

1st Corinthians 11: 23 -26
Psalm 116: 1 -2; 12 - 19

²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

¹ I love the LORD, for he heard my voice;
 he heard my cry for mercy.
² Because he turned his ear to me,
 I will call on him as long as I live.
¹² How can I repay the LORD
 for all his goodness to me?

Let's face it. Most of what we see tells us to keep, to store, to conserve. We are trained by family and experience to preserve. To detect the safest route through the forest and take it. I don't want to decry this strategy tonight. It is not my place. Further, I see the wisdom in it. I am doing the same thing with my children. Teaching them the value of safety and conservation.

And, then along comes Jesus. So often he upsets my common sense. So often his call gets in the way of my best laid plans.

35 years old now, Frederick Buechner, Presbyterian Minister and author once wrote: "If the world is sane, then Jesus is mad as a hatter and the Last Supper is the Mad Tea Party. The world says, Mind your Own Business. And Jesus says, there is no such thing as your own business. The world says, Follow the wisest and safest course and be successful and Jesus says, Follow me and be crucified. The world says – Drive carefully for the life you save may be your own and Jesus says whoever would save his life will lose it and whoever will lose his life for my sake will find it. The world says Law and Order and Jesus says, Love. The world says Get and Jesus says, Give."

The world says Get, Jesus says Give.

Imagine the spectacle of it -- your last night on earth. You spend it not lamenting. But eating and giving. Sharing life. Giving wisdom and breaking bread. With friends and enemies alike. Imagine the spectacle -- huddled around a crowded table to observe the Passover. Only this Passover isn't like the others -- Jesus is talking about heaven and betrayal, he is blessing the cup, he is speaking of forgiveness of sin. He is calling us to remember him. He is asking us to receive him. In this meal. For his memory. By his grace. In giving to us he is calling us to receive him.

It may just be that these Holy Week days are, well, so Holy, because in them this line between giving and receiving is so razor thin. Is it a gift at all if there is no one to receive it? Is a gift not worth receiving a gift that was not worth giving? They are mutually interdependent. One must have the other. Givers and receivers, giving and receiving, are close cousins indeed.

So how would you spend your last night on earth? Colleen and I have an old friend named David Bailey who in 1996 at the age of 30 was diagnosed with Glioblastoma, a deadly brain cancer. He was told six months. He is still alive today, 14 years later, and after his diagnosis gave up computers and took to folk music and church concerts, telling his story and sharing his hopes. He actually has faced this question -- what would you do with your last day, hours, night of life here on earth? David sings in his song, If I Had Another....:

"If I had Another Day, I'd take a drive up to the mountains
Have a picnic with my kids and with my wife
I'd hike the hidden trails, tell a few tall tales
About the crazy moments of my life
But then again, I might decide to write a letter to my parents
And then write a few more to all my friends
I'd thank them for their love and say I loved them too
And remind them that true love never ends
-- that is, if I had another hour.
If I had Another minute, I'd put my arms around my baby,
And hold her like I'd never done before
I'd tell her not to worry, and promise I'd be waiting
When her time came to knock on heaven's door.
But then again, I might decide to fall down on my knees
And thank God for the life I loved so dear
I'd ask Him to send peace to each Of us, as long as we are here."

I think what David has learned is a lesson that Jesus taught. In giving we receive. Our last act should be as Jesus' last act -- we should give until the very, very end. That our most lasting legacy is giving that others might receive.

We know that Jesus gives during the last supper. But what do we receive on Maundy Thursday?

Bread. Cup. Sacred grace. Immortal love. This is no mere meal -- see it that way and it will taste like simple bread and grape juice. See it that way, like mere morsels, and it will be nothing more than empty calories for you to count. See it that way and you are wasting your time coming up here.

No matter how lovely a gift is, if the heart is not ready to receive it then it cannot be received. No, we cannot undo the loveliness of this sacrament. But if we approach this night like any other night then, this table like every other table, then we will miss the glory in our midst. It would be like wearing earplugs to the symphony and missing the lift of violins or the swell of the bass. If we expect little from this then likely the gift will come to mean very little.

If we come up here expecting something great....however....well then, I don't know what may happen. Sometimes when we look for a blessing we find one. What the Holy Spirit does with the heart ready to receive is the Holy Spirit's business. But I do know this -- the life that is changed by God is the life that is open to change by God and the first step along this road to change is a heart ready to receive the grace and the call that God is ready to give. So much of our faith comes down to this very transaction - giving and receiving. Are we ready to receive?

The Psalmist - how can I repay the lord? What do we have to pay God back for life love and grace divine? Technically there is nothing God needs from us. There is something God asks of us, though and rightly so. Our faith, our devotion, our worship, our service. Just by receiving my friends, we give back to God.

Paul - passes it on. He gives as he was given. The genius of Jesus is secure. Our economy says keep, Jesus says give, and Paul gives us this meal. Spiritual. Sacramental. I have given you he says, as I have received. Imagine if he would have kept it to himself?

The genius of this is that it is the gift that keeps giving. Jesus says to pass it on, and Paul passes it on to us. We take our places with generations of those before and after who will receive and pass on again and again and again.

What do we do to give thanks for all God has done and is doing for us? How do we repay the Lord. We receive with willing and ready hearts. You know it is nothing more than a passing observation, but it is one that I try and remember. Give and live only one letter off.

With no giving, there is no receiving. With no receiving there is probably no living - try for more than a minute to live without receiving air, a day without receiving drink, or a lifetime without receiving love. The giving of this supper is a foreshadow of giving on the cross. Giving of this supper is proof once more of God's new covenant through the grace of Christ with all people who love the Lord of the living.

The write Philip Yancey once penned, "Throughout all of history, people of faith have clung to the belief that there is a God who understands the human dilemma. That the pains we endure on Earth are not meaningless. That our prayers are heard. In Passion, we Christians focus on the supreme event when God demonstrated for all time that he knows our pain."

Before he took on this pain, he chose to give and it is not an empty gift. Tonight you are called to come forward and take and eat. Tonight you are called to receive. Receive because the Lord gave. And God knows, we all need the gift. Amen