

March 28, 2013

Maundy Thursday

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-32

Theme: "The Objects of Lent - The Sponge"

Tonight I want to talk about the wine. Wine received, wine refused, and why it was received or refused. In the Epistle, we hear the familiar words of institution that I say every time we receive the Lord's Supper. What I say is what St. Paul said that Jesus said and so the line is not broken from our Lord's Passover meal with his disciples to this very night when we gather to receive the gifts again. But there are things in those words that can easily be missed if not carefully examined. Tonight, I want to focus on one of those things.

Jesus gave his disciples the cup of blessing. This was the cup, in the traditional Passover Celebration, that reminded the Jews of the great blessings God had showered down upon them, protecting them from famine, guarding them in Egypt for 400 years and then preparing them to leave Egypt and return to the Promised Land. Jesus took the cup of blessing as Rabbis always had but as he gave it to them, he said something no rabbi had ever said,

"This cup is the new covenant in my blood." Sometimes translated covenant, sometimes testament, both mean promise. This is the new promise in my blood. The wine of blessing is

elevated to a new promise, which is transmitted by the blood of Jesus.

Now knowing that, let's look at our object for tonight in the series we have been following all through Lent, the objects of Lent. Tonight is the sponge. Jesus was offered wine the day of his crucifixion two times. The wine he was offered is sometimes called vinegar in the Bible but wine, vinegar and grape juice are all essentially the same thing in the Bible at different stages of strength and fermentation. The first time was just before the crucifixion.

Mark 15:23 says,

"And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it." Myrrh was like a narcotic. It was offered to people being crucified to help dull the pain. It was a small mercy to the one who was about to have nails driven through his flesh and hoisted up in the air, hanging from his hands and feet. Jesus refused to dull the pain. He was in for the whole deal and he would not use drugs to mute any of it.

The second time he was offered wine was just before he died. John 19:29-30 says,

"A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When

Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, "It is finished," and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit." That was not the way it was supposed to work. Dehydration was a man's friend on the cross. Any normal criminal would have accepted the first wine mixed with a narcotic and refused this drink, which would only prolong life. Jesus did just the opposite. He refused that which would dull the pain and accepted that which would prolong the pain. Only the Father had had enough and received his spirit into paradise. "It is finished," he said, and breathed his last. Even though Jesus drank of the wine that should have prolonged his suffering, his suffering was over and he was received into paradise.

"Take. Drink. This cup is the New Covenant in my blood." This New Covenant, this new promise is not some kind of fanciful dream or nice idea. It is a guarantee, bought with the life, blood and soul of Jesus Christ. Take. Drink and remember that he refused to mute the pain that he experienced in order that that you would never have to experience such pain. Take. Drink and remember that he went the full course until the Father said it was enough so that there would be nothing left for you to do. There is nothing further for you to accomplish. The gift was purchased on the cross and given to you in your Baptism. Salvation is already yours, free and clear.

Take. Drink. Remember. Look at the sponge that you were given tonight – a sponge not unlike the one from which Jesus received a drink on the cross, but remember that at the cross, our Lord also willingly drank the wine of the Father’s wrath down to its very dregs, and he did so for us – that we might enjoy the wine of his Father’s love. There is no cup of blessing without Jesus. He is the cup of blessing and from this cup come all blessings. Now enjoy. Let go of all your worldly wisdom and all your imaginary fears and enjoy. What more is there to do than to revel in the blessing Christ is pouring out on us? Have you got hardship and pain, sorrow and fear? Take. Drink! This is the New Promise in his blood and it heals every ill for he has conquered every evil. Come. Join him at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb and live redeemed forever in the glorious presence of the one who insured our salvation.