

Sermon: Maundy Thursday

Text: Mark 14:12-26: The institution of the Lord's Supper

Theme: God's Covenant

Goal: God's Covenant through the blood of Jesus wants to provide us the best .

Dear Friends,

Introduction: When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He called it a Covenant, an Alliance. To illustrate what a Covenant means, we can think about a marriage: When a man and a woman decide to get married, they establish a covenant between themselves. The ring is a symbol of this covenant. (Ring in Portuguese is called *aliança*= alliance.) They promise faithfulness to each other, love, care... If marriage is not put into practice (it's only on the paper) it's a false marriage and it doesn't work. If the partners are not faithful to each other, the covenant ends. The covenant has to be renewed daily in constant love.

I – The Old Testament Covenant

God had established a covenant with His people in the Old Testament. God Himself uses the image of a marriage to illustrate His relationship with His people: He is the bridegroom and His people (the church) are the bride. God comes as the perfect, rich, powerful bridegroom and offers His love to a poor, despised and weak bride. Can she refuse the covenant? Can she refuse God's love? Can she offer to make a covenant with God? No; she has nothing!

God came first to Abraham and said: “As for me, this is my Covenant with you...” (Gen 17:3). And He promised lots of things to Abraham and his descendants. Then He said to Abraham: “As for you, you must keep my covenant.” And the covenant was sealed by blood, as they used to do in the old times: blood of sacrificed animals, and the blood of circumcision.

God renewed His Covenant with Abraham's descendants several times. The most important one was in the time of Moses. When God took His people out of Egypt, the blood of a lamb put on the sides and tops of the door frames of their house saved them from death and gave them freedom to go to the Promised Land.(Ex 12:7). This event was celebrated every year and is called Passover. Jesus was celebrating the Passover with His disciples in remembrance of the delivering out of Egypt when He instituted the Lord's Supper. And He used the same elements they had on the table, bread and vine, to make a New Covenant.

The Old Testament reading for this night (Ex 24:3-11) presented The Covenant Confirmed while the people were in the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land. “Moses took the blood” of the sacrifices, sprinkled it on the people and said: “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all His words.” And the people answered: “Everything the Lord had said we will do.” And the people saw God and they ate and drank. God offered His Covenant and the people reacted well to the Covenant.They were happy, and confident that God's Covenant was good for them. They practiced fellowship with God eating the meat of the sacrifices offered to God; and they practiced fellowship with their fellows eating and drinking together.

I read once that among some native Indian tribes in America, when two tribes made an alliance, the chiefs came together and both pierced their arms, and when the blood flowed, they put their arms together to mix the blood. And they said: Now we are one people, we have one blood.

II – The New Testament Covenant

It may seem a little strange for us and for our culture to establish a Covenant with blood. But it was so in the old times. God Himself had made a statement, saying: “Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Heb 9:22). It is necessary to know this to understand why

Jesus had to shed His blood for us as our substitute, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We don't have to shed blood anymore, because Jesus died once for all, as we read in Heb 10:10,18: “We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all ... And where (the sins) have been forgiven, there is no longer sacrifice for sin”. Therefore the Apostle John says: “The blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sins.” (1 John 1:7).

Jesus established a new Covenant, a new Alliance when He instituted the Lord's Supper, a Covenant established by His blood. It's really the continuity of the Old Testament Covenant, but in a much broader sense. As it is written in Hebrews, “Once for all”.

We are not able to set any conditions for an Alliance with God, as many try. Look around you and see how many people and churches are establishing their statements to have a covenant with God, - even Christian churches! No, my friends. We cannot do it. We can only accept by faith what God offers to us, even if it seems crazy to someone. God loves us and He had good plans for us when He established the Covenant by the blood of Jesus.

God's Covenant is not a temporary one, but it is forever. What He began here He will fulfill completely in His house! Jesus promised under an oath: “I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew (with you) in the kingdom of God.

We shall take also Jesus' words as they are written: “Take it; this is my body... This is my blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for many.” Unfortunately, the Sacrament that unites God's people also divides God's people. The Sacrament that is called Holy *Communion* separates brothers and sisters. Why? Because many don't accept the Words of Christ as they are written. They argue that they cannot understand it the way they are written, and they give their own interpretation for them. Many don't believe that Jesus' body and blood are really present in the Sacrament. Many don't believe that we receive

forgiveness of sins in the Sacrament. For them this is only a symbol, a drama that has to be performed in remembrance only.

As simple as they are, or as complicated as they appear, the Words of Jesus cannot be changed. We have to accept God's condition for the Covenant and to believe in His promises. We cannot change the condition of the Covenant. We can only enjoy them and give thanks to God who came to us in His Son Jesus Christ. He wants the best for us. He wants to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He wants to give us life. He wants to enter in fellowship with us as a foretaste of all that is to come. To those who believe, He gives His blessings and the Covenant is renewed. We are in peace with God and we can feast with our fellows!

Conclusion: Let's go back to the epistle for tonight for a bit,

1 Corinthians 10:16-17. It's a short text with two questions that require a positive answer: “Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? (Certainly it is!) And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? (Certainly it is!) Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.”

The Covenant God establishes is individual with each of us, but He establishes His Covenant with His people as well. He calls us together as one people. He gathers us as His church. Paul says that “because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf”. This means not only that we have fellowship with God in the Communion, but we have also fellowship with our brothers and sisters.

As we celebrate the Lord's Supper tonight, in remembrance of the first night when Jesus instituted the Sacrament, let us enjoy all the blessings He gives us in this Communion and let us renew with thanksgiving the Covenant He always does with us. Amen.

Pastor Carlos Walter Winterle
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