

Sermon 4 (Good Friday): This Do in Remembrance of Me, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Proposition: Jesus commands us to eat His Supper in His memory.

- I. What we do
 - A. We take bread, give thanks, break and eat it, vv. 23-24
 - B. We take wine, give thanks, and drink, v. 25
 - C. We proclaim the Lord's death, v. 26
 - D. We discern the Lord's body, v. 29
- II. What we remember
 - A. Our Lord's Betrayal, v. 23
 - B. His Broken Body, v. 24
 - C. His Shed Blood, v. 25
 - D. His Coming, v. 26
 - E. The Past of the Christ who is Present right now, vv. 24-25

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we gather together solemnly on this evening of Good Friday, the day on which our Lord was crucified. As we do it, we remember Him. We remember that He is the Son of God who came to Earth and lived as one of us. He went from working class to homeless during His decades on this planet. He was constantly opposed and mistreated by the religious establishment, and at the end of His life He came into collision with the political establishment too. We are here to celebrate a murdered carpenter, because as we know, His death brought life to the world. Brothers and sisters, Jesus commands us to eat His supper in His memory. We're going to eat it at the end of this sermon. But before we do, let's just examine two things: What we do in the Supper, and what we remember.

I. What we do

Now, the text describes what the Lord handed on to Paul regarding the Last Supper. Paul does not specifically say "Do everything the Lord did." He didn't need to. He knew that we, his readers, would know that because Jesus did it, we too are supposed to do it. And anyway, the text says twice "Do this." Do what, Lord? The answer, of course, is "Everything I did that's written down for you."

So when we take the Lord's Supper, we imitate what the the Lord did.

A. We take bread, give thanks, break and eat it, vv. 23-24

The text tells us that our Lord took bread. He picked up a loaf of bread, and then He gave thanks. Other passages say "He blessed it." It's the same idea. Jesus was not addressing the bread ("Bless you, O loaf!" — and it definitely wasn't a loaf named Olaf!) but rather addressing His Father, to

whom He gave thanks for the bread. He then broke it and distributed it to His disciples. And so two things are going on here — a receiving, but also a giving. We take bread, but we take it because it was given to us. Jesus acknowledges that bread itself is the Father's gift. That is actually where the name "Eucharist" for this ceremony came from. Anyone know what "Eucharist" means? It means "thanksgiving." That's right; we could drop the fancy Greek term and substitute for it the plain English thanksgiving. That's not just a holiday at the end of November; more importantly, it has become a name for the Lord's Supper (called the Lord's Supper only here in the New Testament).

So Jesus gave thanks, thereby acknowledging not only that bread is a gift from God, but also that this particular bread, symbolizing and conveying His body, is a gift from God. He gave it to the disciples, and they took it.

In the Lord's Supper, we need to remember this dynamic. The text before us speaks only of taking. Other passages make clear that Jesus gave to His disciples. We need to remember that the first element of the celebration is that mutual event where Christ gives Himself to us and we accept. He offers, and we receive. He took bread, and then gave it to the disciples, who took it.

I know this seems obvious. Why is it important? Because the Lord's Supper is not a one-way street. We act, and God acts. He gives to us, and we receive from Him. So many accounts of the Lord's Supper fail because they neglect this crucial point. They make it all about us, to the point where communion is solely an event that takes place in the communicant's mind. They emphasize the taking to the exclusion of the giving. On the other hand, some Christians emphasize the giving to the exclusion of the reception. This sacrament is a gift from God, and they are so excited about that they never talk about receiving the gift, appropriating the gift, eating the gift. And so, in our actions, we want to remember both. We want to do both. Jesus gives Himself to us. That's the first step in communion. We receive Him, sacramentally eat of Him. That's the second step. It's about the relationship, the mutuality. He acts, and we act.

B. We take wine, give thanks, and drink, v. 25

In the same way, then, the Lord took a cup of wine and gave thanks for it. He then gave it, again, an action not mentioned in the text but a profoundly important one. It is the corollary of taking. We take what the Lord gives us, even as He took what the Father gave Him. He gave thanks, highlighting the truth that He is not the source of these gifts, but that they ultimately come from the Father through Him.

Brothers and sisters, when Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper, it was all about giving thanks to the Father. When you celebrate the Lord's Supper, do you make it all about giving thanks to the Father? Do you recognize that Christ as mediator receives everything from the Father and then passes it on to you?

