Maundy Thursday

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Preacher: Rev. Jeremy Graham

[0:00] and will you please open your Bibles again to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 verses 23 to 32 with me these are apostle Paul's precious words for us precious because did you know that these are the earliest recorded words of Jesus Christ the very first words recorded that's because the book of 1 Corinthians was actually written before any of the gospel accounts about only about 20 years after Jesus death and resurrection that means these words were passed down to us by the disciples faithfully transmitted and Paul wrote them down so that in verse 23 Paul says for I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you these are precious words precious also because they provide Jesus own interpretation of his imminent death how did Jesus understand what was coming well here we find out so if you're a Christian these words are probably very familiar with you perhaps you've even memorized them because they're also the words of institution that's part of the Holy Communion service in verse 23 again for I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread you could probably repeat it from memory when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me but whether you're familiar with these words or they're new to you it's worthwhile to slow down and rehearse the last events of Jesus life on earth to listen to Jesus own words and his own interpretation of his death and I want to draw special attention to at least four levels of meaning that are expressed in Jesus words about himself and these four levels of meaning are then applied in the Lord's Supper that we're celebrating together tonight so first of all we remember Christ's sacrificial death on our behalf and second we personally appropriate the benefits of Christ and then third we celebrate our fellowship in Christ and finally we joyfully anticipate Christ's return and if you like alliteration you might remember it this way we remember we receive we rejoice until Christ's return so let's start with we remember we remember Christ's sacrificial death on our behalf have a look again at the text verse 24 Jesus says this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me so Jesus is celebrating the Jewish Passover meal with his disciples here and this ritual meal symbolically remembers

God's rescuing of his people from slavery in Egypt and as part of that rescue plan do you remember this? Israelite families would slaughter a lamb the blood of the lamb was then put on the door frames of their homes and when the angel of death passed over each house if there was a lamb's blood on the door then the firstborn child was spared from the plague of death in a very real tangible sense the lamb died in place of that firstborn so some readers reading 1 Corinthians notice that there's no mention of a lamb at Jesus' last supper and perhaps that's because we're meant to see that Jesus himself is the Passover lamb sacrificed in our place in fact if you go earlier in this same letter 1 Corinthians Paul refers to Jesus as our Passover lamb when he says that he has been sacrificed as the Passover lamb for our sake in chapter 5 verse 7 so
I want you to imagine that last supper Jesus takes this smooth unleavened bread and he breaks it before his disciples and he says my body is for you it's bruised and broken in your place he says and Revelation 5 verse 9 describes it this way worthy are you Lord Jesus for you were slain and you purchased for God with your blood people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation and this is the beauty of the beauty of the cross that Revelation is describing the beauty that we remember in Jesus' words and in the breaking of the bread at the last supper so Jesus continues in verse 25 in the same way he then he took the cup and after supper he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me so Jesus is saying that in the breaking of the bread and in the shedding of his blood he establishes a new covenant a new promise a promise that's not based on the Old Testament laws but on the forgiveness of sins by faith and the gift of the Holy Spirit to all believers this is the new covenant promise

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Jesus says do this rehearse this repeat these words and actions together share this meal together so that you will remember everything I've done for your sake so first then in the Lord's Supper we remember Christ's sacrificial death on our behalf what's the first R we remember and that brings us to the second R we receive we personally appropriate the benefits of Christ so one of the amazing things about Holy Communion is that it's not a religious ritual that only insiders can understand if you're new to Christianity if you're visiting us tonight I'm certain that there are going to be things about tonight's service that are a bit odd a bit strange a bit new to you but the simple message of the symbolic meal is the proclamation of the universal good news of God's love in Jesus and that's a message that anyone can hear because every human being can relate to eating and drinking this is a universal symbol that we have

St. Augustine called the supper proclaiming the gospel in visible words visible words isn't that great and Paul agrees with that in verse 26 of our passage have a look at verse 26 for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes isn't that a strange way to describe the meal as a proclamation the word proclaim usually means to show or to announce it's usually used in the New Testament to refer to the verbal proclamation of the gospel but here Paul says that we actually proclaim the gospel in both word and sacrament we proclaim it in fact using all five of our senses so imagine for a moment we see the bread and the wine and we remember Christ's body and blood given for us and then we hear Jesus' words this is my body given for you this is the blood of the new covenant we hear these words explaining the meaning behind the sacrifice and then we smell and we touch the elements as they're placed in our hands and finally we put them to our lips and we taste them we taste them as we eat and drink by faith all five senses are being used the whole person is engaged in this gospel message in other words we receive the gospel in a way that goes far beyond mere mental recollection and in this way we actually begin to personally appropriate the benefits of Christ and these benefits are far too numerous for me to elaborate on all of them so I just

[8:14] I've chosen three three that I want to show you that directly connect to the symbol of eating and drinking so first of all just as a homemade loaf of bread a warm loaf out of the oven together with a rich glass of red wine they nourish your body don't they they nourish and bring joy to your taste buds so too the richness of Christ's reconciling death the new life that he gives you it nourishes your soul and fills you with joy in a very similar way another benefit just as when I ingest bread and I drink wine they become part of my body inseparable from the rest of me that's a picture so too the richness of Christ Christ's reconciling death his death and resurrection and the Holy Spirit within me they unite me with Christ so that I'm united in that same way that's inseparable and then finally what's another benefit that we see here in this symbol just as I come forward tonight with open hands empty bringing nothing to receive food and drink at the table just as that so too I receive all the benefits of Christ simply by faith as a free gift not because of any hard work

