

Holy Thursday
1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Tonight's meditation is based on 1 Corinthians, chapter 11.

“For I received from the Lord that which I am traditioning to you.” (v. 23a)

That's the Pastor Maggard translation of the first part of verse 23. I wanted to highlight the “traditioning” that happens as Christians. As Christians and especially for me as a pastor, we're not our own persons. We don't invent anything in Christianity. We receive and pass down. That's part of the reason why pastors go to seminary. We receive and hand down the faith. Parents receive from their parents and pastors and hand down the faith to their children.

As with all handing down, error creeps in because we are saint and sinner at the same time. Our flesh gets in the way of pure doctrine many times in history and in our own lives. When that happens, God rises up saints like St. Augustine, Dr. Luther, Martin Chemnitz, Dr. C.F.W. Walther, and many others to purify His church. God also causes confessions of faith to be created that act as safeguards for pure doctrine. The Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed are great examples. So is our Book of Concord, or the Lutheran Confessions.

Of course the true catholic church has always maintained that it is under authority here too. Don't get tripped up by my use of the 'catholic' word. Catholic merely means 'universal.' The LCMS is part of the true catholic church. The Roman Catholic church with its adherence to the Pope as the vicar of Christ and final authority is no longer part of the true catholic church. The true catholic church recognizes that it is under the authority of Jesus Christ alone.

Yet we don't see Jesus with our eyes. Jesus even says about these last days that we're in, “If anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” (Mt 24:23-24) There will be no doubt when our Lord returns again. No one will question, “Is this really Jesus Christ?” So, how is Jesus the authority of His church?

As you probably guessed, Jesus' Word is His authority in His church. Of course, Jesus rules His church with His Holy Spirit as well, but we don't see the Holy Spirit with our eyes any more than we see Christ. So we depend on His Word. This naturally brings up the question, "Well, smarty pants pastor, what Word do we trust?" After all, Roman Catholics say one thing and the Eastern Orthodox says another. The confessional Lutherans say even another thing and all the Protestant churches say yet another thing. Who are we to believe? I believe this is one reason Luther translated the Bible into the common tongue so everyone could read it.

We Lutherans confess the perspicuity of Scripture. Perspicuity is merely a fancy word that means that everything you need to know about salvation and life in Christ is clear in Scripture. Oh sure, there's tough parts here and there like the book of Daniel and Revelation, but overall, the main things are straightforward and plain. We also confess that no one can understand the Scripture apart from the Holy Spirit. The wisdom of God seems foolish to man. Jesus dying for the sins of the world to save us from His own wrath makes no sense to us even though that's what the Scripture plainly says. "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned." (1 Cor 2:14) This doesn't mean they aren't simple. And all Christians have the Holy Spirit.

Why is it important to know if you have the right church? Simply because then you know you have a place where Christ is present with His gifts of grace and mercy for you. We believe that the LCMS Church is that Church. At least right now on paper. We certainly believe it about Grace. Here is how our first president in the LCMS put it:

"We confess joyfully and in steadfast certainty of faith that our beloved Church is the Church founded by Christ and His apostles more than 1,800 years ago. We make this statement because our faith, doctrine, and confession, in all of its parts, agree precisely with Scripture, the Word of Christ, and the apostles. The Lutheran church is actually not only 'a' but 'the' true visible Church of God on earth, insofar as 'true' means nothing other than 'as it should be according to the Word of God.' We neither can nor do we want to boast before other churches about our pious

behavior. But we can and must boast about the pure doctrine which, by God's grace to us poor sinners, shines among us like the clear bright light of the sun."¹

I hope you notice that Walther puts the emphasis on pure doctrine and not pure people! He understands better than most of us, that we want to act pious before both our Lord and other people and we fail again and again. Many people make the mistake of equating Christianity with a basic morality. After all, that's how every other religion in the world sells itself. I mean any Mormons you meet are the nicest people, aren't they? But they are not Christian. Christianity is all about Jesus Christ. And God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. They choose to reveal themselves to us through doctrine. Doctrine is nothing else than saying, "This is what Scripture says." If you say, "Jesus loves you," you have made a doctrinal statement. God reveals Himself to us through Doctrine. And Jesus established His New Testament Church to proclaim who God is and what God has done so that the Holy Spirit will work when and where He wills to create faith in the world.

Jesus basically gave the New Testament Church five commands.

He instituted Baptism and Catechism: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Mt 28:19–20) Teaching and catechism are synonymous.

