

Sermon – “Do This in Remembrance of Me”
Sunday, October 7, 2018
Scripture Readings: Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 22: 14-38
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Our first reading comes from the very end of Matthew, relating the final words recorded of Jesus by that Gospel writer, containing both charge and promise. Hear now God’s word to you in Matthew 28, verses 16 through 20.

¹⁶ Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them. ¹⁷ When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹ Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

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Our second reading comes from the book of Luke, telling the story of the Last Supper and the institution of the sacrament which is based on it. Listen to these words from the Luke, chapter 22, verses 14 to 38.

¹⁴ When the hour came, he took his place at the table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ He said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; ¹⁶ for I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” ¹⁷ Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he said, “Take this and divide it among yourselves; ¹⁸ for I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ Then he took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰ And he did the same with the cup after supper, saying, “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. ²¹ But see, the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table. ²² For the Son of Man is going as it has been determined, but woe to that one by whom he is betrayed!” ²³ Then they began to ask one another which one of them it could be who would do this.

²⁴ A dispute also arose among them as to which one of them was to be regarded as the greatest. ²⁵ But he said to them, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. ²⁶ But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. ²⁷ For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

²⁸ “You are those who have stood by me in my trials; ²⁹ and I confer on you, just as my Father has conferred on me, a kingdom, ³⁰ so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

³¹ “Simon, Simon, listen! Satan has demanded to sift all of you like wheat, ³² but I have prayed for you that your own faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.” ³³ And he said to him, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!” ³⁴ Jesus said, “I tell you, Peter, the cock will not crow this day, until you have denied three times that you know me.”

³⁵ He said to them, “When I sent you out without a purse, bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?” They said, “No, not a thing.” ³⁶ He said to them, “But now, the one who has a purse must take it, and likewise a bag. And the one who has no sword must sell his cloak and buy one. ³⁷ For I tell you, this scripture must be fulfilled in me, ‘And he was counted among the lawless’; and indeed what is written about me is being fulfilled.” ³⁸ They said, “Lord, look, here are two swords.” He replied, “It is enough.”

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“Do this in remembrance of me.” Friends, brothers and sisters, we gather today in remembrance of our Lord. The table is set. The call to this table has gone out to all through Jesus Christ, who offered himself, saying “I am the bread of life,”¹ and, “the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.”² “For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world,”³ and today the whole world gathers to receive him. Today, the first Sunday in October, is celebrated as World Communion Sunday. With us, Christians in every part of the world this morning, across many denominations, are partaking of the Lord’s Supper.

But what we gather for is even bigger than that. In the Apostles’ Creed, we proclaim a belief in the communion of saints. Christ’s saving body and blood is something we share in common with all believers in all times and places. And so as we gather with people of every nation and era, it is fitting to contemplate the meal we share. Let us spend a few minutes together in the Last Supper, as we are told of it in all the Gospels.

For this is not just any meal. This is the night he was betrayed. Jesus offers his very self for us, “for the forgiveness of sins.”⁴ “[H]e took a loaf of bread,” Luke tells us, “and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”⁵ And then after: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.”⁶ Broken, and given, for us. Here Jesus reveals, in a few short words, that for which he has come: to die for our sake. And indeed, “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”⁷ But with this offering comes that admonition: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

¹ John 6:35 and 6:48. All quotes are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.

² John 6:51b

³ John 6:33

⁴ Matt 26:28

⁵ Luke 22:19

⁶ Luke 22:20

⁷ 1 Cor. 11:26

Having heard it more times than we can count, we may not find this instruction particularly intriguing. But if we look at it more closely, we discover its meaning may not be as immediately and fully obvious as we think. “Do this.” What is the “this?” What is it that Jesus is saying to do? Certainly for one thing, he was asking his apostles to take and eat from the loaf he was distributing at that very moment.

But they are being charged to do this “in remembrance of” someone who is right there with them. How odd. And furthermore, he has made it clear he is not merely talking about a loaf of bread. “This is my body,” he says, for the life of the world.

This goes far beyond one physical loaf shared between those twelve men. To eat the bread Christ offers is to receive Christ. To eat it in remembrance of him is to carry on after he has died. And for nearly two thousand years, Christians have been proclaiming the Lord’s death and sacramentally receiving his life by celebrating the meal we eat together today.

But there is yet something more here. “Do this,” he said— as he broke the bread and gave it to them. “Do this,” he said— as he offered his body, broken, for us. Do *this*.

“We know love by this,” 1 John chapter 3 says, “that he laid down his life for us— and we ought to lay down our lives for one another.”⁸ *This* is not just a meal, and so *do this* is not just an injunction to eat. *This* is the love, the gift of self, that he offers us. To *do this* is to give as he gave, to offer our own bodies in remembrance of him. It is to give as Jesus gave, to love one another as he has loved us.⁹

And how has he loved us? He tells us part of the answer right here in our text from Luke. “I am among you as one who serves.”¹⁰ The love Jesus has given us is not merely to feel really nice toward us. To love one another, to *do the this* that Jesus did that night, is to give our own lives in service to each other. How different a picture Jesus is painting than the one which naturally comes to mind in those in the inner circle of the coming King, who sit arguing over their own importance!

