

Maundy Thursday
March 29, 2018
Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Hebrews 10:15-25 The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16 “This is the covenant I will make with them
after that time, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts,
and I will write them on their minds.”

17 Then he adds:

“Their sins and lawless acts
I will remember no more.”

18 And where these have been forgiven, sacrifice for sin is no longer necessary.

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20** by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21** and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22** let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. **23** Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, **25** not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

“New Covenant of Forgiveness”

Something “new” is going to happen. The disciples can sense it in the air. They trudge through the streets of Jerusalem and can’t deny the heavy sense of dread. Will there be conflict? A battle? A showdown? All of the above? None of the above. With Jesus, it’s so hard to tell. Just when they thought they had him figured out, he always did something to surprise them.

But tonight there is no denying the trumpet blast they heard coming from the barracks in the distant. Quickly that alarm was followed by the synchronized marching of soldiers’ feet. They had seen the scowls on the faces of Pharisees all week. More recently sinister grins spread across the faces of Sanhedrin members. Now they make their way to the upper room when everything is prepared and ready. The full moon casts light between buildings and provides illumination hanging like a radiant plate low in the eastern sky. They can tell something is about to happen. Something new is about to go down. They just don’t know what.

They find spots and recline around the u-shaped table inside the upper room. Candles spread shafts of light on the faces of their friends and the meal set out in front of them. The lamb has been roasted and ready for them. The flat bread laid out in front of them. The bitter herbs and brick of sweet dates and figs positioned within reach.

They are ready to find comfort in this ancient ceremony. Somehow everything will start to make sense again when they retell the story of the Lord's delivery from Israel's oppressor enemy back in Egypt. Joyously the remembered God's mighty acts to extricate them out of evil and into their own land of blessings and prosperity.

Now the meal is drawing to a close. And Jesus throws them a curveball. He inserts something new into this time-honored routine. He took a flat loaf of bread that brought to mind the poverty of the Israelite slaves in Egypt. He took this bread and gave them something new. Then he lifted up the third cup of wine known as the "cup of blessing" or "cup of redemption" and he gave them something they had never received before. **"This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me,"** Jesus told them (Luke 22:19). Their minds started to swim. When Jesus said "my body" he was talking about himself. By saying "given" he talks about a sacrifice. "For you" seem like odd words when they would expect for a new revolution or for the launch of the new kingdom as they hoped to find it. Jesus is definitely doing something new. And the disciples aren't sure how they feel about it.

New can be fun. New can be innovative and exciting. But there is something undeniably comfortable about what you are used to. That old pair of jeans that feels so familiar, like they have eventually conformed to the shape of your body. They are the first thing you reach for when you want to relax even though they probably aren't suitable for wearing out to Wal-Mart. It's your favorite pair of comfy shoes. They are well passed the time when they should have been replaced. And that toe sticking out hurts your efforts to deny reality.

But Jesus isn't done. He continues innovating, bringing something new to this unique Passover meal. **"This cup that is poured out for you,"** he enlightened them, **"is the new covenant in my blood"** (Luke 22:20 ESV).¹ And with that the disciples see flashes of Moses holding God's law in his hands, the covenant enacted on Mt Sinai. Images of Aaron in his priestly garb standing before the altar poised to offer a sacrifice. They can't quite wrap their heads around it yet. But Jesus is talking about an entirely new covenant.

That's where we are more likely to draw the line. Eventually you embraced the VHS and then the DVD. You begrudgingly learned how to send text messages. You've come to grips with your fears about leaving home to go to school and start a new job. But a new covenant with God is more than just a little uncomfortable. We've gotten comfortable with the way we expect things to work with God. We've gotten used to the way we've always done things. Human beings have their expectations for God. Everyone knows that we give to God and then he gives back. God extends an expectation and we do our part by falling in line with obedience. As long as it works for me, what should it matter to anyone else?

