

**Maundy Thursday Sermon**  
**The Best Meal You've Ever Had**  
**Text: Luke 22:7–20**

What's the best meal you've ever had? Of course, I'm going to say Spaghetti and meatballs but I also have come to love the duck at the TAI restaurant in Beverley Hills.

What criteria make a meal "the best" you ever had? Is it the food, the fellowship, the price? Tonight, may I suggest, will be served one of the best meals you ever had because it is a life-giving, life-renewing, life-changing meal that we could have over and over again.

This Passover meal became an expression of Christ's redeeming love in the New Covenant. Passover was the significant family meal in the covenant between God and his people. The Israelites were initially slaves in Egypt, living under the harsh treatment of the Pharaoh. Their cries went to the Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who sent Moses to deliver them. Pharaoh refused to let God's people go free.

Pharaoh depended on Egypt's gods to lead the country. By sending plagues that overpowered Egypt's so-called gods, the true God convinced Pharaoh to let God's people go. The final plague brought judgment on Egypt's god of life, Osiris or Ptah, as the almighty God sent the destroying angel throughout the land, killing the firstborn in each home.

God directed his people to hold a special meal centered in a lamb, whose blood was smeared on the door frame. When the destroyer saw the blood, he passed over the house. The people were protected by the blood of the lamb as a substitute for their lives. As a result of this catastrophic judgment on Egypt, Pharaoh let God's people go. The Israelites celebrated the Passover meal thereafter.

In our text Jesus gathers with his disciples in the Upper Room to celebrate the Passover meal. Jesus was ready for his exodus or departure.

During the meal, he “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.’” Matthew adds “for the forgiveness of sins.”

Jesus instituted a new Passover based on his self-sacrifice as the Passover Lamb. He ends the first covenant and establishes the new covenant promised for the new era. Just as the lamb’s blood served as a substitution for the death of the firstborn, so now Jesus’ blood substitutes for our death. We are set free from our bondage to sin, to malice, and to evil through the forgiveness he earned by taking judgment into his own body. Sin “lets us go,” that is, releases its stranglehold on us. We are free. We are rescued from death and given the certain hope of heaven.

Yes, Jesus *“institutes a Passover or Supper for you and me which we shall enjoy not only once a year, just upon this evening, but often, when and where [we] will, according to every one’s opportunity and necessity, bound to no place or appointed time”* (Triglotta, p 765).

We will eat a life-giving, life-changing meal tonight and every time we celebrate the new Passover.

A man was telling a friend that every time he and his wife argue, she gets “historical.” The friend interrupted and said, “Oh, you mean hysterical.” “No,” he responded, “I mean historical. She always brings in the past and holds it against me.” In this new Passover meal God does not get “historical.” He forgives and forgets our past, as far as the east is from the west. Our sins are forgiven in this meal.

This meal unites us with Jesus, the Messiah. Sadly, and to their detriment, many Christians neglect this meal.

But for those hungering and thirsting for righteousness, this is a meal of great benefit. Those who struggle with the old sinful nature, who need strength to handle broken relationships, and who seek the wisdom to make decisions are united with Christ through this meal.

When a person receives the bread and wine in Holy Communion, that person receives Jesus. As he said, “This is my body.” The heart of faith grasps the Word, which put in the benefit, and then takes out the benefit, namely, all that Christ is according to his Word. The mouth eats physically for the heart and the heart eats spiritually what the body eats physically, and thus both are saved and satisfied by one and the same food (Adapted from *What Luther Says*, comp. Ewald M. Plass [St. Louis: Concordia, 1959] 818).

This special meal, through which Jesus gives us himself, changes us into himself through faith.

This will be evident when the Lord returns and gives us resurrected spiritual bodies equipped to live forever in the new heavens and earth.

This meal, a life-giving, life-renewing, lifechanging meal is the best meal we will ever have because we are united with Christ Jesus in this Sacrament. God changes us through the power of the Word, but also in this meal he gives us his compassion, joy, peace, patience, kindness, moral goodness, sense of responsibility, humility, and self-control—all of which are life-giving, life-renewing, and life-changing. Fantastic!

This meal unites us with one another. Consider for a moment grains and grapes as a symbol of Christian fellowship. “For bread is made out of many grains, ground and mixed together. Out of the many bodies of grain comes one loaf of bread. In it the individual grain loses its body and form and assumes the common body of bread.

Likewise, the drops of wine lose their own form and become the body of one wine. Just so should and will it be with us if we use this Sacrament aright.

“Through the love of Christ we are to be changed and are to make the infirmities of all other Christians our own, take upon ourselves their form and needs, and let them have all the good we are able to give them that they may enjoy it. This is the real fellowship and the true significance of this Sacrament. In this way we are changed into one another and are brought into fellowship with one another by love. Without love no such transformation can take place” (*What Luther Says*, p 814).

Love comes from him and overpowers my attitudes. I am changed by this meal in my relationships and dealings with fellow Christians.

Through this meal our Lord fashions a fellowship that goes deeper and rises higher than any of human design.

“This fellowship consists in this, that all the spiritual possessions of Christ and his saints are shared with and become the common property of him who receives this sacrament. Again all sufferings and sins also become common property; and thus love engenders love in return and [mutual love] unites” (*Luther’s Works* 35: 51). When Jesus says do this in remembrance of me it is as though he were saying, “I am the Head, I will be the first to give himself for you. I will make your suffering and misfortune my own and will bear it for you, so that you in your turn may do the same for me and for one another, allowing all things to be common property, in me, and with me” (*Luther’s Works* 35:55).

Didn’t Jesus pray for us to be one in the high priestly prayer: “Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:21)? Nothing harms the witness of the church more than a church in conflict.



Yet in this feast of love we are united in our witness to this truth: the Father sent his Son to return us to himself as one fellowship.

Amen