

**Is It I Lord?
Maundy Thursday
April 6, 2023**

20 When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. 21 And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” 22 And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” 23 He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. 24 The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” 25 Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so.”

Dear Christian Friends,

Some time ago, I read a blog written by a novelist named Richard Evans. He wrote about a time when his marriage was in serious trouble, and he found himself crying out to God for help. He describes how God moved him to ask one simple and sincere question every day to his wife, “How can I make your day better?”

The first day, his wife was irritated with the question and answered, “Clean the kitchen.” Which he did. The next day he asked again, “How can I make your day better?” She answered, “Clean the garage.” Which he did.

The third day, he asked, “How can I make your day better?” She angrily told him to quit asking the question. But he refused. She asked why he kept insisting, to which he replied, “Because I love you and I want our marriage to be better.” For a number of days in a row, he asked and she responded, “Nothing.”

To make a long story short, one day, she broke down, she admitted that she was to blame, she didn’t know why he was so kind. He asked her what he could do to make her day better. She replied, “Could we spend more time together?” That day marked a whole new beginning in their marriage. A new beginning that started with a really good question, “How can I make your day better?”

Tonight, we explore a really good question asked by each of the 12 disciples, in response to Jesus warning them that one of them would be betraying him. Matthew records, “And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?”

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul writes that there are two kinds of sorrow - Godly and worldly. Worldly sorrow leads to making excuses, but Godly sorrow leads to repentance. Worldly sorrow leads to explaining and defending and rationalizing, but Godly sorrow leads directly to a little hill outside of Jerusalem. Worldly sorrow leads to a hardening of the heart and an attitude that says, "My mind is made up, just leave me alone." Godly sorrow leads to a bended knee and a change in behavior. Worldly sorrow is to be sorry that we got caught, while Godly sorrow confesses that we have offended Almighty God, that we have profaned His Name, and have done damage to His kingdom.

As often as we commune at our Lord's Table, we do well to say, "O God of new beginnings and second chances, here we are again. Three questions we would ask as we examine our hearts on this Holy Thursday evening. 1) Am I sorry for my sins? 2) Do I believe in Jesus as my Savior? 3) How can I do better?"

There are at least two attitudes Christians towards this Supper. One is to think of the Lord's Supper as not a big deal and to receive it on special occasions. The other is to see it as a high point in our life together and receive it often. One is to just sort of go through the motions and the other is to make it a time of self-reflection. Paul writes, "**Let a man so examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup.**"

The Words of Institution for our Lord's Supper as recorded by Paul to the Corinthians are before us tonight. One commentator wrote that these words are like diamonds dropped on a muddy road. One of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture is given in the middle of Paul rebuking the early Christians in Corinth for their worldly and selfish and insensitive attitudes and behavior. The Corinthian congregation had more troubles and controversies than you could shake a stick at. Their life together was marked by immorality, incest, and a misuse of spiritual gifts. They couldn't even get the Lord's Supper right. Some were getting drunk, the rich folks weren't sharing their food with the poor, they had turned a meal meant to be pure good news into a meal that irritated and divided. Instead of engaging in self-examination and running for refuge to their Savior, they were sinking further and further into darkness.

Corrie Ten Boom once said that when you're sitting on a train and the train is going through a dark and long tunnel, that isn't the time to tear up your ticket and jump off the train. It's a good time to sit still and trust the engineer.

Dear friends in Christ, we have at least three options in life when it seems as though the powers of darkness are prevailing in our hearts. 1) We can just sit there and curse the darkness. 2) We can light our own candles and try to make the best of bad circumstances. Or 3) We can fix our eyes on the light at the end of the tunnel.

Jesus Christ is the light at the end of every one of our tunnels. As often as we eat and drink at His Supper, we are fixing our eyes on the Light of the world. The One in whom there is no darkness at all.

For those who feel no particular thirst for this Supper, Martin Luther had three words of advice.

- First, he says that no better advice can be given than that you put your hand into your bosom, and feel whether or not you still have flesh and blood.
- Secondly, if that doesn't do it, look around to see whether you're in the world or not, and keep in mind that there will never be a lack of sins and trouble.
- And third, if that doesn't make you feel the need for Holy Communion, remember that you will certainly have the devil after you, he will be lying and he will be causing all kinds of trouble day and night, and the last thing in the world the devil wants you to have is peace.

Three brief meditations I offer tonight, based on the three familiar questions we would ask before we step forward for this Holy Supper.

Question #1 - Am I sorry for my sins?

Peace Lutheran Church in little Barney, North Dakota has a special place in my heart. There I was baptized, attended Sunday School, Confirmation Class, was confirmed, participated in Walther League, and eventually was ordained into the ministry. Holy Communion was once a month, and my cousin Merlyn and I took turns being the gate - letting the right number of people up to the altar. (Story of Mom insisting on cutting my hair with a trim comb). The day before we would prepare for Holy Communion by reading through a pamphlet which asked questions on the basis of the Ten Commandments.

Today, the first ten questions that would come to my mind would sound like this: Have I been practicing what I have been preaching? Have I been spending quality time each day in God's Word and in prayer? Have I been looking Debi in the eyes and listening to her heart in a careful way? Have I been laying down my life for Debi, as Christ laid down His life for His bride, the church? Have I wasted

time scrolling through Facebook and engaging in less than important conversations? Have I been eating and drinking and exercising in a way that recognizes that my body is not my own - it has been bought at a great price? Have I been helping and befriending my neighbors in every bodily need? Defending, speaking well of, and putting the best construction on my neighbors' words and actions? Putting the needs of others before my own? Seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and trusting Him through all the ups and downs of life?

Question #2 - Do I believe that in Jesus Christ I have the forgiveness of my sins?

In many sanctuaries, the Lord's Supper is viewed as a memorial meal where the suffering and death and resurrection of Christ is remembered and His command to eat and drink often is obeyed. In Lutheran sanctuaries, the Supper is all of that and so much more. It's pure Gospel. Jesus is the host, and we are the guests. He gives and we receive.

At our Lord's Table, there is neither rich nor poor. Neither male nor female. Neither Democrat nor Republican. At our table tonight, there are no levels of Christianity. It isn't as if some of us have it all together and some of us are messed up. We have all fallen short, and in Christ, we have all been declared not guilty.

At our Lord's Table tonight, there are all kinds of communions going on. There is a communion between the bread and the very body of Christ. There is a communion between the wine and the very blood of Christ. There is a communion between the 60 or 70 redeemed sinners that are present tonight in this sanctuary. There is a communion that we have with the angels and the archangels and the communion of saints in all the generations that we have tonight. But above all else, you and I have a communion with Jesus Christ, our Redeemer, our Savior, and our Friend. Believe it and do not doubt it when your called and ordained servants of the Word dismiss you with those beautiful words, "Now may this true body and blood of your Lord Jesus Christ preserve you in the true faith unto life everlasting. Jesus Christ loves you. Go in his peace. Amen."

Question #3 - How can I do better?

The kingdom of God is like a congregation of redeemed and precious people of God who have their bad days, their good days, and their really good days.

- On their bad days, life is the same old, same old. Nothing new. They pretty much keep the good news of the Gospel to themselves. And they just sort of wander through the day with no particular purpose in mind.
- On their good days, they make the sign of the cross. They rejoice in the forgiveness of their sins and in their status as the beloved children of God. Their hearts are at peace, and there is a contentment in the deepest parts of their souls.

- On their really good days, they are famous for asking themselves, God, and loved ones, “How can I do better?” In Jesus’ Name. Amen.