Actually, Jesus is just acting on God's promises. A new covenant is necessary. The old one never worked the way it was designed to. Abraham had a special relationship with God. But he lied to foreigners about his wife's identity. Not once, but twice! He fathered a child with his wife's maid, putting the promise in jeopardy. King David was a man after God's own

¹ Behold the Lamb: A Passover Haggadah Prepared for Christians, by John C Lawrenz

heart. Yet, David neglected his responsibilities and let his heart drag him from lust to adultery and murder. The new covenant is necessary because the old one is broken. It doesn't work. It can't function. And not like what you might need to do if your water heater goes out or your pipes break. It's broken in the way your house would be if you found out it was built on top of a nuclear waste site.

Everything God's people were incapable of delivering for God throughout the ages anticipated this newer and better covenant. God had first announced it through his prophet Jeremiah: **"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord. I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds." Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.**" (Hebrews 10:16,17)

This new covenant is now a present reality in the blood of Christ. Jesus offers a new way. Jesus says it is: **"the new covenant in my blood"** (Luke 22:20 ESV) It's not through you coming close to God. It's not about overcoming past mistakes. It has nothing to do with how you can improve yourself. It is based on the single sacrifice of Jesus. His blood does what none of your efforts can do. His death sponges away sins. His sacrifice takes away all the wrongs that separate us from God.

Sometimes we fear forgetting. You can still see hats and stickers telling us to remember 9/11 and never forget the victims. People get tattoos or create car decals for loved ones who have passed away. All the things you can't quite bring yourself to forget about your past, all your past rebellion, all our arrogant attitudes in defiance to God, He no longer remembers. Because of Christ Jesus' one single sacrifice, they are completely taken away. God no longer has anything against his people. Nothing bad to remember. Nothing bad to punish. No stain on your conscience. No reason for condemnation, now or ever again!

Now Jesus says to you "do this." He instructs disciples to do it in remembrance of him. Jesus tells you to come to him with all the disappointment you have over your performance this past week, and he simply says to you "I don't remember." Jesus invites you to his Supper with your heart burdened by the hurt you have caused your loved ones and he says "I don't remember." Jesus prepares his table for you who would rather do things your way, would rather cling to the way things should work, would prefer to hold onto the older more comfortable way of approaching God and says "I don't remember." Jesus holds out his own body and his own blood for all the could have done, should have done, would have done's you can't get out of your mind and says "I don't remember."

Jesus gives you His Supper to celebrate your new relationship with God on the basis of His forgiveness. In the waters of baptism we are given a brand new start. He seals his covenant of love with us through Holy Spirit working through the word accompanying the water of Baptism. Jesus' blood gives us clean consciences, pure souls sprinkled and made whole. We have full confidence to approach God without any baggage of past mistakes and failed attempts at a right relationship with God. God now blesses us by putting his law into our hearts so we live a holy life. We rest on Christ's one sacrifice.

We don't get a whole lot of insight into what happened when the disciples stepped out of the upper room and went back out into the night air of Jerusalem and traveled with Jesus down the slopes from the city wall, into the valley and into the garden of Gethsemane. How much had they really changed? Did they even fully realize what Jesus had given them and what he was about to give them?

Disciples refreshed and renewed by God's new covenant in the blood of Jesus get to see themselves in a new way. The new way is little more than simply embracing Christ's accomplishments on your behalf and your identity in Christ. Sacrifices aren't new. But Jesus is the source of this blood instead of bulls and goats. The innocent blood of God's own Son is vastly better in power and effect. So God invites you to come to him without fear. Come near with the freedom Christ won for you. Come near with the privileges his perfection grant to you. Hold onto the gifts he has given to you in faith. Hold onto the God who promises and is always faithful to his promises. Come near and encourage your brothers and sisters in the faith. Stir each other up in love and noble actions.

Bring that same joy with you whenever you come into God's house. Not the fear and dread of the disciples walking the streets of Jerusalem on that ominous Passover evening. The joy of knowing you are God's child and being in God's house is where you belong. The joy of knowing what you are in Christ and by his sacrifice, so you come to be restored and refilled with his grace. The joy of knowing you are privileged to be part of God's family through faith in Jesus. So every interaction with your brothers and sisters in Christ reflects your shared status and equal importance. So your care and concern for each other flows from God's genuine care for you. So you can expect God to do something new and exciting when you work together with your fellow Christians, anticipating God's blessings for his kingdom using you as his instruments.

Something new is happening for you when God comes to you with his forgiveness, his sacrifice, his new life. Amen.