

Sermon Title: "Maundy Thursday"

Prelude

UMH #64 "Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty"

Congregational Reading: UMH #283 "Holy Thursday"

Apostle's Creed UMH #881

Scripture

John 6:47-58

Matthew 26:20-35

Sermon: "Maundy Thursday"

Communion

Lord's Prayer

UMH #290 "Go to Dark Gethsemane"

Closing Prayer and Benediction: Number 6:24-26

“Maundy Thursday”

Pastor Jacob Hanson

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## Opening Prayer

Good Evening Beloved, Maundy Thursday is upon us. Tonight is a remembrance of one of the most somber times in human history, the calm before the storm. In the life of Jesus this is the last time that He has a meal, and appropriately we call this the “Last Supper” because indeed it is. We know it as “Maundy Thursday,” because the word Maundy comes from the Latin word “Mandatum,” the word we know as mandate. It is mandate Thursday, or command Thursday, because indeed the disciples are given the command to “do this in remembrance of me.” Tonight is notable in other ways as well in the life of the church. Jesus, in the Gospel of John over five chapters, will teach the disciples many important things about love, the truth, and the fact that Jesus is going to be sacrificed. (Judas is absent at this point when Jesus is teaching.) Jesus will also wash the feet of the disciples, and thereby instill within the church the teachings of humility and service. You cannot have a faithful servant of Christ without these things. There is the background happenings as well, where Judas leaves after the foot washing and after eating the meal to go and betray Jesus; and we know that the pieces are falling into place for the crucifixion the next day. It is a time of great suffering for Jesus, and there is the palpable taste of something horrific coming soon in reading the text. While all of this is happening, Jesus institutes for the disciples and for us the sacrament of Communion, which is given precisely to help us remember what Jesus does for us so that we may have our salvation.

Our first reading this evening actually came before the Last Supper, but it gives us a helpful explanation from Jesus about what Holy Communion really is all about. John 6:47 reads “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.” This, as always, is what its all about Beloved. Everything that is done by Jesus, the prophets, the disciples, and (in theory) by the church is done so that people may bring glory to God through their belief and salvation. Eternal life is the goal, and there is a reason why Jesus tells us in the next verse that “I am the bread of life.” Bread was (and in most cases still is) the staple food. A meal was based around bread in some form. Food sustains us, provides us energy, and without it we slowly wither and die. This isn’t only true physically, but it is also true spiritually. Verses 50-51 read “This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Is Jesus telling us to consume Him physically like some type of cannibalism? Of course not. What He is telling the people is that just as bread sustains us in this life, He sustains us spiritually and that such sustenance comes through His death and resurrection.

You may remember Matthew 4:4 from the beginning of Lent where Jesus stated during His temptation in the desert: “It is written, ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.’” Just as we cannot live here without earthly sustenance, we cannot live eternally without Christ within us. Jesus finishes our first reading by stating just this when He says “As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me.” That simply means that we receive eternal life because He lives.

In Matthew 26 we read a short account of the Last Supper. In a moment when we take Holy Communion we will read through verses 26-30 again, but for the moment we should take note of a couple of things which happen here. As was mentioned at the beginning, Jesus institutes the sacrament of Communion at the Last Supper. A sacrament is simply a fancy title for something Jesus told us to do that has a physical component that is in remembrance of something heavenly. In the Christian world there are only two sacraments, although there are many things that we are commanded to do. There is Baptism, which is commanded in Matthew 28, and there is Communion, which is commanded in all four of the Gospels at the Last Supper. Baptism is done to mark the entrance of a person into God’s kingdom and the church. Communion is done to bring to mind Christ’s sacrifice for us, and to remind us of our belonging to heaven if we cling to Him. This is stated in verse 28 where we read “For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.” His blood is what seals our salvation, His sacrifice opens the door to eternal life if we receive it. The bread and the juice mean nothing on their own without remembrance of His sacrifice and without belief and that right relationship with our Creator. Communion takes the place of the Passover meal that marked the Jews’ release from Egypt by the hand of God, and in the history of us as Christians it marks our release from our sins also accomplished by God’s hand through Jesus’s death and resurrection. Eating a little wafer and drinking a little juice does not make us clean, but it is the representation of God’s covenant with us, that covenant has made us clean.

Matthew 26:28 again read “For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.” Jesus says this during a Passover meal, when the people assembled would have understood God’s covenant with Israel and the sacrifice of a lamb that marked them as safe from God’s judgement. A covenant is a binding agreement between two people, and here is no different except this covenant is between God and man. This covenant is not, thankfully, based upon anything that we have done, but rather is based upon what Jesus is going to do on Good Friday and Easter Sunday. This covenant establishes a new relationship if we receive it. This relationship we have with God is no longer focused upon our own sinfulness and our inadequacies, but rather it is focused on our Savior. He had made us clean, we are made pure in His blood, we therefore have direct communication with the Lord. As we will see over the next few days, Jesus makes good on His part of the covenant.

He goes from here to the Garden of Gethsemane, is arrested, is falsely tried, is crucified, and will rise again on the third day on Easter Morning. What this does is take from us our guiltiness, and the rightful wrath of God falls upon Jesus instead of us. His covenant of new life, that His blood and body are given up for us so that we may live, is sealed upon us at His resurrection. When we take of the juice and the bread we, as members of His church, are brought back into that space and remember what He has done. Jesus is the bread of life, His body is broken for us, His blood is poured out for us, and as we take Holy Communion together we are united in Him. The Covenant we receive is that just as He is put to death, so too are our sins, and just as He is raised up to life, so too are we raised up to life on the last day. To make sure our hearts and our minds are in the right place before we take Communion this evening on Maundy Thursday, lets bow our heads in prayer.

### **Closing Prayer**