

Sermon: Maundy Thursday

Text: Exodus 24:3-11 (v. 8, 11b)

Theme: The Meal of the Covenant

Goal: As the people of the OT celebrated the Old Covenant with a meal, we also feast at the Table of the New Covenant

Dear Friends,

Introduction: These ceremonies with blood are something outside of our culture, outside of our context. To be sprinkled by blood... our white shirt would become spotted and it is difficult to remove blood stain and to bleach it again...

We don't need to sacrifice animals anymore, neither to offer their blood as a payment for our sins to God, as they used to do in the Old Testament time. Why? Because Jesus shed His holy blood for us on the cross and "we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:8). Peter wrote that we were sprinkled by the blood of Jesus and we were sanctified (1 Peter 1:2). But we need to be aware that, even though our salvation is free for us by God's grace, it cost a lot to Jesus: It cost His own blood, which is still given to us at the Lord's Supper for forgiveness of our sins. We celebrate the Holy Communion with Thanksgiving, remembering the night when for the very first time Jesus celebrated the Lord's Supper with His disciples.

I – People celebrated the Old Covenant with a meal

It was a very special gathering of God's people at the foot of Mount Sinai. Three months had passed since the spectacular deliverance from slavery in Egypt, crossing the Red Sea. God reaffirmed His promises to His people and gave them the Ten Commandments. God

confirmed the Covenant made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and sealed that Covenant with blood of sacrificed young bulls offered as fellowship offerings. Note: these were not sacrifices for sins, but fellowship sacrifices, offer in honour to God and celebrating the fellowship people were enjoying with God and the fellowship they were enjoying with each other as a free people.

Half of the blood was sprinkled on the altar as a sign of God's Covenant and of God's fellowship with His people. The other half was sprinkled on the people; but not before they knew the terms of the Covenant. Our text says: "Then he (Moses) took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." Moses then took the blood, 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 these words."

Moses had written in a Book all the words of the Covenant God had given him. It was not just an oral tradition that someone could change or interpret the Covenant in a different way. It was written! And we still have this Book of the Covenant with us, which was further complemented by God with more messages to the people: The Five Books of Moses in the Bible.

After this Covenant was sealed by blood, God revealed Himself in His glory to many of the people. "They saw God, and they ate and drank." This was the Covenant Meal: people were happy with the Covenant God had proposed to them, to be their God, to protect and guide them to the Promised Land. They committed themselves to trust, to follow and to obey this powerful and gracious God. And they rejoiced and feasted with a shared meal, eating the meat of the sacrificed young bulls and drinking in the presence of the Lord.

II – We celebrate the New Covenant with a meal

"This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you."  
Are these words familiar to you? "This is my blood of the (new)

Covenant which is poured out for many” (Mark 14:24) said Jesus when he Celebrated the Holy Communion with His disciples. The background is the Old Covenant. But a new time has come: The Messianic Era, the New Testament Era, the New Covenant Era. Jesus was the fulfilment of all Old Testament sacrifices and the top of God’s promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: In Him, all the nations on earth would be blessed! We are the blessed people of the New Covenant by the blood of Jesus shed for us!

Hebrews 12:18,23,24 says: “You have not come to Mount Sinai... but you have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to (His) sprinkled blood...” These are the blessings we share with all the believers. Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant and He intercedes for us. When we sin – and who doesn’t sin? – and we deserve punishment and condemnation, Jesus stands up and intercedes before God on our behalf, remembering the New Covenant sealed by His blood. We are not punished for our sins anymore, but we are forgiven according the terms of the New Covenant: *“This is my blood of the New Covenant shed for you for forgiveness of all your sins”*. Paul wrote to Timothy: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time” (1 Timothy 2:5,6).

And because God is gracious to us and faithful to His Covenant, we can feast in the presence of God, celebrating with joy the New Covenant we enjoy, like the people of the Old Testament did. – I’m always concerned when some people look at the Holy Communion just as a Memorial Service, where they come to honour someone who passed away. Of course Jesus passed away on Good Friday, but He rose again on Easter Sunday and is alive among us! Therefore we can celebrate His Holy Supper not with sorrow, but with joy, as redeemed people. We are sad for our sins; but we rejoice in the forgiveness God offers us in the New Covenant. It’s a strange mix of sorrow and joy, of a repentant heart and of a joyful heart. But we can

feast, eat and drink in the presence of the Lord! And we can go home nourished and strengthen by this special meal.

Conclusion: We don't see God and His glory anymore, like the people of old saw Him on Mount Sinai. But we see Him in His humbleness, in the bread and in the wine given and shed for us for forgiveness of our sins. We touch Him and we receive Him. This blessed fellowship with our God and with our fellows is highlighted by Paul with rhetoric questions in the Epistle for this night, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17: "Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf." He is talking of the meal in a context that the first Christians used to celebrate around a table, sharing the Lord's Supper. It was not just bread and wine that they (and we) received. Through the cup we participate, we enter in fellowship, with the blood of Jesus, Christ Himself. And with the bread we enter in fellowship with the body of Jesus, Christ Himself. And as the loaf is made of many grains, so we are many, but together we are one body as church, in fellowship with each other. Therefore the Lord's Supper is also called Holy Communion: We are linked to God, and we are linked to each other. - It is also called: Eucharistia, which means: Thanksgiving, because Jesus gave thanks before He shared the bread and the wine with His disciples, and because we rejoice and say thanks in this fellowship of the New Covenant.

Maundy Thursday is a night of love, as we celebrate in the Order of Service for tonight: Love of God, who gave His Son for us; and love among us, who are filled with God's love. In spite of the sorrows that will affect us tomorrow as we remember Jesus' suffering and death, we know and believe that our Saviour rose again on Easter Sunday and is alive among us with His body and blood, with His Word and blessings. In this faith, let us approach the Table of the New Covenant repentant, but rejoicing in confidence of His forgiveness and of His love according to His promise. Amen.