Jesus then took the wine and drank, showing us that we should drink.

What does it mean to eat and drink? It means claiming, receiving, accepting the gift of Himself that Christ is offering to you.

Have you ever had a gift refused? Tried to give someone something, but had them say “I don’t want that; take it away”? Did it feel like rejection? Of course it did! To reject the gift you offer, even in a non-sacramental context, is to reject you. To reject the Lord’s gift of His body and blood, which are a code or cipher for Himself, is to reject Him. And the flip side of that, the positive side of that, is clear: To accept them is to accept Him.

C. We proclaim the Lord’s death, v. 26

Paul goes on to say that in accepting the broken body and shed blood, we become preachers. By eating the meal, we proclaim the Lord’s death.

When did Israel eat the Passover lamb: Before or after it was slaughtered? What a dumb question, you might say. Of course they ate it after it was slaughtered! And of course that’s true. The deeper reality to which it points is that we are eating our Passover lamb after He was slaughtered. The very fact that we are here eating indicates that the one we’re eating died. We don’t eat live things; we eat dead things. And this meal is no exception. To eat and drink this bread and wine, the symbols of the body and blood, is not only to accept Christ’s gift of Himself, but also to affirm that He had to die in order to so give Himself.

Right now, my flesh and blood are all one package. When my flesh is here and my blood is a pool on the floor over there, I’m in trouble. I’m not far from being dead. Indeed, if *all* my blood is pooled on the floor over there, I am definitely dead. The very separation of the flesh and blood, no less than the eating, testifies that our Lord really died. Otherwise, we could never eat the sacrificial meal. Anyone here who’s not a believer witnessing the Lord’s Supper can see with his own eyes that we truly believe that our Lord Jesus died. We are proclaiming His death with one voice.

Notice, though, that this proclamation has an expiration date. We are proclaiming it only for a limited time — until He comes. In other words, we are proclaiming both His death and His resurrection, ascension, and Second Coming. This meal is just as appropriate for Good Friday as it is for Easter morning. That’s because it demonstrates that the one who died is the one who’s coming again.

D. We discern the Lord’s body, v. 29

Finally, as we eat, we not only receive Christ and proclaim His death, but also we discern His body. What does this mean? It means two things. It means that we recognize that Christ’s body was given for us on that Good Friday long ago, and that in eating the bread we are receiving and claiming that same body now, this very day. If you don’t recognize that, then you won’t see this meal as Christ really giving Himself to you. You will see it only as you doing something — remembering Jesus, or having a pious experience. But the disciples didn’t just eat bread; Jesus gave them the bread and told them that it symbolized Himself. And so when you eat the bread, you need to think about the reality that Jesus not only *gave* Himself but *is giving* Himself to you, both symbolically and really. If you don’t discern that, then you’ve broken the great chain of Christ’s mediation that received bread from the Father, gave thanks for it, and then passed it on to you.

But secondly, you need to not only remember that you're receiving Christ's gift of Himself, but also that you're receiving it with the body of Christ.

I've talked about this with my own congregation many times. Paul is the only Biblical author who uses the metaphor "body of Christ" to describe the church. Why? I think it's no stretch to say that the answer is not hard to find. How was Paul converted? Through Jesus saying, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *Me*?" In other words, if you touch the church you're touching me.

That was a lesson Paul never forgot. He learned that if you hurt the church, Jesus takes it personally. And so forever afterward he referred to the church as the body of Christ. If you hit my body I don't say "Oh, that's what you think of my body. But how do you feel about me?" Of course not! The very idea is ridiculous. How you treat my body is how you treat me. It's that simple. And so that brings up the question: How do you treat the body of Christ? How have you acted toward your fellow Christians? Have you discerned that Christ is giving Himself to you in them, and that you in turn give yourself to Christ by giving yourself unreservedly to them? If you are not at peace with a fellow Christian and yet eating the Lord's Supper together, then you are not discerning the Lord's body. You are ignoring the fact that to mistreat the church is to mistreat Christ. Don't ignore that fact. Recognize in the gift of the bread and wine Christ's gift of Himself. Then look around the table at your fellow saints and recognize Christ's gift of Himself there too.

