

**THE LORD'S SUPPER**  
**Sermon for Maundy Thursday, 2026**  
**Matthew 26:26-29**

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 part of the Gospel from before, Matthew 26:26-29:

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

Dear friends in Christ,

Maundy Thursday is a special night of Holy Week in which we take ourselves back to that upper room, to the original scene of the Last Supper. In his account of the Last Supper, Luke recorded how Jesus said, “*I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer*” (Luke 22:15). Even though He knew He stood on the precipice of His death, nevertheless, Jesus had eagerly looked forward to celebrating the Passover with His disciples.

For seven days, starting the day before Passover, Jews ate only unleavened bread to remember what the Israelites ate during their journey through the wilderness. This seven-day period was known as the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* (Ex. 12:15), while the *Passover* itself commemorated the eating of the lamb in Egypt, whose blood had been painted on the doorposts so that when the LORD saw the blood, He would pass over the door because those inside the house were under His protection.

This was the most sacred season of the year for the Old Testament church because this feast pointed *forward* to the coming of the Messiah, who would save His people from the bondage of sin. Surely, as the disciples ate this meal and remembered Israel’s history, they felt a connection to their *past*. They felt a connection to God, as His people. They felt a connection to one another, as this family history belonged to each of them. It was certainly a special night — the most special night of the year.

But just when the disciples thought it couldn’t get any better or more significant, Jesus made the occasion *even more special*. While they were eating, Jesus took the unleavened bread, and said in front of His disciples, “**Take, eat; this is My body.**”<sup>27</sup> **And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you,**<sup>28</sup> **for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”**

Jesus’ words made it very clear that this New Testament Supper with His disciples *was something very special*. Taking the bread and the wine of the Passover, Jesus now instituted the New Testament sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. Now, instead of the lamb in the Passover, Christ Himself, in this sacrament, would give His body and blood — crucified the next day — in, with, and under the bread and wine, as the one true sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins, and not only for those disciples present at that time, *but for all believers of all time*. Already three years before, John the Baptist had pointed to Christ, saying, “*Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29).

Tonight, we are going to celebrate this incredible supper, and it is very beneficial for us to spend some time reflecting on it.

First of all, through the Lord’s Supper, Jesus invites us to look back by eating and drinking in remembrance of Him.

Each time we receive the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim to both Christians and non-Christians that Christ has given His body and shed His blood to redeem all mankind. We remember His death, that pivotal, crucial event upon which the salvation of every man, woman, and child depends. The Lord’s Supper reminds us of Jesus’ death and bestows the *benefits* of His death. Our Lutheran Confessions state, “*To remember Christ is to remember His benefits. It means to realise that they are truly offered to us. It is*

not enough only to remember history” (AC XXIV 31-32).

Jesus also wants us to look in and examine ourselves.

With the stethoscope of God’s Law on our hearts, we are to examine ourselves to see, as Luther so clearly says in his *Small Catechism*, whether *we are sorry for our sins*, whether *we believe in our Saviour Jesus Christ and in His words in the Sacrament*, and whether *we plan, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to change our sinful lives*.<sup>1</sup> We need this self-examination because we are all guilty of sinning against God and deserving of His punishment. We’ll dig deeper into this shortly.

Again, as we come to this table tonight, Jesus wants us to look around and appreciate the blessing of unity we have with those who stand or kneel at our side, receiving His body and His blood.

This is of great significance and perhaps attracts the most debate about the Lord’s Supper among families and fellow churchgoers across Christian denominations.

So, tonight, let’s look at who should be taking the Lord’s Supper. And to answer this question of “who”, it is good to remember that in the Lord’s Supper, there are horizontal and vertical relationships to consider.

What do we mean by these two relationships?

Many people like to think only of the vertical relationship with God.

What is the vertical relationship? This meal is between God and the one communing. God offers it to those who repent of their sins and seek His forgiveness.

Returning to the topic of self-examination, we see in First Corinthians that Paul provides a couple of qualifications that make someone “worthy” to receive this holy meal. He writes, “*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*” (1 Cor. 11:27-28).

We must understand what we are receiving. In the immediate context of the words, “*whoever... eats the bread or drinks the cup*,” this is referring to the body and blood of Christ. If anyone does not know the question of “what it is,” as Christ teaches, then they are made unworthy to receive it. Note how Paul states that anyone partaking of the Sacrament in an unworthy manner is guilty concerning the body and blood of Jesus, *not* the bread and wine.

The second qualification is that they must be repentant of their sins, seeking to be freed from their sins by the power of Christ given in the meal. That’s what Paul means when he says, “*let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup*.” Of course, communing worthily does not require a perfect, sinless life before reception of the Sacrament — if that were the case, none of us could commune! — but there must be a *desire* to receive the blessings of the Sacrament.

That’s “who” is made worthy to partake in this vertical relationship, but what about on the horizontal? Is this meal just a personal matter between God and me? Does it matter who I take it with?

I once heard someone say, “While the Lord’s Supper is always a personal matter, it is never a private matter.” That is to say, who I take the Lord’s Supper with, and what my relationship with them is, matters, and that is the horizontal relationship.

The Lord’s Supper has always been seen as “*a confession of unity in faith*”<sup>2</sup> between those who commune together at the Lord’s Table. In fact, for Christians in the time of the apostles, the Lord’s Supper was *the* highest form of unity, of fellowship. This was foremost in Paul’s mind when he said, “*Is not the cup of blessing that we bless the communion of the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we*

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<sup>1</sup> The Small Catechism with Explanation. Question 303.

<sup>2</sup> AELC Statement of Faith, p. 35.

