



Palm Sunday
Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish
Mark 14:22-25

"This Is"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen

"This is my body. This is my blood." These words have troubled many people throughout the ages. These words were certainly confusing to the disciples who heard them on the night Jesus first spoke them when they had gathered that evening for the Passover meal. This was a meal that they likely had eaten together before. It was a meal celebrated by the Jews to remember when the Israelites were finally freed from captivity by the Egyptians when the final plague was announced that all first-born humans and animals would perish unless the Lord saw blood on the doorposts of their homes. When the Lord saw the blood on the doorposts, he would pass over these homes and no death would come to that house.

The Jewish people were commanded to remember this event by having this Passover meal every year. On this night, however, the Passover meal would take on a new meaning. The atmosphere around the supper table had already become very uncomfortable when Jesus looked at his guests and announced, "One of you will betray me." It got worse when Jesus told his disciples that they would all become his deserters. The disciples started to get used to hearing things they didn't understand such as the son of Man would suffer, die and on the third day rise again. Their list of things they didn't understand got longer on this night when he broke bread and said, "This is my body" and when he passed the cup of wine saying, "This is my blood." At the heart of this confusion for the disciples and for so many people today are found in the two words, "This is".

The disciples must have wondered, "How can this be Jesus' body and blood if he was serving bread and wine?" The disciples must have thought that Jesus must have meant something else when he said "This is" my body and blood. Jesus was fully aware of this confusion and told his disciples not to tell anyone the things that he had taught them until he had been raised from the dead. Even after seeing the empty tomb on the first Easter, the disciples didn't fully understand everything that they had heard Jesus say and the words "This is" remains hard for many to believe today.

Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli, another leader of the Reformation, agreed on many things in the church that needed reforming, but when it came to the Lord's Supper, they parted ways as they debated over this matter of what "this is" means. Once again, Zwingli sided with the disciples who did not believe the straightforward words of Jesus when he said, "this is". Zwingli thought when Jesus said "this is" he really meant to say "this is like" or the bread and wine are merely symbols of the body and blood of Jesus Christ. And to this day the Lord's Supper does not carry the same depth of meaning in all churches. Interestingly the pandemic this past year has seemed to have given even Evangelical Lutherans license to change the words that Jesus gave us to say when receiving the Lord's Supper. With the creation of single service communion kits or the authorization

to simply commune at home, the words "This is my body and blood given **for you**" has often modified to say "given and shed **for us**". Some may think this one-word change doesn't make much difference, but this slight change can leave you wondering if the forgiveness of sins really includes "you". This is just another example of how still today, Satan still whispers into the ears of God's chosen people attempting to create unbelief where there once was faith by saying, "Did Jesus really say, "**This is my body given for you. This is my blood shed for you.**"?"

One of the questions that this class of First Communion students was asked to answer after studying the Words of Institution which was the gospel reading for today was, what did Jesus mean when he said, "**This is my body. This is my blood.**" It is great to hear their childlike faith answer this question about the real presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper and respond, "This is" means just what Jesus said, "This is". The Lord's Supper is not a symbol, or a remembrance of what Jesus did when he first instituted the Lord's Supper when the disciples were remembering the Passover Meal, but it is Jesus coming to you and declaring the forgiveness of your sins.

Jesus couldn't have made these words more simple or clear. Jesus is present in the Lord's Supper. Unlike the Passover meal which remembered when the Lord passed over the homes of the people that put blood on the doorposts, Jesus doesn't look to you to see if you have made some kind of a sacrifice before this meal. Jesus' death on the cross is the only sacrifice that can remove sin. Jesus' blood is the new testament. It was Jesus' last will and testament that you are heirs to receive the forgiveness of sins. Your sins are not passed over, but they are forgiven unconditionally and forever. To reduce the Lord's supper to anything less than believing that your sins are forgiven only by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is to doubt what just what Jesus meant when he said, "This is".

Jesus heard these same two words the first time from his heavenly father when he was baptized. When Jesus came up out of the water, Jesus heard his father say, "**This is my son, my beloved, in whom I am well pleased.**" Again, when Jesus heard these words from his father there were no qualifications or conditions to what "this is" meant. Satan was the first person to appear in the wilderness immediately after Jesus was baptized and slightly changed what God said into something that means something entirely different. Satan's first words to Jesus following his baptism was, "If you are the son of God". Jesus recognized that Satan had changed "This is my son" to "If you are the son", but Jesus refused to believe anything less than what his father had told him.

On this Palm Sunday let us with childlike faith simply with believing hearts know that Jesus comes to you in the Lord's Supper and not only forgiven the sins of his disciples who first betrayed him, but the real presence of Jesus comes to you in the Lord's Supper when you hear Jesus say to you, "This is my body given for you." This is my blood shed for you." Amen