“What greatness will be mine,” those who were with him thought! “What stature! I was with him from the beginning. Surely, I will sit at his right or at his left hand and be honored before the others who are under his reign.”¹¹ But greatness is not to be found where we think it is, Jesus tells us. We do not become great by receiving accolades or by raising ourselves above others, but by lowering ourselves to the level of servants to one another.

“If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet,” he says in John 13, “you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.”¹² And here in Luke 22, “The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.”¹³ In the outside world, the highest is the one served. “But not so with you.”

⁸ 1 John 3:16

⁹ See John 13:34 and John 15:9-13

¹⁰ Luke 22:27b

¹¹ See Luke 22:24 and Matt. 20:20-24

¹² John 13:13-17

¹³ Luke 22:26

Humility, self-emptying, servanthood. This is greatness? Jesus is the master, the Lord, and yet what place of glory did he take? As the book of Philippians reminds us, he “emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death— even death on a cross.”¹⁴ This is not greatness or highness or strength as we know them, “[b]ut God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise;” says 1 Corinthians chapter 1. “God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are.”¹⁵

No, greatness in the kingdom of heaven is not found by, as Jesus puts it in our text for today, being the one at the table served, but by being the one who serves. Jesus offers himself in humble, lowly service, and he exhorts us to “do this” also.

But this is no easy road. This is not the route we want to take. We know the story; we’ve seen Jesus go down that path, and we’ve seen what it involved and where it ended up. This is a way that leads to difficult places. “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you,”¹⁶ Jesus says in John 15. In Mark, he tells us, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”¹⁷ We often speak colloquially of this or that trouble in life as “the cross I must bear,” but to truly remember the nature of a cross is to recognize that to pick one up and follow Jesus is not just to accept some burden of suffering, but to voluntarily take up the means of one’s own death to the world and carry it to its end. Jesus hit over and over again on that theme in his teachings— “[U]nless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”¹⁸ “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”¹⁹

To “do this” as Jesus does this is to love, and to give. “Do this,” Jesus says, as he breaks the bread that is his body and pours the cup that is his blood. These do not sound like pleasant things. How is it that Jesus, taking up *this* cup and bread, knowing they are his death and ours, gives thanks for them before giving them to his disciples? What absurdity is this? We are told to lower ourselves to the status of slaves, suffer for the sake of Jesus, and lay down our lives for our neighbors. How is this something to be thankful for? Perhaps we’d obey, and partake, but why would we *celebrate* this meal?

But “do this” is not the entirety of his charge to us. “Do this,” he says, “*in remembrance of me.*” Why? What does that add? What does that change? What difference does it make, remembrance?

When we do as he commanded, gathering in remembrance of him, do we remember what else is happening?

¹⁴ Philippians 2:7-8

¹⁵ 1 Cor. 1:27-28

¹⁶ John 15:20b

¹⁷ Mark 8:34. See also Matt. 10:38, Matt. 16:24, Luke 9:23

¹⁸ John 12:24

¹⁹ John 15:13

“[W]here two or three are gathered in my name,” he tells us, “I am there among them.”²⁰ What does this promise bring? It brings, into a situation of death, no less than the presence of Jesus Christ himself, who is life. We know by this promise that we are not alone. We may be asked to carry a cross and walk a hard road, but we are not asked to walk it by ourselves. Jesus does not come as one of the Gentile kings, lording his Godhood over us and exacting our lives as penalties.

Jesus comes as a servant, giving up his own life on our behalf, offering to us, in the bread and the wine, his own self. When we share in that, we are participating in Christ who has died, but Christ is also risen. In dying with Christ, we too rise with Christ.²¹ If it is true we lose our lives for his sake, then it is also true that we gain them by him. We can cling to our lives until they are taken from us, or we can give them freely, as Christ gave his to us, and trust his promise that we will in so doing gain our lives back.

“Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them.” And from today’s reading, “I am with you always, to the end of the age.” If the presence of Christ is with us through all things, then the hope of Christ is with us through all things. If we are built on him, then even in subjecting ourselves to the utmost evil this world can dole out to us, we need not fear, for as Jesus taught us, we should not “fear those who kill the body, and after that can do nothing more.”²² And the talk of taking up swords in today’s scripture passage reminds us of Ephesians 6.

“Put on the whole armor of God,” the text famously reads. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit— in the armor of God we are protected.²³ The world can only truly harm us insofar as we place our hopes and center our lives in it.

This does not mean we have nothing to endure. Because this is a broken world, even loving one another requires suffering, because giving of ourselves here in this life means bearing loss. Having ultimate hope in Christ doesn’t mean we will not come under attack from sin, suffering, death. But it does mean we cannot be defeated by them. God is not “up there,” watching to see if we emerge alive from battle with these enemies. God has come to us, is with us still, and has armored us and prepared us a table in the very presence of our enemies,²⁴ a table set with the bread of life and the cup of salvation.

This is why we, like Jesus, thank God for the bread and the wine, for the gift of Christ’s body and the blessing of offering our own. “Do this...in remembrance of me;” for “remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”²⁵ Amen.

²⁰ Matt. 18:20

²¹ See Romans 6

²² Luke 12:4

²³ See Ephesians 6, particularly beginning with verse 10

²⁴ See Psalm 23

²⁵ Matt. 28:20