

Palm/Passion Sunday-April 2, 2023

Baltic and East Nidaros Lutheran Parish

Matthew 26:17-30

"The First Lord's Supper"

Sermon by Pastor Randall J. Questad

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

*Several young members of our parish will be receiving their first Lord's Supper today. These young people are not receiving this sacrament without being first taught what this sacrament does for them. The sacrament of the Lord's supper and the sacrament of Holy Baptism are both sacraments in our church, but they are not the same. These youth learned that the sacrament of Baptism should always happen first before receiving the Lord's supper. In fact, the sacrament of Baptism should happen as soon as possible in the life of a person and in Baptism, we believe that Jesus is making a promise **to us** and it is for that reason, we baptize only once. The sacrament of the Lord's Supper on the other hand is to be received often. In today's gospel reading which is just a small section of the complete passion story, Jesus has a class of 12 students who will be receiving the First Lord's Supper.*

*Jesus also teaches the distinction between Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Jesus commands us to baptize, but **never** tells us that if we are unsure if He really was serious about the promise we receive in Baptism, that we are to return to the baptismal font to receive another dose of water. Also, before Jesus delivered the First Lord's Supper to this class of First Communicants, Jesus spent some time teaching his disciples about the purpose of this sacrament.*

The first thing that Jesus taught his disciples and teaches us today is that the Lord' Supper is not just any meal. Jesus and his disciples were already gathered to have a meal together. They were gathering to celebrate the Passover meal. This meal was like the Lord's supper in that it caused those receiving it to remember something that happened in the past. Whenever the Jewish people ate the Passover meal, they remembered when their ancestors were freed from slavery and the angel of death passed over the homes where the angel saw the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of the homes. The Lord's supper does more than cause us to remember an event from the past. The Lord's supper when delivered to you does cause us to remember the day when Jesus first instituted this sacrament that we just read about, but then it delivers a promise to you today as you take and eat it.

The Lord's supper has caused some subtle and some significant controversies over the years. There are divisions whether this is a sacrament or just a symbol of an event to recall from the past. Such controversies even began on the night that Jesus first instituted this sacrament. Most of these controversies revolve around the first statement Jesus made when he came into the room where his disciples were eating the Passover meal. Jesus looked at each of them and said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me." You can imagine the stir this comment made among these twelve followers of Jesus. At this point, Jesus didn't call the one he was talking about by name. If he had, the other eleven would likely have quickly let out a sigh of relief and had

gone on eating their meals. None of the disciples wanted to be named a betrayer and quite often the first response from us today also is to be defensive and say as the disciples did that day, "Surely, not I Lord."

This past week one of my favorite teachers from Junior High passed away. He wasn't my favorite teacher to begin with. To begin with, I was dreadfully afraid of Mr. Vissia. I had good reason to be afraid of him. I had heard stories about him and knew several examples of when a student challenged his authority, the battle was short, and he was always the victor. I remember after taking our first social studies exam with him in seventh grade, he held all our graded papers in his hands as he walked into our room. He just stood there in silence for what seemed to be an eternity. Then, instead of handing them out to see what grade we had gotten, he just said, "Some of you didn't study well enough. I will be speaking with each of you individually who didn't at least get a C for a grade." The home ec room was adjacent to his room and was unoccupied during his class, so one by one, he called the names of students one by one who did not meet the standards that he set. Not one of us raised our hands confessing that we knew we hadn't done well, nor were any of us certain that we exceeded his standards because this was the first test, he had given to us and graded for us. For 50 minutes, each of us sat in fear, feeling the accusation that we were about to meet Mr. Vissia face to face. To this day, I still am thankful that I didn't have my name called that day. But it didn't really matter. Not one of us had a perfect paper to boast about. The best part about that day, those one-on-one encounters never happened again, and we knew what to expect from Mr. Vissia.

People who feel they have done nothing wrong often are the first to say it. Judas spoke to Jesus after he had told all of them that one of them would betray him and Judas quickly said, "Surely, not I?" and Judas didn't even address him as Lord, like the other disciples had earlier. Judas addresses him as Rabbi. For Judas, Jesus was not someone who could do something for him. For Judas, Jesus was simply a good teacher.

It is then that Jesus makes a distinction between the meal that they were eating and the Lord's Supper that he was providing. The meal that they were eating had not received Jesus' words that promised what the Lord's supper would do. The meal they were eating was just a remembrance of an event from the pages of their history. The Passover meal that they were eating would take away their hunger, but the Lord's supper that they would receive would take away their sins. By breaking the bread and blessing it and giving them the cup to drink, Jesus taught them that they would be eating the real presence of the body and blood, not of a teacher, but a Lord and Savior who promised that their sins would be forgiven.

The last part of preparing Jesus' first class of disciples to receive the First Lord's Supper and the last part of preparing this class of first communicants is to know who is prepared to receive the Lord's supper. The answer to this question is simple. You must have a believing heart. This means more than you believe in Jesus or have heard of him. It means that you believe that you come to his table as a betrayer of Jesus and through the eating and drinking of his very own body and blood your sins are completely forgiven! It wasn't just Judas who betrayed Jesus. It was every one of his disciples that deserted Jesus. And it is every one of us. If you do not believe that you too are a betrayer of Jesus, the Lord's supper is not for you. But today, if you believe that you are a betrayer of Jesus and are hungry to hear that his body and blood are given and shed for you, know, and believe this unconditional promise which is for you. Your sins are forgiven. Amen