

Mark D. Reichert

Maundy Thursday – Matthew 26:26-29 – Take and Eat; Take and Drink

4/6/23 – Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Beaver Dam, WI

The winters were the hardest, I remember. At least being cooped up in a college dorm room meant the wind didn't hurt your face and the cold didn't freeze your nostrils shut, but it was hard to stay on top of the world in the midst of a gloomy Minnesota winter that lasted for weeks dragging into months before spring break came – and Greek and Hebrew homework can only warm your heart so much, let me tell you.

But for the lucky few, something would come that would make those gloomy winters just a little brighter: a care package from home. My grandma and grandpa used to always send me one that was addressed to “Master Mark Reichert” and would typically have a can of Pringles, a box of devil's food cookies, and a package of lemon drops – those were some of the things that they always had on hand at their house, and they knew their grandkids loved because they tasted like home. And if you've ever been away at school or in the military or out on your own for a job, maybe you know exactly how much that can mean, because no matter how down or lonely you might be feeling at the time, getting one of these means that you've got people who love you and care about you, people who are thinking about you and pulling for you, and people who are looking forward to sharing those things with you in person again soon. And there's something about that that lifts your spirits, helps you keep going, and helps you remember that one day you'll be back home again.

A care package from home... it means the world. But that's not just true for those who are away at school or wherever else. It's true for us, too – even you and me, because we're not home yet, either. Yes, it's nice to hear from our parents and our relatives, but ultimately God is our Father and heaven is our home, and life in this world can be so tough sometimes. That's why it's so important that our Lord sends us a care package of sorts – something to give us strength, something to assure us he loves us, and something to make us look forward to seeing him in heaven one day. Only for us, it's not chips, cookies, and candy; it's even better. It's the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of all your sins.

See, on that first Maundy Thursday evening, Jesus knew that he was going to leave us here in this world and he had to go away to give his life as a ransom for many. But what he had to do cast doubt into the disciples' minds in so many different ways. Why did Jesus have to leave? Why did he have to die? Was this defeat? These people who killed Jesus, are they going to try to kill us now, too? Where do we go from here? What happens now? Where do we stand with God?

All hugely important questions, and all without a doubt answered by Jesus on that night he was betrayed. The first and most important thing Jesus wanted his people to know was that his death didn't mean that God was angry with us or that there was no hope for us anymore. No, in fact Jesus' death meant that God loved his people enough to send him to die as a sacrifice to take

away our sins and give us real hope for everlasting life. Jesus' death won for us forgiveness – that same forgiveness that Jesus delivers to each of us personally in the Lord's Supper, and where there is forgiveness, as Luther says, there is also always life and salvation. It's just like Jesus said: Take and eat; this is my body, given for you. Take and drink; “*This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*” See, that new covenant God made with his people was based totally on his gracious promises to us. God knew we couldn't save ourselves or ever make ourselves right with him on our own, so he loved us enough to do it for us. He said he would forgive our wickedness and remember our sins no more, and that forgiveness is exactly what he promises us in the Lord's Supper.

But then what's even better is that hand-in-hand with that forgiveness comes another one of God's greatest blessings: fellowship. We come together into God's presence to receive God's presents, God's gifts of grace, and it says in Hebrews 10 that this is one of the greatest: “*Let us not give up meeting together... but let us **encourage** one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*” We come together to the Lord's table to celebrate our one Savior, our one common faith, our one hope for eternal life, and that oneness is exactly what Jesus promises us. We're not alone in this world. We have a heavenly Father, a brother in our Savior Jesus Christ, a Comforter and Counselor in the Holy Spirit who lives in our hearts by faith, and we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with all our fellow believers of all times and places. We have reconciliation with God, and we have a special unity with our brothers and sisters in faith that we can't get anywhere else than in the Lord's Supper. We're in this together, and joining together in Holy Communion is a way we can strengthen each other, encourage each other, build each other up and keep each other faithful to God and his Word, and it's a way that we can walk together down life's long road until the day when we finally make it home to heaven where we belong.

And as much as anything, that's the hope the Lord's Supper holds out to us. It's not the *Last* Supper as it's sometimes called; it's the *Lasting* Supper, because in it our Lord gives us a foretaste of what he's preparing for us at God's heavenly banquet feast forever. Don't miss that special little word Jesus used: “*I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on **until** that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.*” *Until* – it's a word of promise, a word of hope. A word that assures us that the Lord's Supper that we'll celebrate together in a few minutes is a down payment on our forgiveness and fellowship forever. As special as it is when we get the awesome privilege of coming to God's table with our fellow believers, it's going to be even better then because everything will be new. Everything will be right. We won't have to feel alone anymore, because we'll be with all of our Christian brothers and sisters and even with our Lord Jesus himself, and we'll never have to be apart again. We won't have to long for something better, because we'll have all the perfect joy and unity and peace we could ever want. So come, friends; take and eat, take and drink – so much better than this other kind of care package, come and take this *heavenly* care package sent just for you, because it will sustain you and uplift you until you finally make it home to take your place at the Lamb's heavenly banquet feast for all eternity. God grant it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.