He instituted the Office of the Keys: "[Jesus] breathed on them and said to [the Apostles], 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.'" (Jn 20:22–23)

He instituted the Lord's Supper: "Do this, [that is, the Lord's Supper,] in remembrance of Me." (1 Cor 11:24)

¹ Closed Communion: Admission to the Lord's Supper in Biblical Lutheran Perspective, CPH, 2017, Pg. 26.

He commanded us to love one another: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.” (Jn 13:34)

Baptism and teaching bring you into the faith. The Office of the Keys and the Lord’s Supper strengthens your faith. And loving one another *results* from faith. Of these five, the one we’re most joyful and thankful for on Maundy Thursday is our Lord’s Supper since He instituted it on this night. Let us briefly consider what the Lord’s Supper is and what benefits it gives.

The Lord’s Supper is *not* the passover or seder meal. Jesus instituted His Supper during the seder meal as a new thing. The seder meal is the meal of the old covenant. The Lord’s Supper is the meal of the new covenant. The seder meal points to the Lord’s Supper. Christians don’t gain anything by participating in a seder meal. The Church is *not* commanded to have a seder meal but we *are* commanded to have the Lord’s Supper. It’s the same with the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. It pointed to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross for our sins. If you have the once-and-for-all sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, you no longer need the animal sacrifices. If you have the Lord’s Supper, you don’t need the seder meal. We have the Lord’s Supper and there’s no better meal than that.

The Lord’s Supper consists of the Word of God, bread, and wine. Bread is necessary because our Lord instituted His Supper with bread. And the word used in all four accounts of our Lord’s mandate uses the generic word for bread. It doesn’t matter if the bread is unleavened or leavened. The passover meal used unleavened bread but Jesus makes a point of using the generic word for bread. Typically, the church uses unleavened bread, but either is fine. But it has to be bread. Jesus instituted His Supper with bread so we must use bread. Wine is necessary because our Lord used wine when He mandated the Supper. It doesn’t matter that grape juice wasn’t available when Jesus instituted the Supper. The Church has always used wine and will continue to use wine until our Lord returns. The Word of God makes the bread and wine the body and blood of Jesus, so we must have the Word of God. That’s pretty self-evident. If you have the Word of God, bread, and wine, you have the Lord’s Supper. If not, you don’t have the Lord’s Supper.

The Lord's Supper is a participation in the body and blood of Christ. The body and blood of Jesus are in, with, and under the bread. When the consecrated bread and wine are placed into your mouth, the body and blood of Jesus are placed into your mouth. Everyone who receives the Lord's Supper receives the Lord's body and blood. The worthy Christian receives all the benefits of the Lord's Supper. The unworthy and unbeliever receives judgment from the Lord. Many unworthy in Corinth became ill and some even died. (1 Cor 11:29-30) I believe it's foolish if we think that no longer takes place.

The Lord's Supper is for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus says exactly this in the Matthew account of the Lord's Supper. John says "From [Jesus'] fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." (Jn 1:16) God is rich in His mercy and gives us many ways to receive forgiveness. His Supper is added to Baptism and the Absolution as another means of forgiveness. He knows our weakness. He knows we need reassurance that forgiveness is really ours. And He provides His Supper as another grace upon grace.

The Lord's Supper is for the strengthening of faith. We don't sense our Lord's body and blood in the bread and wine. You can't see or smell or touch or taste the body of Christ. You see and smell and touch and taste mere bread and wine. And cheap bread and wine, at that. When you believe that you are eating and drinking your Lord's body and blood, your faith is strengthened. On top of this, you know that Jesus is with you. With how sinful we are, it's easy to fall into the trap of wondering if Jesus is really with us. The Supper is God's amen that He is with you and for you and not against you! And how can that not strengthen your faith?

The Lord's Supper is a confession of the unity of our faith. We don't participate in the Lord's Supper with Roman Catholics or Eastern Orthodox or Baptists or Methodists or any Christian who confesses something different from the Book of Concord. We only participate in the Lord's Supper with those who joyfully and confidently confess the Book of Concord as the pure doctrine revealed in Holy Scripture. In this way, we confess to the world that we have the pure doctrine of the true visible church on earth.

Finally, the Lord's Supper is our Lord's last will and testament. The language of the Lord's Supper is the language of a will and testament. He died on the cross to

ratify His will and testament. Once someone has died you cannot change or nullify their will and testament. That's why we are careful to practice the Lord's Supper with how He instituted it using His exact words. And since we do that, I can confidently say that you have received your Lord's body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins and the comfort of your conscience, for the strengthening of your faith, and it is a real participation in the life of Jesus. So come to the Supper and be blessed.

In Jesus' name. Amen.