

April 1, 2021

Maundy Thursday

Bethlehem Lutheran Church, Milan, WI

St. John Ev. Lutheran Church, Edgar, WI

Text: 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

In the Name of the Father and the ✠ Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

We are not to put the LORD God to the test. Moses found this out the hard way. When the Hebrews were in the wilderness and water was scarce, the people grumbled against God and Moses because they thought that they and all their livestock would die from lack of water. God had already provided so much and was still providing for them, through the daily miracles of manna and quail, but still they did not trust Him. After all these years, their faith was still a pale, weak thing. In response to the people's grumbling, God told Moses to strike a boulder with his staff and they would have all the water they needed. So Moses stood before the assembly of Israel and he struck the rock... twice. Water did pour forth, as God promised, water in abundance, but Moses' tiny act of unbelief was noticed by God. Apparently God didn't work fast enough for him. Because water didn't pour forth immediately when Moses dealt his first blow, he had a moment of doubt, and in this moment of doubt he decided to force the issue, to make God pay attention and keep His promise. So he struck the rock again. Afterward God said to him, "**Because you did not believe in me... you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.**" (Numbers 20:12) For this small act of unbelief, Moses was forbidden to enter the Promised Land and would die looking upon it from atop Mount Nebo, close enough to see God's promise but unable to partake himself. It seems like a harsh punishment, but since when is unbelief ever a minor thing? God calls us to trust His promises and – this is hugely important – not take His actual gifts for granted.

Many Christians take their Baptisms for granted. They highly esteem the date they graduated from high school or perhaps the time they won the big game and were locally famous for a few weeks. But do they recognize their Baptismal birthday, the day they were drowned with all sins and evil desires and brought back to life as a new creation in Christ? Not so much. It is not our memories which make Baptism effective, mind you. Our emotions or memories add nothing to God's creative power. If you were Baptized at a week old, it is just as effective as if you were Baptized last week. And if the exact date of your Baptism is lost to you, due to poor records or a murky past, that doesn't affect it in the least. Forgetting your anniversary doesn't mean you aren't married anymore... which is a good thing for husbands everywhere! But remembering that you are married is important. Baptism, like marriage, is a state of being that goes on and on. We should remind ourselves every day that, "I am Baptized. I bear the seal of Christ Jesus on my head and on my soul. I belong to Him and am a part of Him. And He is a part of me." That is miraculous. It is your own personal, supernatural gift from God.

It's not just Baptism, though. We also have trouble with the Sacrament of the Altar. At most Lutheran Churches it is celebrated at least twice a month. It used to be every Sunday, but rationalism reduced the frequency of the Sacrament in the 1800's and we are still trying to recover from that. Here we receive it every single Sunday and on other festival days, like today. But even receiving it every Sunday, we still struggle to hold high this miracle. To grasp and appreciate what it actually means. Here the Almighty God and Creator of the universe, gives of Himself for you to eat and drink. This is a blessing. This is a promise. This is a life-giving, soul-strengthening miracle. It is not a symbolic act, it is an effective act, and we are not the ones doing it. God is. Christ Jesus gives us His very Body and Blood here today, to join us together into a real, blessed, eternal communion.

The Hebrews grew bored with many of God's blessings. Even the daily gift of manna, miraculous bread from heaven, they took for granted, going so far as to say, "**we loathe this worthless food**" (Num 21:5). Loathed it, despised it, hated it. A daily miracle, and they grew bored with it. After receiving it every day for years, it no longer seemed that special to them, but that was not the fault of God nor His gift. The gift was still amazing. It was solely the fault of the receiver, for not recognizing the gift for what it was nor honoring Him who gave.

The Church in Corinth had some very serious problems surrounding the Lord's Supper. The chief problem was that they, like many who call themselves Christians today, did not actually believe the miraculous nature of it. The sacramental nature of it. They were treating it as just ordinary food, as a part of a potluck, and they gave no thought to what it meant nor those who gathered with them in the church, the other members of Christ's flock. They failed to discern the Body and Blood and so Paul warned them "**When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat.**" (1 Cor 11:20). That is what Paul was trying to correct in chapters 10 & 11 of his letter to them, this lack of recognition of the miracle taking place. He told them, "**The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.**" (1 Cor 10:16-17) The Lord's Supper is not an empty symbol, but a wonderful gift from God that actually does something. It is a participation in the Body and Blood of Christ. If it were mere symbolism, would it matter who partakes? If it was just about what you felt or what you thought, would we be warned about taking the Sacrament to our harm? Our Lord said it is His Body and it is His Blood and we should not allow our own little moment of unbelief to contradict Him. We should not put Him to the test.

Every Divine Service we are witness to three overlapping miracles: Heaven comes down to earth, as the angels and archangels and all the heavenly host join us in worshipping the Triune God. Or more properly speaking, we are joining their worship, which never ends. For a while, heaven and earth intersect here and our voices blend with their voices, our praise with their praise. The second miracle is that Christ gives us His very Body and Blood to eat and drink. He says in John 6, "**Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have**

no life in you.” (Jn 6:53) In the Eucharist we partake of four things: The bread, the Body, the wine and the Blood. We see two things but take four things into our mouths. This is a mystery of God that we cannot explain, only accept through faith. By receiving the Body and Blood of the Lamb of God, our sins are forgiven. As the Psalmist wrote, **“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.”** (Ps 139:6)

The third miracle is related to the other two. As St. Paul wrote in v. 17, **“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”** We are not just communing with the Son of God. We are also in communion with one another. We are in Christ, and He is in us... so we are also in one another. I am a part of you and you are a part of me. Not metaphorically, but in reality. And not just the people here in this room today, but also the Christians in Marshfield and Miami and Moscow. And in heaven as well. The blessed dead are in communion with Christ and He is in us, so we are also in communion with them: Your dearly departed child, your parents, your loved ones, your friends. Each Divine Service we join with the blessed saints who completed life’s journey in faith, each connected to the other, each in communion with Christ and one another. We are one body because of Christ’s body. How can that miracle ever be topped?

You can see, then, why we take the Sacrament so seriously. It is not just a mundane act, a simple reenactment or memorial meal: It is the very hand of God come down from heaven to consecrate His gift and bless us all. It is a miracle. An earthshattering, mind-blowing miracle that we partake of all the time. You don’t need another miracle to prove God exists and that He loves you. Just come to the altar. Because it is here where His gifts are distributed, here where His blessing pour forth. Just say *Amen* and receive the meal of eternity.

In the precious name of Jesus, Amen.

Rev. Schopp