

Maundy Thursday

April 18, 2019

Matthew 26:17-30

I used an overhead projector only once a year for years. I used it for the First Communion Preparation sessions. This year, Pastor Stuart taught that class so I didn't get a chance to use it and the wonderful overhead transparencies I had prepared. I'm not using the overhead projector, but I'd like to use two of the transparencies.

The first has to do with the suffix "ment". Those four letters appear at the end of many of our words. "m-e-n-t" means something comes together. When you add m-e-n-t to the base of a house you get a base-ment, a place where the base and the house come together. When you add m-e-n-t to two or more people agreeing on something, you get an agree-ment. When a person receives something to treat an illness or disease and you add m-e-n-t, you get a treat-ment.

The second transparency features the word "sacred", or its modified version "sacra". Something that is sacred has a connection to God. So when you put "sacra" and "ment" together, you get "sacrament". And the meaning is clear. In a "sacrament" God comes together, and he comes together with people. He comes together with us. Each person receives this sacrament only once.

Lutherans recognize two sacraments. The first is baptism. Through water and the word, the Holy Spirit comes into life and promises us that we are God's children, we belong to him forever. The second sacrament is Holy Communion. We receive it because Jesus tells us to.

God had come together with his people throughout Bible history. He came in direct contact with Adam and Eve in creation. He came in contact through leaders and prophets like Moses and Elijah. But he had an even more powerful idea on coming into contact with us.

When we celebrate Christmas, we hear one of the names used to identify Jesus. He is called "Immanuel", which means, "God with us". God came together with us by becoming human and living in our world. Jesus came to show that we are with God in his loving care. He did it in words and he showed the love of God in actions.

Our lesson tonight finds Jesus and his disciples celebrating Passover in an upper room in Jerusalem. It was nothing new. Jewish people still celebrate Passover every year. But there was an addition to the traditional meal that night. Jesus took bread and told his disciples, and us, to eat it. It's his body. Jesus took wine and told his disciples, and us, to drink it. It's his blood. He tells the disciples and us to do it in remembrance of him. We remember he is with us as we receive this meal.

And we remember the message of the meal. It's given for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus would go the cross the next day and give his life so that we might be freed from sin. We are reminded of that forgiveness tonight as we receive this meal. We are reminded that we can let go of all the faults and failures of the past and become new again. In this sacrament God comes together with us in wine and bread to give us a new start, a new beginning.

We also know that we have a future. Jesus promises that we will dine with him in the kingdom. In our Communion liturgy we refer to Holy Communion as a "foretaste of the feast to come."

At the end of Matthew's Gospel, the resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples on top of a mountain. He's about to return to his heavenly home. And he gives us a promise. He says, "Behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

When we hear the Word, Jesus is with us. When we are washed in the waters of baptism, Jesus is with us. When we receive his Holy Supper, Jesus is with us.

And I want to throw in one more thing. Martin Luther wrestled with the idea of one more sacrament. He talked about "the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren." We won't get into the reason Luther didn't push for this sacrament, but we remember its power.

When people come together to connect with each other, when people come together to comfort and console each other, God is with us. God is at work. You see, YOU can be a sacrament. Through you God can come together with other people and give them the comfort and strength of his love.

Tonight we come together with Jesus and each other as we share this meal. We also come together with Christians around the world who share this meal. And we come together with those who have died and those who are yet to be born who have received and will receive this meal. They are with us and we are all with God, now and forever.

God is with us. God is in us. God works through us.

AMEN