins and their lawless deeds any longer.” ¹⁸ Where these have been forgiven, there is also no offering for sin any longer. ¹⁹ Therefore, fellow-Christians, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰ by the new, living way that He has opened for us through the curtain, that is, through His body, ²¹ and, since we have a High Priest over the house of God, ²² let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith! For our hearts have been sprinkled to take away guilty consciences, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. ²³ Let us cling to the confession of our hope without wavering! For He who has made the promise is faithful.

²⁴ Let us also consider how we may stimulate one another to love and to do good works! ²⁵ Let us not forsake the assembling of

ourselves together, as some are regularly doing, but let us continue to encourage one another, and so much more as you see the day approaching!

Luke 22:7-20

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