

LUKE 22:19–20. (EHV)

He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “**This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.**” In the same way, he took the cup after the supper, saying, “**This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is being poured out for you.**”

Tonight we celebrate Jesus’s institution of the Lord’s Supper or Holy Communion. We might laugh to ourselves when we hear it called a supper or a meal. After all, we think of a meal or a supper as a long and enjoyable affair at which we can eat until we are full, and at the Lord’s Supper we, to all appearances, only get a small bite of bread and a single gulp of wine, and the whole experience only takes a few minutes for us personally.

But don’t be deceived. This is indeed a supper, a meal, at which we could not enjoy ourselves more and at which we could not be fed more richly, because there is much more taking place here than initially meets the eye.

In order to appreciate the benefit and nourishment we receive here, tonight we want to consider the three unions of Holy Communion.

1.

When we sit down to an ordinary meal, it usually doesn’t require much effort to discern what we are eating. The host usually only needs to set the food in front of us: Ah, it’s a hamburger, or stew, or pizza, or rice, or potato soup, or vegetables, or an orange. Sometimes we might need to actually take a bite in order to determine what exactly we’re eating, for instance, if it’s a casserole with some kind of topping. And the more complex the dish, the higher the likelihood that we might need to ask the host what exactly we are eating.

But this meal is unique, because the host is the Lord, and he is unique. It might initially seem like nothing special is required in order to discern what he is serving here. It looks and tastes like bread—unusual, unleavened bread, but bread—and it looks and tastes like wine. But with this host, it should come as no surprise that if you want the whole story of what he is serving here, you’re not going to figure it out with your sight, smell, or taste. You need to listen to him. You need to listen to his Word.

“He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body.’ ... In the same way, he took the cup after the supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new testament in my blood.’” This is the first union of Holy Communion. Jesus says that the bread he is serving here is also his body, and that the wine he is serving here—what Jesus and the Jews in general called “the fruit of the vine”—is also his blood.

If you say one plus one *is* two, one plus one does not change into two so that it ceases to be one plus one, nor does it merely represent or symbolize two. It is both one plus one and two at one and the same time. If you say, “This belt buckle *is* my prized possession,” the belt buckle does not change into your prized possession so that it ceases to be a belt buckle, nor does it merely represent or symbolize your prized possession. It is both a belt buckle and your prized possession at one and the same time. So too here. When Jesus says, “This [bread] is my body,” and “This cup is the new testament in my blood,” the bread and wine do not change into his body and blood so that they cease to be bread and wine. But neither do they merely represent or

symbolize his body and blood. The bread and the wine he gives you in his Holy Supper are both bread and wine and his body and blood at one and the same time.

“But that’s impossible,” people will say. “His body and his blood would have long ago been used up after so many celebrations of the Lord’s Supper,” people will say. That would be true if this were your supper or my supper. “His body can’t be there with the bread, and his blood can’t be there with the wine. His body is at the right hand of God right now,” people will say. Again, that would be true if the one serving this meal were any ordinary human, and if the right hand of God were a physical location with GPS coordinates. But Jesus is not just an ordinary human; he is also true God. And the right hand of God is not a physical location; it is the position of all power and authority in heaven and on earth.

Also, don’t miss that Jesus says he is giving us a testament or covenant here. You do not use metaphors and enigmas and cryptic language with a testament. You use clear language that cannot be misunderstood unless you aren’t paying attention. Plus, Jesus’s own apostle Paul said that if we eat this bread and drink this cup in an unworthy manner, we are guilty not merely of sinning against an institution of the Lord; we are guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. This is also what the early Christians confessed after the time of the apostles. Around 350 AD, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote, “Since therefore [Jesus Christ] has made pronouncement and said with regard to the bread, ‘This is my body,’ who will dare to doubt any longer? And since he has affirmed himself and said, ‘This is my blood,’ who will ever waver, saying it is not his blood? ... Therefore do not regard the bread and the wine as bare elements, for according to the authoritative pronouncement you are encountering Christ’s body and blood. ... Do not judge the matter from what you taste, but from your faith be fully assured without wavering that you have been deemed worthy of being given Christ’s body and blood.”

And since this is one of the unions you encounter in Holy Communion, do not complain any longer that you have never gotten to touch Jesus, or that you have never gotten to witness a miracle of Jesus. Jesus truly gives himself to you in a supernatural, miraculous way in this Supper.

