

The Body

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Holy Thursday, April 18, 2019

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup unworthily will be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. Let a man test himself and thus let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. The one who eats and drinks judgment on himself eats and drinks without discerning the body.

Up until that last sentence God has always pointed to His body and His blood. He talks about eating the bread and drinking the cup. He talks about being guilty of the body and of the blood. But when He talks about eating and drinking judgment, He talks only about discerning His body. He does not talk about discerning His blood. Why? Why this emphasis on the body when He talks about judgment and not on the body and the blood. Isn't the Sacrament of the Altar composed of the Lord's body and blood? Aren't both distributed? Aren't both received? Isn't the body of the Lord eaten and the blood of the Lord drunk? Isn't this done in the blessed reality of the Word of the Lord which creates reality? Then why when God finally gets down to talking about people who come up here and eat and drink judgment on themselves does He only discuss the necessity of discerning His body and not the necessity of discerning His blood?

He is emphasizing His body for some reason. I think it is obvious that God wants us to discern His blood along with His body when we eat and drink from the bread and from the cup. But because He calls attention to the discerning of His body by only mentioning it when He talks about things that should be discerned while eating the bread and drinking the cup, then we should ask ourselves. What is His body?

His body is first and foremost what He offered on the cross for our salvation. Nails were driven through His hands and feet. A crown of thorns was placed upon His head. He hung on a cross until He was dead. Since this is His sacrificial offering, it atones for our sins and gives us everlasting life.

Secondly, His body is in the Sacrament of the Altar in, with, and under the bread. This gives you the opportunity to fulfill your priestly duty of eating the body of the sacrificial victim. Since God commanded the priests in the Old Testament to eat the flesh of the sacrificial victims offered to atone for the sin of Israel so also in the New Testament God commands His priests to eat of the sacrificial victim that atones for your sin.

In addition to this it also gives you the opportunity to keep the Passover. God commanded Israel to celebrate the Passover with a sacrificial lamb that He told them to eat. Its bones were not broken. It was eaten in one night. And Israel was redeemed from slavery on that night. God told Israel that this would be an everlasting statute in Israel. John the Baptist then declares that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. When Jesus dies His bones are not broken. You then eat of the Lamb of God and you do it perpetually. Thus the Passover is not celebrated among us just at night as it is tonight but all of the time as we constantly eat the body of the Lamb of God who takes away the world's sins.

Thirdly, His body is the congregation of believers. Ultimately His body is the Church. He is the head and we are all individual members of His body. God gives a long explanation of this in the next chapter of 1Corinthians. You and I are members of the body of Christ. Just as the members of the body depend on one another so we also depend on one another. The head cannot say to the feet, "I have no need of you." Therefore none of us can be arrogant and look at other members of the body of Christ and say that we have no need of them. You cannot look at a fellow member of the congregation and think to yourself that you have no need of that person. If you do, you are not discerning the body. If you think that way and eat of the bread and drink of the cup, you are eating and drinking judgment on yourself and not salvation.

A member of the body cannot dismiss himself or herself as not part of the body. The ear cannot say, "Because I am not an eye, I am not part of the body." God has made you a member of His body by baptism. We were all baptized into one body. We were all given one Spirit to drink. If we have been baptized into the body of Christ, then we cannot say to ourselves or think to ourselves that somehow we are not good enough for the body. We cannot think to ourselves that other members of the congregation are better than we are because they are wealthier or seem to be more religious or whatever it is. To think that they are better than you are is to deny what God did for you in your Baptism. You are a member of the body. You cannot say, "Because I am not like so and so, I am not a member of the body." If you do and you eat from the bread and drink from the cup, you eat and drink judgment on yourself.

How terrible it is then when there is a breach in the body. How terrible it is when there are divisions within the body. How terrible it is when those divisions are public and known.

There were breaches in the Corinthian congregation at the time when God had Paul write 1Corinthians. They were divided over which preacher to follow. Some followed Paul and some Apollos and some Cephas and some had it right and said that they followed Christ. The Corinthian congregation was divided over social class. The wealthy people were eating a fancy meal in conjunction with the Sacrament of the Altar. They were eating it in the dining room of the man who was hosting the Divine Service that particular Sunday. The poor people remained in the courtyard and were hungry because they could not bring extra food to the Sacrament of the Altar. This did not bother anybody in the Corinthian congregation because that was how things were in the world in which they lived. If they had gone to a birthday party it would have been that way. If they had gone to a meeting of a professional guild, it would have been that way. They did not understand that things were different in the Divine Service. They did not understand that when the rich fail to welcome the poor there is a breach in the body. They did not understand that in the celebration of the Sacrament of the Altar if the poor were not as welcome as the rich, there was a breach in the body.

Therefore any breach in the body of Christ renders the communicant unworthy. If there is any disputing among us, it must be settled. If there is any bigotry among us, it must be ended. Matters of wealth and race cannot be factors when attending the Sacrament of the Altar. The only thing that matters is one's ability to examine oneself. That is all. In any other division within the body of Christ the communicants become unworthy. He eats and drinks judgment and not salvation.

Therefore we must learn the principles of reconciliation. We must learn to apply the faith God has given us in daily life. We must learn to forgive as we have been forgiven. We must learn to rebuke as we have been rebuked. All this must be done to heal the divisions within the body of Christ. And when they are healed we will realize that it is only because of the prior reconciliation that Christ has brought about between us and God that reconciliation with each other is possible.

In this way the Sacrament of the Altar becomes the visible sign of our unity with one another. It is a celebration of our union with one another and with the God who feeds us His body and His blood.

In the name of Jesus. Amen.