Well, of course, to discern the Lord's body is a mental action. It's still an action, but it's something you do in your mind with consequences for your behavior. But we don't just take, eat, and drink, proclaiming our Lord's death and remembering His body.

II. What we remember

For in addition to these commands, important as they no doubt are, is another command, one (like the command "do this") repeated twice. That command is "This do in remembrance of me." While one twentieth-scholar proposed the idea that in eating the Lord's Supper we are actually calling on God to remember His Son, I don't think that idea holds water. Clearly, we are being told to remember that Passover night and its events culminating in the death of Jesus. Every time we eat this Supper, we are told to eat it while remembering Jesus. Indeed, we eat it "in loving memory," as the stock phrase goes. Have you ever been in a church and seen in the hymnal "Given in loving memory of Erma Mae Schnickel" on "Given in memory of Todd J. Cook" on a plaque on the front pew? Of course you have. This very sanctuary was festooned with such decorations at one time. Of course, people never actually sit in those pews or sing from those hymnals while remembering the person named in them. But if you regard "This do in remembrance of me" as a nice phrase carved on the communion table that has as much to do with worship as "Flo Pierson gave the flowers this morning," then you need to repent. Now.

The fact of the matter is that this celebration is meaningless without the events it commemorates. If Jesus was never betrayed by one of His own apostles, if His body was never broken, if His blood was never shed, if He isn't coming back, then we have no business even

gathering here. We might as well replace Good Friday with Black Friday as the most important holiday of the year.

So remember with me.

A. Our Lord's Betrayal, v. 23

Remember, first of all, the pain of betrayal. Most of us have been betrayed. Fewer of us have been betrayed by someone who was a trusted person who kept our finances for three years. But remember the pain of Jesus Christ, betrayed by Judas Iscariot for thirty pieces of silver. Remember the pain recorded in Psalm 41 and Psalm 55. I'm not sure what the modern equivalent of 30 pieces of silver is; it's a pretty good amount because it could buy a field. Let's say it was a pretty small field. How would it feel to know that your friend would trade your life and your friendship for \$10k? Remember that He was betrayed, that He knew He would be betrayed, and that He did this anyway.

B. His Broken Body, v. 24

Remember His broken body, ripped by a scourge, stabbed by a spear, nailed to a cross and left to die. Remember the crown of thorns. Remember that He was too weak to carry His own cross, and that Simon of Cyrene had to do it for Him. Remember the stations of the cross. Remember the brutality with which the crowd jeered and the malefactor next to Him reviled Him. Remember the humiliation of appearing naked in public, in front of your mom, your sisters, the women who supported you, and basically the whole giant crowd that was in Jerusalem for the feast. Remember that.

C. His Shed Blood, v. 25

Remember that Jesus' blood spilled out on the ground. When you're bleeding, you try to stop it. You superglue your cuts. You put on a bandage. You don't have to hang there bleeding while your life drips away. But Jesus shed His blood for you. He proffers a cup full of it to you, and says "This cup is the covenant in my blood." And then you drink it. While you do that, remember Him, bleeding there.

D. His Coming, v. 26

And remember His coming. You should not just remember His pain, but His exaltation. You are proclaiming His death, but you are also proclaiming that He will come. Do you remember not just His death, but His reign and His coming Kingdom?

E. The Past of the Christ who is Present right now, vv. 24-25

Finally, brothers and sisters, remember that Christ is here, giving Himself to you in the signs of bread and wine. You are not remembering an absent Christ. You are remembering a present Christ — remembering His past, remembering His future, remembering everything that makes your relationship significant.

When you go out for your wedding anniversary, you are doing exactly what Jesus is talking about when He says "Do this in remembrance of Me." You go out with your wife in remembrance of your wedding day (and night!). Yet you're not remembering an absent person; you are remembering the spouse who's right there, sitting across from you in the booth. The

whole point of going out for your anniversary is to celebrate it with the person to whom it's also very special. You're there, not with a total stranger, but with someone who also remembers the day when you stood in front of the world and said "I take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife."

So remember Him, not as someone absent, but as someone present here at the table by His word, by His Spirit, and symbolized by the bread and the wine. Remember why this meal is so significant. It's significant because in it, Christ offers Himself to you, and you accept. Could there be anything more glorious?

Let's pray. Amen.