

April 13, 2017
Maundy Thursday
Matthew 26:17-30

“Famous last words.” We sometimes use that phrase among ourselves, but it’s always in a somewhat sarcastic fashion, because none of us is famous...and those probably aren’t going to be our last words. We say it to mean; whatever you just said is real iffy about becoming a reality. It means, you’re probably going to have to eat those words because they aren’t going to come to pass.

Famous last words: Moses read the Book of the Covenant in the hearing of the people and they said, “*All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.*” Famous last words. Now I’m sure the people meant it. Yahweh had done great things for them in fulfilling His promise to Abraham in making Israel a numerous people in slavery in Egypt and now bringing them out of that slavery my mighty signs and wonder and the parting of the Red Sea. And Yahweh is about to do even more, settling them in the promised land where He will be their God and they will be His people. But they’re not going to live up to the promise. They’re going to eat those words. They’re not even going to leave Mt. Sinai without being disobedient with that whole golden calf debacle.

Yet we can’t really be too harsh on those Israelites. I mean, think about your confession of sins before Yahweh, the repenting and knowing that this word “repent” means to turn from sin and change directions, and there is a genuine hope and intention to do better against temptation in the future. Yet how many of us leave confession feeling or thinking, “yeah, famous last words.” I have. I do. We know we’re going to eat those words because we are—poor, miserable sinners.

This is why the gift of the Lord's Supper Christ gave us before He was crucified is so, so good. "Take, eat; this is my body" and "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" are not famous last words. Jesus says "Do this for my remembrance" and declares these to be enduring present tense words of promise. Where you and I will always have to eat our words of any promise of obedience toward God, Jesus gifts us with enduring words declaring His body and blood always present for us to eat for His gift of forgiveness.

This "new covenant in my blood" as St. Paul quotes Jesus is just that, a new covenant, a standing testament, an enduring very one-sided deal in which poor, miserable sinners eat and drink in faith and receive, receive, receive, the hard-won gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. It's not our deeds or words that gain this; it's all gift. Christ's deeds. Christ's Word. Christ does this.

And I cannot stress enough that Christ does not do this for the worthy! The nation of Israel was never worthy, yet God kept on giving and giving, and here in Holy Week is giving His only Son unto death for them and the rest of the world. At this first Lord's Supper Jesus is not surrounded by the holiest, best and brightest mankind has to offer. Judas may have partaken. Peter who would deny Jesus was certainly there. They all would scatter and abandon Jesus, yet the gift of Christ was present "for the forgiveness of sins."

And the epistle from which we draw most of our understanding about this gift is First Corinthians—a letter to a derelict church with members way off the reservation of Christian behavior—but St Paul still calls them church! And his urging is that they rightly come back together in unity to receive this gift of Christ's body and blood for their forgiveness, not because they can get good enough to deserve it—but because Jesus gives the gift and they need it.

We don't need to eat our words when we repent. We need to eat our Savior's body and blood and know that His Word stands solid that in Him, in this, we are forgiven.

It kind of irks me than in the synod's explanation of the Small Catechism they compare Christ's wonderful words at the Last Supper with a normal person's last will and testament. Yes, Jesus knows He is going from this place to die horribly for the sins of all mankind. But this is not just any death! Jesus, in perfect human faith, knows the promise of Yahweh is true. He has explained to His disciples many times that in three days He will rise from the dead victorious! He knows this when He gives the disciples, who will be apostles founding His church, the gift of His living body and blood in this supper.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, what Jesus said at that Passover meal nearly 2000 years ago were not "famous last words" referencing a body and blood that would die and rot in the ground. No. These are enduring first words, enduring God's Words, that this night and every time this meal is celebrated convey exactly what Jesus present-tense says—This is my body; this is my blood for the forgiveness of sins. He gave this not anticipating His death, but anticipation His life and victory over death and His eternal reign as King of all things seen and unseen.

Jesus gave this to nourish not just a bunch of poor, miserable sinners who needed a pick-me-up now and again as they struggled through life toward death. Jesus gives this holy meal to His body, the church, to forgive her and nourish her in the faith unto life everlasting. This meal can accurately be understood as the eternal kingdom of heaven gifted right into your mouth.

Why am I going on and on about this? Because we get this wrong, like we do all the gifts of God. Like the Jews did with the tabernacle and the temple, we like to make it all about us—our sacrifices, our works, the quality of our repentance and turning from sin. We look at our lives after God's name was placed on us in Holy Baptism, we look at our lack of change following our

confession and receiving of absolution, we consider our thoughts, words and deeds in the wake of leaving the Lord's table and we're tempted to think it was all just our sarcastic "famous last words," which we eat in failure again.

But it's not your body and blood; it's Christ's...and He did not fail! He beat sin and death and Satan and He still lives. By His Divine all-encompassing authority these words are what He declares and do what He says—and it's all gift for you! These are God's victorious, present tense truth: Given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins!

Don't second guess them. Don't over analyze them. Simply receive and believe them and know that the kingdom is yours because Yahweh not only gave His Son for you on Calvary, He literally just put the victorious Son inside you and it is today and forever victory and salvation.

Amen.