

Matthew 26:20-30

Vicar Caleb Weight

July 15-16, 2017

Hope Lutheran Church

***Invited by Christ***

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, amen.

You may have heard this quote before, “Nothing is certain in life except for death and taxes.” But for me, I would alter this quote. “Nothing is certain in life except death, taxes, and leaving grandma’s house with a full stomach.” My grandma is a master at hosting. Anyone who walks through her front door will be offered something to drink, then shortly after she will ask “are you hungry?” And if you are me, the answer is always yes. And she will either direct you to the jar that is always stocked with treats, like cookies or bars. If it is dinner time, then she will dish you up a meal that was cooked from scratch. My grandma is one of those people who will extend a personal invitation to someone, even if they do not know them well. My grandma is a great host; she makes everyone feel welcome the moment they enter into her home. Her invitation is one of those invites that should not be passed up.

Today’s text reminds me of these personal invitations that my grandparents extend to people, as they invite them into their home for supper. Today we heard the narrative of the Last Supper. The meal that Jesus shared with his disciples to celebrate the Passover. The Passover is a yearly celebration by the Jews, remembering when God brought them out of Egypt. You might remember the 10 plagues? The lambs blood on the doorposts, the angel of death coming down and passing over those who had their doorways painted with blood? Moses parting the Red Sea, when they crossed over dry land and received the Ten Commandments. These are stories that are recalled every year by the Jews, and are the stories that Matthew and the disciples would be celebrating at that last supper.

Let's look at this text a little closer, but this time through Matthew's eyes. They were eating the Passover meal, imagine them having conversation, relaxing, laughing, everything one would come to expect from having dinner with your closest friends. When suddenly, Matthew sees Jesus pick up some bread. Now this isn't a loaf of bread like we see, but flat bread, bread made without yeast. Jesus then says a prayer of thanksgiving and breaks this bread and passes it around saying "Take and eat; this is my body." Matthew may not have realized what was going on then. But Christ was personally inviting them to eat, he was inviting them to have their sins forgiven.

Jesus continued, and he took the cup, and gave it to his disciples saying "drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins..." A covenant is a biblical term for a contract, a two-way agreement. Up to this point, God had a covenant with Israel. God said to his people "I will be your God; you will be my people." And this covenant included a system that is pretty foreign to us. One where they would have to sacrifice their best animal in order for their sins to be forgiven.

So what is Jesus doing, talking about a covenant? What Jesus says here is loaded with language that would have made Matthew think of the covenant that God has with the Jews, especially on Passover when God made a new covenant with his people. And now, Jesus is doing something new. Jesus is making a new covenant. He is establishing a covenant that will be sealed with the breaking of his body and the shedding of his blood on the cross for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is inviting his disciples into this covenant. Jesus is inviting them to have their sins forgiven.

The beauty of this text is that it is not only an invitation to Matthew and the disciples on that night, but it is also an invitation to us. It is an invitation to us because we are no different than Matthew. We all have a past that is riddled with sin, and we all have a future that is riddled with moments of doubt, of lacking faith, of being stubborn, of doing things our own way. Every single one of us can look at

ourselves and feel that we are the least likely people to receive this invitation. But, just like Matthew, we are personally invited by Christ.

This past year I received a letter in the mail from our local Chevy Dealer in St. Louis. The letter was from the sales manager. So first I called them and asked what it was about and if I could speak with the sales manager. The letter had said, very vaguely, that he wanted to talk to me about what my car was worth and possibly trading it in, because they, quote "Needed inventory!" So me, being the young, millennial consumer that I am, decided to indulge them and go into the dealer. When I got to the dealership I let them know why I was there and they directed me to their sale manager's office. I sat down, and I had brought this personal letter with me and said I got this in the mail. He looked at me, and at the letter and said "What is that?" I told him it was a letter I got in the mail. He looked at me and kind of smiled and said, "Oh, it's one of those, yeah we send a bunch of those out." This personal invitation was no longer very personal.

But, Christ invites us all personally to have our sins forgiven. He gives us an invitation with our names on it, and this is not an invitation that expires. It is not an invitation that can be canceled. This is a standing invitation. There is no dress code, there is no fee. But there is the forgiveness of sins, there is real, genuine, grace.

We are invited to this meal every single Saturday/Sunday. Speaking for myself, I know that there are times when I am not focused. We come to this meal week after week and it sometimes seems like it becomes a ritual, it becomes something that we just do. Maybe, it even becomes a work, something that we feel will get us closer to God. So today, we get to refocus. We all have moments of doubting that God's grace is real. Sometimes it is just too good to believe, how can God forgive me? Today, once again, Christ invites each and every one of us personally to come and have our sins forgiven.

So in a few moments, when you come up, and when you receive Christ's true body, and Christ's true blood, I would encourage us all, to focus on Christ's invitation to you, his invitation to "take and eat, and to take and drink," for the forgiveness of all your sins. This invitation is a great opportunity. This invitation is extended to each and every one of you by Christ who is truly present here. As you come up today, think about Christ saying, "Joe, John, Cindy, your sins are forgiven." Come up and focus on Christ, and who he is, his death on the cross. His resurrection, and his proclamation that your sins are forgiven.

We don't believe that this is symbolic grace, but real grace. This is not a symbolic forgiveness of sins, but the real forgiveness of sins. Scripture is very clear on this, and it is because of what scripture says that we are careful in teaching, and instructing about this invitation by Christ. And this invitation is not only for us...

But, this is also why we go, and we invite others to Hope. We go and invite them so that we can share the message of Christ's forgiveness. We share this message with that hope that one day they will come and join us at the rail where Christ invites us to eat and drink this forgiveness. We invite them to come and be where Jesus is, and to receive what he has invited us to have. Invite them to hear the good news, that Christ has forgiven them of all their sins.

And may the peace of God which surpasses all understanding keep your hearts and minds on Christ Jesus. Amen.

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5. So what is Jesus doing, talking about a covenant?
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