

Lenten Midweek #5

The Death of Christ and the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 10:14-22

Luke 22:7-23

Building, growing in scope and force, the Gospel narrative of Christ's life leads to an astounding crescendo. It is dramatic. A divine drama that makes one's pulse quicken; the climactic events of Holy Week have captured the hearts and minds of God's people for two millennia. The theme of food had been established early on in Jesus' ministry. He had claimed to be manna from heaven (John 6). He miraculously fed 5000 people with five barley loaves and two fish (Luke 9). He changed water into wine (John 2). The tax collector Levi, whom you know as Matthew, gave a great banquet after Jesus called Levi to follow Him. The Pharisees and scribes were bent out of shape about this and they *grumbled* and attempted to scold Jesus' disciples and the Lord Himself by extension. "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" (Luke 5:30).

How many of y'all like to eat and drink? It's best when it's festive. It's best when the mood is high, when the chef has used all his talents and the company is pleasant, friendly. I had rolled into Ft. Wayne a little before midnight. It was January 17<sup>th</sup> and it was freezing (in the teens). The airlines have a twisted sense of humor, a bit on the demonic side. When you book a flight, they give you maybe an hour layover and if you fly into Dallas/Ft. Worth you have to take this crazy tram from the side of the airport where the big planes are (Ontario to DFW) in order to get to the side of the airport where the small planes are (DFW to Ft. Wayne). There's really no time to get something to eat. On the way, you have to walk past restaurant after restaurant that smell delicious with long lines but you don't want to miss your connection so you just soldier on. No food for me at the airport. My good buddy, who picked me up in freezing Fort Wayne, drove me through at Wendy's, right about closing time. I ordered a chicken sandwich. After I ate it, he politely asked me how it was. I told him it was utilitarian. It seemed the appropriate word. He didn't understand. It means that it wasn't good but that it did the job (designed to be useful or practical rather than attractive). Cold, limp and tasteless; that's what it was (and no, I didn't have Covid).

Jesus is in the Upper Room. He is happy to be in the Upper Room. His church is gathered around Him. They are eating the Passover Meal. He likely, as the head of this NT family, tells the OT story of Israel's exodus out of Egypt. The plague of death, the blood of the Lamb, the unleavened bread, the bondage of slavery and the great deliverance which God provided – the movement of God's people toward the Promised Land – as the paterfamilias, Jesus recounted it all. Death was near. Hours, not days; a horrible, sacrificial death was very near. Jesus knew what drama was swirling outside the Upper Room. Mysteriously, simultaneously, it was both the ugly plan of godless men and the wondrous plan of our gracious God. He gave His disciples food unlike any other. Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is my blood. A new meal; this is a decidedly new meal. This meal does not end.

He longed to give them this food. "With deep desire I desired to eat this Passover meal with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). Those are His exact words. He is a giving Lord, a giving Savior, a giving Chef. What He gives is Himself. The Upper Room is the last significant interaction that Jesus had with His disciples before He was crucified. Do you think that that was by

accident? When the religious authorities *grumbled* against the Lord's disciples about eating with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus jumped into the conversation with a reply. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:31-32). That is why Jesus suffers; because we are sick. He is our Good Physician and His body and blood is the medicine of immortality. By His stripes we are healed. Oh, how He suffers. Oh, how deep is our sickness.

Each and every one of us is terminal with sin and death. We have earned our wretched diagnosis. One of our saddest traits is that we are in love with this world. Pride and this world are bedfellows. Lust and this world are bedfellows. Greed and this world are bedfellows. We eat the food of this world and our stomachs, our sinful hearts, want more. Some of the Israelites resented their deliverance out of Egypt and they wanted to go back to the world's food. They despised the manna God gave them and so they begged to return to the food of Egypt and they *grumbled*. The food of this world – it is utilitarian; cold, limp and tasteless. It's true; we must eat. But the fruits of the earth don't feed our souls. The food on our plates is cold and limp and tasteless compared to what Christ gives in Holy Communion. The world is going to seduce you, sending the aroma of it's self-indulgence into our minds. Pass it by. You have a connection to make. You have a different feast that calls to you.

Our divine Chef has used all His talents, all His abilities to feed you with what is good. Your soul is beckoned to delight itself in the richest of fare, among a group of people in whose company you are supremely at home. The sick sinners who kneel at Christ's feet at this altar are fed with the bread of life. Heaven pierces the gloom of our days to uplift our spirits and give us a foretaste of a feast that is pure joy. Christ's own righteousness is what we feast upon. Did you know that your pastor knows your habits at our altar? I know precisely who takes the host in their mouth and who receives it in their hands. Not only that, I know *how* you receive it in your hand, *how* you receive it in your mouth. A few of our members had missed the Divine Service for a number of months and so didn't hear that we were just distributing it in the hand for a time and when they returned, they just opened their mouths to receive it their normal way and I thought, well, yeah, it's time to go back to the normal way – thank God for them. Anyway, one of our ladies, who, when she hears the words, "The body of Christ given for you" she whispers in reply, "for me!" with an unmistakable note of gratitude to God in her voice.

For you; so very personal. He knows you. He gives you exactly what you need. You are Levi, the sinner whom Christ calls to follow Him. We, together, we are Christ's church, whom He serves with the food of deliverance. He brought us out of the land of slavery to sin, a land of death, and He is leading us toward the true Promised Land. The company in our congregation is pleasant, friendly because we know how loved we are. Each of us is prized in God's house. The mood is high here because we know that our Lord is risen from the dead. Death has no mastery over Him. Death has no mastery over us. Christ's healing is in the bread of His body and the wine of His blood. Healing not merely of our minor afflictions but of our most problematic sins. He covers us. His righteousness invades our being and we receive His health, His purity, His life. With great desire does He desire to feed *you*. As often as *you* eat this bread and drink this cup *you* proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. His death is for you. His resurrection is for you. His body is for you. His blood is for you. In this place, we receive food unlike any other.

The Lord Christ is happy to be among us. The beautiful drama of salvation is ongoing at Christ the King – here we participate in a feast of victory, a heavenly banquet. It is the Lord's Supper!