

5 April 2012
Holy Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“A Greater Gift”

Text: Mark 14:12-26 (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

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

Is it I? So asked all twelve. Each in his own turn. Not one of the disciples is really sure of himself. It couldn't be him . . . could it?

Well, what Jesus spoke of the one would really be true of them all. Judas Iscariot was the one who would literally betray Him - or hand Him over - to those who would crucify Him, but which among them would not betray Him in the hours ahead? They all would. Denying, running away, abandoning Him. There is plenty of guilt to go around. They were *all* dipping bread into the dish with Him. So if we can say that Peter was the first among equals, perhaps we could also say (in a way) that in the opposite way, Judas also was the first among equals.

And tonight, we join the twelve. **Is it I?** And you know the answer. It is as we confess: *I am a poor, miserable sinner*. For to sin is to betray our God. It is to hand over the holiness He has given us to unholiness. It is to hand over faith for unbelief. It is to fear, love, and trust someone or something more than He, for my life, for my happiness, for what I need. It is I. It is you. It is us. Like with the disciples that night, there is plenty of guilt to go around in this room, too.

But there is another “**It is I!**” that we heard this night, and one whose importance far exceeds our own. It is, in fact, the answer to our own. It is when Jesus took the bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to His disciples and said: **It is I. This is My Body.** And then when He took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them and said: **It is I. This is My Blood.**

And with those simple statements we see a profound truth: Jesus gives His perfect body and blood for our sinful body and blood. The perfect body and blood He gives to eat and drink are the very same body and blood that will soon hang on the cross in the place of our sinful body and blood. And in so doing, He takes our *It is I*, and gives us His *It is I*. He takes our guilt, and gives us His life. Before He is handed over to death, He hands Himself over to us.

And so guilt is met with gift. And the two are not equal. The gift overwhelms and

far outweighs the guilt. It is the way of God, as it has been since the very beginning. For in the beginning, when Adam and Eve sinned, guilt was met with gift – the promise of a Saviour. So it was down through the years of patriarchs and prophets – guilt was met with gift. When Jesus walked through the towns and villages, eating with tax collectors, prostitutes, and sinners – guilt was met with gift. In the ancient Church, this day was the day when the penitents were received back into the community, their guilt removed by the gift.

And so too for us. Not only tonight, but especially tonight. That we might see the gift given here, and the gift of the sacrifice to come, aright. That we come crushed in our failures and sins, with our broken lives, in all of our woeful inadequacy to be called children of God – so that our guilt will be met with His gift. Our guilt washed away in the flood of Jesus' blood. That we hear again the most wonderful words in the world: **your sins are forgiven.**

And *that* is the gift. It is not just the body and blood of our Lord that is the gift given tonight, but the promise attached and bound to the body and blood of our Lord, the promise of oneness with God in the forgiveness of our sins – *that* is the gift. And by faith we receive that promised forgiveness. For this body and blood that you here eat and drink, were given and shed *for you*, to atone for *your* sin, to wash *you* clean, to grant *you* forgiveness. That though you come to this altar, this table, an Adam, a Judas, a Peter – a betrayer, a sinner, a repeat offender, with nothing to offer God – guilt is met with gift, and *you leave a saint.* A sinner made holy through the blood of the covenant, the blood of the Lamb of God.

Tomorrow night, we will hear once again of the slaughter of that Lamb. Who goes as it is written of Him. Who goes willingly. Who goes in love for you. Tonight, we receive that Lamb, eating His body, drinking His blood, and so as St. Paul said, we become one in Him; one as His body. That tomorrow night we see not only *His* crucifixion, but *ours* as well. That joined to Him and one in Him, His death become our death, His resurrection our resurrection, and His life our life. That our participation in the body and blood of Christ be our participation in His *passing through* death and into life eternal. That the old sinner in us be slain, and the new man arisen. And that even though that old Adam, that old Judas, that old Peter in us continues to live on, and continues to lead us where we do not want to go, and do that which we do not want to do, and plunge us into sin – that we do not fear, or despair, but know that greater than our guilt is the gift. The gift that will never run out, the cup that will never run dry.

And so tonight we confess: ***It is I.*** We do so not to make ourselves feel bad, but to receive *the gift* that is here for the guilty - the forgiveness of our sin given in our Lord's body and blood. So come to His table, and receive. And receiving, see. Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. It is He, here for you.

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