*break the communion of the body of Christ? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we, who are many, are one body. For we all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:16-17).*

The Lord’s Supper is a *corporate meal*. The verbs and pronouns Jesus used as He spoke the words of our text to the disciples in the upper room on the night of His betrayal were plural. So were the words St. Paul wrote to the whole church at Corinth when he learned of abuses in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.<sup>3</sup>

Now, here’s a problem we’ve all had to face. Sometimes, members of other Christian churches join us for worship, especially during a baptism or confirmation service, and we celebrate together when they share a special day with the Lord and us. Usually, these visitors are from other Lutheran churches and openly accept the Biblical teaching of the real presence. So, it can be a little daunting when we have to kindly ask them not to commune with us. Why? Why shouldn’t we commune together if we all believe the same thing? Here’s why.

Unity of faith requires oneness in the Gospel, and confession of the truth of the Gospel in its *basic totality*. Or to put it another way, there may be full agreement on the teaching of the Lord’s Supper, but what if the visitor to our church is a member of a church that does not insist that the 6 days of creation were days of 24 hours, or allows women to take leading roles in the congregation, or insist women wear hats, or are steeped in sinful unionism, or join in prayer fellowship, or even share the altar rail with other denominations that DO NOT confess the real presence. Even if an individual from another church rejects all this, the fact of the matter is that, if you are a member of such churches, their confession IS your confession because of your association with them. As Werner Elert, a German Lutheran theologian, once correctly remarked, “*By partaking of the Sacrament in a church, Christians declare that the confession of that church is their confession. Since people cannot at the same time hold two differing confessions, they cannot commune in two churches of different confessions. If they do this nevertheless, they deny their own confession, or have none at all.*”<sup>4</sup>

When we commune together, we are publicly acknowledging that we are in **full agreement** with one another ***in all areas of doctrine that the church in which we are communing teaches and confesses***. We do not accept that people may commune both at the altars of churches that uphold the pure marks of the church and at the altars of churches that disagree with the pure marks of the church.

Now, some people take offence at this, thinking we are judging them, but this is untrue! We in no way mean to imply that others who truly believe in Jesus as Saviour from sin, yet who are not members of an orthodox Lutheran church, are not Christian, or that they would be communing unworthily by communing with us, but communion is a confession of unity in faith.

This is really nothing new. Actually, some of you may remember that before the union of the ELCA and the UELCA into the LCA in 1966, these 2 synods were not in communicant fellowship with one another. But going way back further, even in the Early Church, only a handful of years after Christ’s ascension, we see that Christians were divided into competing churches with differing doctrines. Some Christians were united in their adherence to the apostles’ teaching that preserved the Word of Jesus. James, Peter, and John received Barnabas and Paul into their fellowship because they held the same teachings. This mutual recognition was necessary for joint preaching and missionary activity.<sup>5</sup> While churches like the Nicolaitans, who did not hold to apostolic teachings, were not in fellowship with

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:17ff

<sup>4</sup> Derived from Werner Elert, *Eucharist and Church Fellowship in the First Four Centuries*, page 182

<sup>5</sup> Galatians 2:9

apostolic churches<sup>6</sup>, churches that acknowledged the apostles' teaching<sup>7</sup>, formed one fellowship throughout the civilised world and welcomed each other's members to the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper was not instituted by Christ to be open but closed. True, for a time after Christ's resurrection, Christians continued to pray with the Jews in their synagogues and the temple, even though their leaders did not believe Jesus was the Christ and had been raised from the dead.<sup>8</sup> However, the Lord's Supper was celebrated not in the temple but only in the homes of Christians that served as their churches. The Apostle Luke says how, "*Day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts*" (Acts 2:46). Unbelieving Jews were excluded from the Sacrament.

Thus, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is for those who are united with Christ and with each other. Receiving the Lord's Supper is more than an individual expression of belief. It is a special oneness among members of one body.

Finally, above all else, above looking back, above looking in, above looking around, as we come to this table and as we leave this table, our Saviour invites us to look forward. We are to look forward to that day when He will "**drink it new with (us) in (His) Father's kingdom.**"

As His own words and promises attest, Jesus is miraculously present in this meal tonight. He is here, attaching Himself as we said earlier, in, with, and under these earthly elements through His Word. As we receive His body and His blood, He's offering to us the forgiveness of sins that only comes through the Gospel.

Enjoy this meal tonight. Hear the words spoken so many years ago, spoken again to you personally by your Saviour, "*Take and eat, this is My body, given for you. Take and drink, this is My blood, shed for you.*" Savour this meal tonight and every time you come to the Lord's Supper. But do so knowing that our Saviour's goal is not simply to dine with us as He did with His disciples at the Last Supper. No, He has given His body and blood so that we may have reservations with Him at a lasting supper — a lasting supper where He eats and drinks with us anew in the kingdom of God.

What that heavenly banquet exactly looks like, feels like, or tastes like, I don't know. But it will be new. New in quality. New like something we've never experienced before. No longer shall we have to look in and examine ourselves for sin because we'll be confirmed in holiness, wearing white robes of righteousness that were tailored by the blood of Jesus. No longer shall we have to look around and be saddened that we can't share this feast with everybody, because in heaven, there will be perfect unity. No longer will Jesus be with us only in, with, and under the wine; He will be with us visibly, as we see our Saviour face-to-face. No longer shall we need to look ahead, because what is now in the future tense will then be present reality, a reality that is breathtaking, filled with overwhelming joy that will never end. It will be a lasting supper. "*Come, for everything is now ready*" (Luke 14:17). Amen.

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

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<sup>6</sup> Revelation 2:6, 15; 1 John 2:19

<sup>7</sup> Acts 2:42

<sup>8</sup> Matthew 28:11-15; Acts 4:1 ff.