2.

For the second union of Holy Communion, listen again to what Jesus says: “This is my body, which is given *for you*. ... This cup is the *new testament* in my blood, which is being poured out *for you*.” Just the fact that someone invites you to a meal usually indicates that you as the invitee have a good relationship with the host. But it does happen in rare cases that a host invites someone to a meal he doesn’t like. Maybe he is hosting a family get-together, and so he feels obligated to invite all his family members, even the ones he wouldn’t want to host otherwise. Or maybe he invites someone so that he can poison or trick him. And if anyone deserves that kind of treatment at God’s table, we do, for all our disobedience toward him.

But Jesus, the Son of God and Son of Man, says he is doing something *for you*, for your benefit, in this meal. He is in fact giving you the very same body and blood that he would give over to death and pour out to death less than twenty-four hours from when he instituted this meal. For the disciples seated at this table, he was dragging Good Friday back in time from the future and giving it to them now. For us who approach his table today, he is dragging Good Friday forward in time from the past and giving it to us now.

And what good does that do for us? In his letter to the Colossians, the apostle Paul says that God “has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation” (Col. 1:22). And Jesus says here the blood we receive together with the wine is God’s “new testament.” This is the same new testament we heard about earlier in Jeremiah, the new testament that would not be two-sided and dependent on our obedience like the covenant he made with his people on Mt. Sinai, but would be one-sided and dependent purely on God’s grace. This would be a testament through which God would simply forgive our wickedness and remember our sins no more. Jesus’s blood is that testament.

This will never happen, but if you as a believer were to stand before God on Judgment Day, and he were to say, “Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels,” you could rightly say to him, “Oh no, you can’t! I have your own agreement. You have given me the blood of your own Son in his Holy Supper, and in that blood you have promised to forgive me my wickedness and to remember my sin no more.”

This Holy Communion is not only a union of bread with Jesus’s body and wine with Jesus’s blood. It is also a union of the holy God with sinful humans, yes, with you and me.

3.

But there is one more union, the union we are primarily referring to when we refer to the Lord’s Supper as Holy Communion. You see, *communion* means a partaking jointly with others, united with others. When Jesus says “given for you” and “poured out for you” here, those *you*’s in Greek are both plural—“given for all of you,” “poured out for all of you.” And when he says, “Do this in remembrance of me,” that *do this* is a plural verb—“all of you do this in remembrance of me.” Even though Jesus comes to us and gives himself to us individually in this Supper, he always comes to us and gives himself to us as part of a group. We partake jointly with others, united with others.

If a neighbor invited both you and a bunch of your neighbors to a meal at his house, you might have enough of a connection to the others that would make you at least willing to try to get to know the other invitees. After all, you all know the same neighbor, right? But once you started talking sports and politics and work and hobbies and other interests, it would in effect be like there were multiple different meals being enjoyed in the same house.

But the host here isn’t just a neighbor. He’s Jesus. And everyone coming to his table isn’t coming just to fill their belly. They’re coming to have their deepest need filled. They’re coming for spiritual cleansing. They’re coming for forgiveness of sins. They’re coming for eternal life. This trumps everything else that we could find to disagree about.

Guess what, brothers and sisters? Tonight you might stand next to someone who has voted differently than you have, maybe regularly so. And if not tonight, then I guarantee you have in the past. At the Lord’s Supper, blue collar and white collar, men and women, citizen and foreigner, relatively young and relatively old, rich and poor, some more polite, some less, those with different views about the best way to govern and execute justice, with different views about education and taxes and the economy and how limiting certain laws should be or whether they should even exist to begin with—they all meet together and stand shoulder to shoulder as one. If you’ve got a problem with that, then you should not come. This is how it should be. Jesus’s kingdom is not of this world. In Christ, this person and that person are brother and sister. In

partaking of Holy Communion together, we are confessing that none of those other views pertaining to worldly affairs really matter in the end. More than anything else, we need to be one with God. We need forgiveness from guilt. We need life after death, life in heaven. And here we receive it. Together. Since we are one with God, we are one with each other.

Later on in this service, we will receive Holy Communion. As we do so, God help us to recognize the union of bread and wine with Jesus's body and blood. God help us to rejoice in the union between our sinful selves and the holy God. God strengthen us in and encourage us with the union we have with one another. Amen.