

**6 April 2023; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26; Maundy Thursday;  
Pastor Fraser Pearce**

### **Dealing with a problem**

- St Paul is writing a letter to Christians in Corinth.
- If you read the letter it is clearly evident
- That the congregation has serious problems:
- Moral problems, doctrinal problems.
- But also problems when it comes to the liturgy,
- To public worship.

Listen to how he speaks in the verses that precede our reading: **Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.**

- This is said in a letter that would have been publicly read out.
- That is: *They would have been better staying home.*

What's the particular problem?

Paul spells it out: **When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you!**

- They think they are coming together to celebrate the meal
- That the Lord instituted,
- But they are treating it as a normal meal.
- What is precisely is happening is a matter of scholarly conjecture,
- But the general contours are clear enough:
- People were treating the Lord's Supper as *their own supper*,
- An opportunity to eat and drink with their own friendship group

St Paul gives teaching to set things in proper order,

- And the first thing he makes clear is that the Lord' Supper
- Was not and is not the creation of Christian people
- According to their own tastes and desires,
- *But that it was and is a gift from the Lord Jesus*
- To grow his church in faith and love.

Listen to how St Paul starts: **For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,**

- This is the language of tradition:
- Of receiving and handing on.
- As Lutherans we can get uneasy with tradition language.
- But this is tradition handed on *by Jesus himself.*
- Most scholars would say: to St Paul through the church

What St Paul goes on to say is very familiar to us: **For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'** In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, **'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'**

- This is a version of what we call the Words of Institution.
- St Paul is very clear: this is not a normal meal, with normal food.
- For a start, Jesus says of the bread: **This is my body**
- As Lutheran Christians we simply take the Lord at his word.
- We don't have theories as to how this is possible,
- But trust what Jesus says, because he is trustworthy.
- Likewise, when Jesus says: **This cup is the new covenant in my blood.**
- We simply take him at his word: what we drink is his blood
- That brings us into a new way of dealing with God.

Now Jesus adds these words: **Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.**

- This can sound as if the main thing in communion
- Is the mental act of remembering Jesus
- And what he did for us on the cross.
- But even in normal human life
- Remembering means more than this:
- Think about how we remember a birthday.
- It may indeed involve a mental act,
- But it is more than this: it is action
- And action that sustains community:
- Phone calls; presents; a party; a cake...

How much more does eating and drinking

- The body and blood of Christ
- Sustain us in faith and in Christian community:
- After all, it's not our faith that makes the bread his body
- It's not our faith that makes the wine his blood:
- It is his word: when Jesus speaks, his word is effective
- And in the meal that he instituted
- We receive the gift of the forgiveness of sins,
- And God brings us together as one people, to grow in love.

St Paul gives these summary words: **For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

- We together proclaim what this death has achieved
- And the new order that it creates:
- We show that we are a community held together
- Not by human power, but by the message of the Gospel,
- A message that brings us together as one body of Christ
- To eat and drink according to Christ's command
- And to grow in our love for each other
- As we recognise that we who gather around
- The body and blood of Christ
- Are one body, called by God to grow in love for each other.