I've done not because of any religious obedience but simply by grace so there's three benefits in Christ that are symbolically represented every time that you come forward for communion or every time that you read the words of institution or hear them on Jesus lips and when you come forward tonight those of you who are here in person you will hear this drink this in remembrance that Christ died for you and feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving so you see it's not enough just to remember Christ's sacrifice on your behalf but also you must personally appropriate those benefits the first R then is remember and the second R is receive remember and receive which brings us thirdly to we celebrate we celebrate our fellowship in Christ that's why we're here tonight well for many years my family was part of an intergenerational community group and we shared meals together before Bible study and prayer every week we shared a meal together it was constantly the highlight of my week there was noise there was chaos there was a lot of laughter all of us around the table together and of course we were really sad to lose that for almost two years because of the pandemic and additionally we also know that we lost we lost Holy Communion didn't we we lost the table together here at church for a long time and even though

I was grateful that we could find a safe solution you know where we could have the wafers and the wine and the individual plastic cups I was grateful for that nonetheless I often felt more like a chemist I gotta tell you with my little beaker and my test tube and you know preparing those cups for Holy Communion because symbols matter don't they symbols matter so Jesus didn't take twelve hermetically sealed plastic cups and say this is my body he took that one loaf of bread and he broke it and that one loaf and that one cup symbolize our unity together our unity or communion with God

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and with one another as the body of Christ and so in the chapter before this one in 1 Corinthians chapter 10 verses 16 to 17 Paul describes this relationship that we share in this meal he says 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's one bread we who are many are one body for we all partake of the one bread the symbolism is rich and this word participation is koinonia it can mean sharing or fellowship it means also that we're not spectators we're participants in the sacrament this is also why we gather around a table for a meal we don't gather around an altar because Jesus' death was once for all there is no re-sacrifice happening in the Lord's Supper there is in fact though a table it can be a fancy table it can be a plastic folding table it doesn't matter because it's table fellowship for all those who are in Christ this is our family meal that we're celebrating so let me remind you where we've arrived so far we're exploring the four levels of meaning that are here in Jesus' words at the Last Supper which are also there in the Holy Communion service first of all that we remember Christ's sacrificial death on our behalf and that we must receive the benefits of Christ and then we rejoice in our fellowship in Christ and that's the third R isn't it and then finally we joyfully anticipate Christ's return so what's going on in this meal with this joyful anticipation well I don't know if you've ever thought about Holy Communion as reorienting your sense of time we think of time as chronological it goes forward when we look back we think of history we might think of history like 1867 the history of the origin of Canada and so when we remember that we remember it as a historical event but the New Testament doesn't use the word remembering in that same way so when we look back at Jesus' death and resurrection we don't remember it just as a historical event this is how one scholar puts it remembering Jesus' death and resurrection means remembering in such a way that we see our participation in the past event and we see our destiny and future bound up in it so you see how the sacrament reorances the way we experience the past the present and the future we look back at Christ and we don't remember it just as a historical event but we also look around at one another and at our world and we're spiritually nourished as we feed on Christ by faith and with thanksgiving and we see the world differently because of because of this meal and Gordon Smith writes we live now in our work in our relationships indeed in every dimension of our lives as people for whom everything is altered for good by the reality of Christ Jesus' death and resurrection and then finally we look forward we look down down the path of history towards the day when Christ will return and if you look at verse 26 of our passage this is how Paul puts it for as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup you proclaim Christ's the Lord's death until he comes so Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead and when he does the Bible promises that he will gather up all those who call him Savior and Lord and he'll invite them to this great wedding banquet the Bible calls it the marriage supper of the Lamb Revelation 19 verse 9 and as we wait as we wait for that great day the Lord's supper is kind of like it's kind of like those potato plants that Matt Damon's character in the movie The Martian he grows them on Mars and he counts time by them and they give him hope they give him hope that he can survive in this harsh world it's a meal of hope that we are sharing it's a meal by which we count time it's the meal by which we are assured of our salvation through Christ's sacrifice the meal by which we are trusting in the benefits of Christ's saving work we're united to Christ and one another in fellowship and we're confident that Christ will return to fulfill all of God's promises so we've covered a lot of ground tonight and I hope that as we've meditated on these precious words from Jesus that have been passed down through Paul through the church to us tonight

[16:56] I hope that this will deepen and enrich your own understanding and experience of scripture and of the Lord's supper tonight so let me remind you of those four R's one more time first we remember we remember Christ's sacrifice in our place next we receive we must receive the benefits of Christ and then we rejoice we rejoice in our fellowship in Christ and finally we joyfully anticipate Christ's return and I want to conclude by reading a poem from the 16th century Anglican George Herbert which is really an invitation to the table tonight this poem is titled Love Three Love Love Bade Me Welcome Yet My Soul Drew Back Guilty of Dust and Sin But Quick-Eyed Love

Observing Me Grow Slack From My First Entrance In Drew Near to Me Sweetly Questioning If I Lacked Anything A Guest A Guest I Answered Worthy to Be Here Love said You Shall Be He I The Unkind Ungrateful Ah My Dear I Cannot Look On Thee Love took my hand and Smiling Did Reply Who Made The Eyes But I Truth Lord But I Have Marred Them Let My Shame Go Where It Doth Deserve And Know You Not Says Love Who Bore The Blame My Dear Then I Will Serve You Must

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Sit Down Says Love And Taste My Meat So I Did Sit And Eat Amen

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