

“Sealed in Blood”

Matthew 26:17-30

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Blood covenants are not an entirely uncommon thing to see, though they have seemingly lost their significance in modern times. In Chapter 10 of the classic Mark Twain novel, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, Tom and Huck Finn witness a murder in the graveyard. Fearing for their lives if the murderer were to find out they were there, they swear an oath of secrecy about the event. They solidify the oath by becoming blood brothers, marking their commitment to keep silent. A covenant in blood is established as they each hold it as ironclad should anyone come asking about the events of that day. Their commitment to one another is so strong that they are willing to suffer pain and death rather than betray the blood covenant they have established with one another.

It’s a frequent theme throughout the Old Testament, as well. In Genesis 17, God’s covenant with Abraham is sealed in blood through circumcision. Moses threw blood upon the people at Sinai in Exodus 24, saying, “Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you.” When the priest went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he sprinkled the blood of the sin offering over the mercy seat of the Ark, atoning for the transgressions of the people (Lev. 16). There is strength in blood, and it is the thing that binds God to His people. Moses records the command of the Lord in Deuteronomy 12:23, “the blood is the life,” and the life of the people is the Lord Himself. So, when Jesus makes a new covenant in His blood as He sits at the Passover table with His Apostles, He is fulfilling the life that is in the blood. By making a new covenant, sealed in blood, He is giving them new life as those who have been redeemed by His blood.

That new covenant was necessary for the world to be redeemed, because sinful man messed up the first one so conclusively. The first covenant made with Adam was that the Lord would sustain and keep him, providing all that he needs to live on the earth, even giving him dominion over the creation. But Satan would have none of that. Through the woman God gave to Adam, the evil one tempted them to believe that they didn’t need God’s provision in order to live in the world. If they only did the one thing He said they couldn’t, then their eyes would be opened to their own ability to take care of themselves. That truly is the most evil thing that the serpent did: turning the man and the woman from reliance on God to reliance upon their own capabilities to care for themselves.

And that same evil still persists throughout the world today. “If you just believe in yourself, you can accomplish anything!” It’s a motivational tag line that is used all over the place. All are guilty of it as sinners. You want to encourage your children and so you tell them they can accomplish anything if they just try hard enough. You know that if you just put in a few more hours at work this week, you’ll do enough to make that promotion. If you pray enough, feel bad enough about your sins, and try to outweigh the bad with enough good, then God will have no choice but to forgive you. It’s a dangerous and slippery slope, and one that your sinful flesh doesn’t want to allow you to stop sliding down. Because it turns everything inward toward itself. You become the agent of everything that happens in your life instead of the one who made you and provides for you.

The Lord knows the proclivity of your sinful flesh to want to please itself and ignore Him. He knew that for the people in our Old Testament lesson, too. After giving them the instructions for the Passover meal, He knew they would be tempted to believe that their successful completion of His command was their own doing and not His. So, He reminds them in the close of verse 11, “It is the Lord’s Passover.” This is His meal, and His promise, not theirs. And the same is true of the forgiveness He comes here to bring you in the Holy Supper of His Son’s body and blood. The Passover lamb of which the people of Israel ate was not truly without blemish, because it was of the sinful world, but it pointed to the true Passover Lamb. Jesus is without spot or blemish, because He alone can be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the world.

And only by His sacrifice is there any hope of salvation for those in the world. No amount of working toward holiness or seeking out righteousness by the Law will accomplish that. Only the truth of the Gospel of Christ has the power to save, as Paul says in Romans 1. There is no work to be done to close the gap, and there is no synergistic reality of the faith in which you need to respond in order for it to work. Faith is a gift, as is the forgiveness it receives on your behalf. It is yours because of the death of Jesus, who gave up His body into death for the forgiveness of your sins, and shed His blood for the redemption of the world. It is that act of Christ that has made you holy and righteous in the sight of your Heavenly Father. You have been made “blood brothers” with Christ, been grafted into the covenant He made with Abraham, and this only by the washing of your robes in the blood of His righteousness.

You are poor, miserable sinners in need of a Savior, and He has gone to the cross to be just that. When He says to the disciples in our text this evening, “My time is at hand,” that is what He means. It is time for the new covenant in His blood to be inaugurated, and He does so in an intimate and glorious meal that is indeed the Last

Supper. It is the Last Supper He will share with His disciples before He goes to His death on Calvary, but it is also the last Passover meal. He is the Passover Lamb, and the new covenant ushers in a new meal where the Lamb's body and blood are "instituted by Christ himself for us Christians to eat and drink." He gives it to His brothers in the upper room, and He gives it to you, His brothers, that have been adopted into His family in Baptism.

And as Paul adjures in our Epistle lesson, you must acknowledge that truth. "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself." It is not a mere symbol, or a representation of what Christ has done for the world. The body and blood of the Lamb who was slain is present here because He says that it is present in His meal. The Sacrament of the Altar is the Lord's meal, just as the Passover was His Passover. And that is both a condemnation of the false doctrines of the Supper, and a joy to those who gather here at His table. It is His meal, and so no one has the right to dictate what it is save for the Lord Himself, which He has clearly done for us in Holy Scripture. But also, your worthiness, or rather lack thereof, plays no part in what He does here for you, and therein lies the joy for the believer who has examined themselves and discerned the truth. He has given His very body and blood, and it is here for the purpose of your salvation.

In the shedding of His holy, innocent, and precious blood, the Lord Jesus Christ has sealed the promise of eternal life for all those who believe in His atonement. His new covenant promised all the way back in Jeremiah 31 has been brought to its fulfillment in His crucifixion, and in His Holy Supper, He shares the benefit of His death with all who believe in Him. By His body and blood, you have been bought back from the bonds of sin, death, and the devil. At His table, He gives you that very body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins. He is present here with you just the same as He was with the Apostles as He instituted the means by which He would share His covenant with all generations. Jesus' presence here is real. His forgiveness is real, and the eternal life which is assured for you in your eating and drinking is real.

His new covenant promised in Jeremiah states, "For they shall all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more." That covenant has been realized in the person of Jesus, and the Lord has sealed it in blood as He sends His only begotten Son to the cross to be the propitiation for all sins. In a few moments you will come forward and receive the very blood with which your eternal salvation has been secured, partaking of the body of the Lamb who was slain as you eat and drink of the foretaste of the Lamb's High Feast. The whole host of heaven now eats of that very meal, and you too sit at the same

table, as the lines between heaven and earth are broken and the communion of saints surrounds you. The Supper you share with your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ today is the covenant of salvation in action for you.

The blood of your Savior has been shed and given for you so that forgiveness, life, and salvation would be yours, and that is exactly what you receive in this blessed Sacrament. What joy there is in such a meal! As our sermon hymn proclaimed moments ago, from Martin Luther:

Thy holy body into death was given,
Life to win for us in heaven.
No greater love than this to Thee could bind us;
May this feast thereof remind us!
O Lord, have mercy!
Lord, Thy kindness did so constrain Thee
That Thy blood should bless and sustain me.
All our debt Thou hast paid;
Peace with God once more is made:
O Lord, have mercy.

May this feast thereof remind us! Peace is yours by the blood which has blessed you according to the steadfast love and immeasurable kindness of the one true God. And because of that love, sealed in blood through His beloved Son, your debt has been paid, and mercy received. For the sake of the One who shed His blood for you, you will be welcomed into the house of your Heavenly Father. Jesus has won life for you in heaven, and in the Supper He gives you this day, you can be assured that you will dwell in His glory for all eternity. Amen.