

1 April 2021
Holy Maundy Thursday

Saint Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“Handed Over, For You”

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-32; John 13:1-17, 31b-35; Exodus 12:1-14

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

For some Christians, tonight is really no big deal. It is simply the night of our Lord’s final meal, His Last Supper, with His disciples. Something to remember, for sure. Maybe also to imitate. But nothing more than that.

For Rome, tonight is a big deal for them partly because it is the institution of the priesthood - Jesus ordering, or ordaining, His disciples-soon-to-be-apostles to continue offering the sacrifice of the mass.

But for us, it is neither of those things. Tonight is the night of **for you**. Jesus’ Body given for you to eat. Jesus’ Blood given for you to drink. Your Passover Lamb, *but even more*. For while the flesh of the old passover lamb was roasted and eaten, and Jesus’ Body would be roasted on the cross and now eaten by us, you could not drink the blood of the lamb. That was forbidden. *Until now*. Until the Lamb of God came to pour out His Blood for you. And now by eating His Body and drinking His Blood in faith, you receive the forgiveness and life of His Passover. His Passover where He does not cause death to pass over you, but defeats death for you. That though you die, yet will you live. That though you die, you will rise to life with Him. A life that *will* not, *can* not, end.

That is the gift, the testament, the inheritance, Jesus leaves behind **for you** this night. His public ministry began with His Baptism and ends with this sacred meal. This night began with Jesus washing His disciples’ feet, and ends as the Lamb is bound and led away to be slaughtered and roasted on the cross. Our Christian life begins with the water, too, and is sustained by this Meal until our end. Our manna in the wilderness until we reach the Promised Land of heaven, and the milk and honey of the marriage feast of the Lamb.

So tonight is a most special night, indeed. The night of **handing over**, we could say. Our English translations don’t quite capture it, but this is how we could put Paul’s words that we heard tonight: *For I received from the Lord what I also **handed over** to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was **handed over** took bread, His Body, . . . and the cup, His Blood, . . . and **handed over** them to you.* The night Jesus was **handed over** to die, He **handed over** to you His gift, to live.

Are you worthy of such a gift? How could you be? But that is what makes it such an extraordinary gift. It is a great gift for those who deserve no gift. A gift for sinners, for the forgiveness of your sins.

But Paul does speak of eating and drinking *in an unworthy manner*. This is eating and drinking in unbelief. Not believing that this is a gift, but rather something that you are doing for God. Not believing that you are a sinner in need of forgiveness. Not believing that when Jesus said *This is My Body* and *This is My Blood*, it really is. This is not gift received, but gift refused.

But to come in faith . . . That yes, Father, Your Word is true. I am a poor, miserable sinner in need of forgiveness. That yes, Jesus, Your Word is true. Here is Your Body and Blood, the very same that hung on the cross, only now risen and glorified, given to me. That yes, Lord, Your Word is true, this is a gift for me and my salvation. To come in such faith, then, is to receive the judgment of God for you **in Christ**, His judgment of not guilty. For your sins have been swallowed up in the death and resurrection of the One once given for you, now given to you. You receive the forgiveness that you need and that God wants so to give.

So, as Paul says, we examine ourselves and judge ourselves truly and repent, so that we will not be condemned. For as David once wrote and prayed, *For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering*. That is, it is not what we do that delights and pleases God . . . *The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise* (Psalm 51:16-17). A broken and contrite heart, a repentant heart that clings to God's Word in faith, God will never despise; He will never turn away. For God does not help those who help themselves. He helps those who cannot help themselves. Israel in Egypt. Outcasts, prostitutes, tax collectors, and other great sinners. You and I in our bondage to sin.

But *there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus* (Romans 8:1). Those who are in Christ Jesus, and those who Christ Jesus is in, through His gifts. For your condemnation was taken by Jesus on the cross, and He **hands over** His righteousness to you. That He live in you as you live in Him. And so His love and forgiveness be both **handed over** to you, and **handed over** by you to others.

That's part of *the new commandment* Jesus gave this night. He commanded that this meal continue - *as often as you do this*. That is, do it often! And He also commanded that we *love one another as He loved us*. *Make sure you keep those two commands together!* For apart they fail. If we try to love as Jesus loved without first receiving Jesus' love, we will fail. We are not able. But also if we receive His love, His gift, and do not love others, it dies within us. It is then the seed of the parable (Matthew 13) that falls on the hard path, the rocky soil, or becomes the thorn-choked plant. Jesus sows His seed that it produce an abundant harvest. And that seed is His Word, yes. But as we especially remember tonight

and tomorrow, it is He, the Word made flesh, Himself. For as Jesus said of Himself: *unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit* (John 12:24). Tomorrow, Good Friday, that seed dies and is planted in the earth. But sprouting forth in His resurrection, He produces an abundant harvest.

Tonight, not only His Word but Jesus Himself, His very Body and Blood, are planted in you. To produce a harvest in you and through you. And He will. He is. *His Word is living and active* (Hebrews 4:12). It is not one and done, though. We can never have enough, as our sin still clings to us. That is why we always need more. More Jesus. More forgiveness. More Word. More Body and Blood. And He is always here to **hand over** that to you.

So tonight is the night of **for you**. And the night of **handing over**. To **hand over** this gift **for you**, that you need. To **hand over** this gift first given this night, to never stop being given, until that day when it is no longer needed, when we enter the eternal day and the wedding feast of heaven.

So come, bending the knee of your heart. Come, broken and contrite, repenting of your sin. Come, hungering and thirsting for righteousness. Tonight is **for you**. Jesus for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.