

18 April 2019
Holy Maundy Thursday

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Vienna, VA

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“The Lord Does Not Forget”

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

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

In my house we have a red plate with the words on it: *You Are Special Today*. The idea is that every birthday or other special occasion, the person being celebrated gets to eat off that plate. And then they're supposed to sign the bottom of the plate, as a kind of record of remembrance of all the special days it was used. We tried to do that, signing with a permanent marker - but the marker turned out to be not as permanent as advertised, and all the names and dates got washed off. So we can no longer remember all the people and times we used it.

You Are Special Today was not how it was among the Corinthian Christians. When they gathered together as a congregation, they did not wait for one another, some ate a lot while others went hungry, and there were divisions among them. And the apostle Paul says to them: *Don't do that!* In fact, when you do that, it is not the Lord's Supper you are eating. *Don't you remember what I told you?* Jesus gave you this meal on the night when He was betrayed, the night before He bled for you and died for you. This meal is special. Different. It is Body and Blood. It is forgiveness and life. *Don't you remember?*

We could ask ourselves the same question, for we have memory problems, too. And not just because more people today seem to have dementia and Alzheimers than ever before. We don't remember our past, our history. We don't remember our Scriptures, our Catechism. How often do birthdays and anniversaries go by unnoticed? But memory problems aren't just about what we fail to remember, but also what we do remember. The hurts that foster thoughts of revenge. The sins and failures that keep coming back in our minds and harassing us. The songs with inane lyrics that we remember easier than hymns. And what else?

Well, we're not the first, and the Corinthians weren't either. Israel often had a memory problem, too. They would often forget God's Word and promises and all He had done for them in the past. And the result was that they would doubt His faithfulness and love and question their future. So God gave them a meal, a feast, the Passover. Keep it every year, He said. As a memorial. A day to remember. So you will not forget. But, not forget what? What the Lord did for them? That's part of it. But even more, this: **that the Lord does not forget**. That the Lord remembers every Word, every promise, and every person.

Always. That there is not one single moment when you are not on His mind.

That's quite different than us and how we are. As it should be.

Jesus showed that difference the night of the new Passover; the night when the old Passover was fulfilled and He did something new. For on that night when He was betrayed, He not only gave us a new meal, a new feast, He also washed His disciples. He washed their feet, but it was more than that. For, Jesus said, ***If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.*** That kind of washing that gives us a share with Jesus is the washing of forgiveness; of baptism and absolution. That's what this washing was a picture and sign of. That's what this meal He was about to give them was all about. And it's what this night of His betrayal was all about. Jesus keeping the promise made all the way back in the Garden. The promise of a Saviour from sin, and if from sin then also from death.

So when God washes you, you have a share with Him. When God washes you, your old name - sinner - is washed off, and your new name - child of God - is washed on. **And you are special.** Not because of who you are, but because of Jesus and who He has made you by His red blood. The blood of the Passover Lamb of God that marks you as His.

But God knew we needed more than that, because of our memory problems. Even more because of our sin problem. And so the night when He was betrayed, Jesus gives us a new meal, a new feast. The one that we need. His Body and Blood. And not just for once a year, but ***as often as you do this.*** That we remember and not forget. That we come and receive the forgiveness we need. That we proclaim the Lord's death - all that Jesus has done *for me* - until He comes again.

So, Paul tells the Corinthians, examine yourselves, judge yourselves, and so come to this meal not as a glutton but as a penitent. And know that though you eat only a small piece of bread and drink a little sip of wine, you are receiving far more than that - you are feasting on the Body and Blood of Jesus that fills you with His forgiveness and life. A feast that fills you far more than Thanksgiving, and doesn't give you a food coma, but awakens you to life. Without this feast, or with this feast eaten without faith, we continue sick in sin and die. Without this feast, or with this feast eaten without faith, we are still hungry for life. But with this feast, received in faith, we are filled with Christ and His love - the love we need to love one another as Jesus has loved us. Love not because others are special, but to *make* them special.

That's a tall order. And an impossible one, were it not for Jesus and His love given to us and living in us. For what we have received we can now give. Forgiveness to the sinner, love to the loveless, mercy to the downtrodden, hope to the hopeless. And ***by this***, Jesus says, ***all people will know that you are my disciples.*** For by this, all people will see Me in you.

So now we come and receive Him, His Body and Blood, His forgiveness and love and life. He lives in you and you in Him. He has washed your sins off of you. He has washed His Name onto you. And He has fed and nourished you with Himself. So yes, you are special. He has made you so.

And now we will also remember *His Sacred Head, Now Wounded* (LSB #450). After the feast, the altar will be stripped, as He was. Everything taken away, and He was. The lights will be dimmed for it is the hour of darkness. But we will not mourn His death, but proclaim it. For this is His love for us.

For having loved His own who were in the world, He loved us to the end. That we might live a life that has no end.

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