

Matthew 26:26-29

26 While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (NRSV).

Today is World Communion Sunday. It is celebrated annually on the 1st Sunday in October. It is one of the most respected special Sundays for the Christian church. As the world struggles with peace, today we celebrate oneness in Christ the Prince of Peace. In this world that so desperately needs peace we are called to serve and care for one another. World Communion Sunday promotes Christian unity in ecumenical cooperation. As we are a global community of faith, we have a distinct opportunity to experience the Holy Communion with the world, united together as one body, remembering and affirming the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Whatever the background, theological tradition, or personal preferences, we are one in Christ. The table is God's table. The invitation comes from Jesus Christ himself where all are welcome. We are in a physical and spiritual communion, with one another, united together, in one body. In this one world we are one body.

I will take a moment to make sure we understand the significance of the covenant. The significance is emphasized repeatedly in the Old Testament. The Hebrew Scriptures show the divine interaction, guidance, and protection of the nation of Israel. Their national well being is dependent on the observance of God commands. The nation received providential care from Egypt, to their time in the wilderness, and into the Promised Land. They suffered the consequences of transgressions and received the blessings from following God's commands. What is truly unique is that out of all of the world's various religions, it is the God of Abraham that leads one nation to victory as is promised for them when they keep covenant with God.

By time Jesus enters into the world as a human being, Israel has gone through a lot of pain and suffering for not keeping their end of the covenant. So, the mindset of the religious leaders is based on the law. They keep increasing the law because they think that when everybody shows enough obedience to God then God will intervene and send the Messiah to defeat the Romans. So, they kept on getting stricter and making more laws. The religious leaders had a mindset of self-righteousness whereupon they enforced the law to the point that it was a burden. As is common in all walks of life, when people with power gain more power, they began to abuse that power. The consequence of this is that they neglect and abused the under privileged. What the law ignored completely was love and compassion. What they neglected were the people and what God loves most is the people. So, in their strict efforts to please God they actually displeased God.

What God does is truly special. God intervenes but the religious leaders are so far off track that they are unable to recognize, or accept, God's intervention. What God does is ratify the covenant. God takes the covenant that is based on law and officially validates it with love. God gives to the people - the people that God loves - God's very best gift of love. God ratifies the covenant with the blood of Jesus; with the death sacrifice of Jesus. In the Old Testament, blood

is used to ratify the covenant. In the New Testament blood is used to ratify the covenant - special blood from Jesus the Son of God.

In light of his impending death, the bread is identified as his body. This is significant because it is bread that sustains life. The wine is identified as his blood. This is the blood of the covenant. This is ratifying blood. His blood is poured out for many, for the forgiveness of sins. It is the blood of the covenant that is poured out for the forgiveness of sins. The command to eat followed by the words "this is my body" implies participation in the death of Jesus. The Holy Communion set up the participants to share the glory of the Lord's atoning death. Jesus death is a sacrifice; atonement for our sins. When Jesus is offering the bread and the wine, he is offering his body and his blood as ratification of the covenant, some manuscripts specifically say *new covenant*. I personally emphasize *new covenant* because God replaces the old covenant which was based on law with the new covenant which is based on love.

The contemporary lesson for us is a matter of our devotion to the covenant. The sacrifice of Jesus seals the bond between God and the covenant people. When we do this, we do in it memory of Jesus, we remember the covenant, we remember the sacrifice, and we honor what was done for us. It is a table of honor where everyone is welcome and forgiveness is offered. It is a table where action is more than symbolic and means more than words can justify. It is a liberating act of God where no one is outcast and all are welcome to a sacred bond of hospitality.

The Lord's Supper is a sacrament; it is a sacred act of worship, where we are all united together with the Lord. We are aligned with God in a new covenant. It is a new parent and child type of relationship where the directive force that governs behavior is love, respect, and devotion. It cost the life of Jesus to make this new relationship possible. The Holy Communion is not to be taken lightly; it is a moment of reverence, appreciation, devotion, reflection, and remembrance. It is a welcoming table for everyone, even the sinners, where no one is neglected or rejected. If the Table of Christ were only for perfect people then no one would ever approach it. The way is always open for the people that love God to be in communion and oneness with Christ. It is the covenant.