

The Supper of the Lord: A Sermon Study on Mark 14:22–24

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[This is the sixth in a series of sermon studies on the 12 articles of the Formula of Concord. The Synod's Formula of Concord Anniversary Committee proposed the series to the homiletics department of the Seminary as a part of its planned observance of the anniversaries of the Formula of Concord and of the Book of Concord.]

Dr. Martin Luther and the Lutheran confessors of the sixteenth century did not regard the Lord's Supper as a mere ecclesiastical tradition or an optional custom. They treated it as a divine ordinance which is to continue in the church for all time. Our reason for mentioning this is that our text—like Matthew's account of the Last Supper—does not include the familiar words: "This do in remembrance of Me." Still, it is Scripture itself that attaches continuing importance to the Supper. St. Luke (22:15–20) and the Apostle Paul (1 Cor 11:23–25) make clear that the accounts of the Last Supper are of more than historical interest. Both quote the Savior as saying: τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. The Supper is of continuing importance, for the Lord has ordered its continuing use. That the church in Corinth understood it thus is evident from Paul's discussion of the abuses surrounding its observance in that city (1 Cor 10 and 11).

It did not occur to Luther and Lutherans that Luke and Paul were contradicting the other accounts or innovating. They operated with the principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. They understood that Luke and Paul included Jesus' words τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν to call attention to something that Matthew and Mark could assume *their* first readers were aware of. We may add that the continued observance of the Lord's Supper was not at issue in the writing of Article VII of the Formula of Concord.

What *was* at issue is stated in the Epitome: "Whether in the Holy Supper the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ are truly and essentially present, are distributed with the bread and wine, and received with the mouth by all those who use this Sacrament, whether they be worthy or unworthy, godly or ungodly, believing or unbelieving; by the believing for consolation and life, by the unbelieving for judgment" (FC, Epit. VII,2). The issue arose because the Zwinglians, who had rejected the Augsburg Confession's Article X "Of the Lord's Supper," were now trying to spread their error by appealing to the *Variata* (FC, Epit. VII,1). As we carefully examine the account according to Mark we will keep in mind the three questions of the *status controversiae*: *what is really present in the Holy Supper, by whom is it received, and with what effect?*

Mark's first words remind us of the setting in which the Savior instituted the Supper: καὶ ἔσθιόντων αὐτῶν. "While they were eating" the Passover Meal together for the last time, on the night of His betrayal, λαβὼν ἄρτον εὐλογήσας ἔκλασεν. The Nestle text omits Jesus as the subject, but there is no doubt that He is the subject. He took the unleavened bread and He blessed it. The wording of this blessing is not definitely known from any of the four accounts. It may have been a regularly used table prayer or a prayer customarily used in connection with the Passover Meal. Ἐκλάσεν, He broke the bread, because it was the accepted way of distributing it. And He distributed it: ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς.

The formulators took the view that the αὐτοῖς included Judas, who had not yet gone out into the night to do what Satan had put into his heart to do. According to this view, this impenitent man received what Jesus was distributing, although he obviously was not receiving anything "spiritually through faith" (FC, Epit. VII,4). As we shall see in the next paragraph, their rejection of such "spiritual" reception does not depend entirely on the exegesis which included Judas in the αὐτοῖς. To reject that exegesis, as many orthodox interpreters do, does not mean that the doctrinal point is lost or rejected.

Φάγετε, "eat," appears only in a few manuscript witnesses of Mark. However, the other accounts make clear that His purpose in distributing the bread was that they should eat it. What was it that Jesus distributed for eating? It was bread. But it was more: τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου: "This is My body." This most solemn occasion was not a time for allegories, figurative expressions, or tropes (FC Thor. Decl. VII,44–45). The fathers of the Formula said, "He who eats this bread eats the body of Christ," and "not only spiritually by faith, but also orally" (FC, Epit. VII,15). They thereby rejected the notion of "spiritual eating" which had been urged by the

subtle sacramentarians: “With them the word *spiritually* means nothing else than the Spirit of Christ or the power of the absent body of Christ and His merit, which is present; but the body of Christ is in no mode or way present except only above in the highest heaven, to which we should elevate ourselves into heaven by the thoughts of our faith...” (FC, Epit. VII,5). They pointed out that “Jesus Christ is...undivided and inseparable” (FC, Epit. VII,11); “that God’s right hand is *everywhere*, at which Christ is placed in deed and in truth according to His human nature” (FC, Epit. VII,14), and “that God has and knows of various modes of being in any place, and not only the one which philosophers call *localis*” (FC, Epit. VII,14). The subtle sacramentarians did not, like Zwingli, insist that ἐστίν must mean “represents.” They suggested rather that Christ is received “spiritually through faith but not bodily with the mouth,” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,6) and that “the body...of Christ (is) as far from the signs as the earth is distant from the highest heaven” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,2). “Since Christ gives this command at the table and at supper, there is no doubt that He speaks of real, natural, bread..., also of oral eating..., so that there can be no metaphor, that is, a change of meaning, in the word *bread*, as though the body of Christ were a spiritual bread or a spiritual food of souls. Likewise, also Christ Himself takes care that there be no metonymy either, that is, that in the same manner there be no change of meaning in the word *body*, and that He does not speak concerning a sign of His body, or concerning an emblem or figurative body, or concerning the virtue of His body and the benefits which He has earned by the sacrifice of His body, but of His true essential body” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII, 48). There *is* a spiritual eating (John 6:54) but this is nothing else than *faith*, “without which spiritual participation also the sacramental or oral eating in the Supper is not only not salutary, but even injurious and damning.” But this in no way excludes the *oral* or *sacramental* eating (FC, Thor. Decl. VII, 61–63).

In affirming that the body of Christ is “truly and essentially present..., distributed and received with the bread...” (FC, Epit. VII,6) they also repudiated the charge that the Lutheran teaching involved a “Capernaite” eating: “We hereby utterly condemn the Capernaite eating of the body of Christ, as though His flesh were rent with the teeth and digested like other food, which the Sacramentarians...wilfully force upon us, and in this way make our doctrine odious to their hearers” (FC, Epit. VII,42).

To express the doctrine that Christ’s body is truly present and eaten in the eating of the bread, the Lutherans used the term “sacramental union” (FC, Epit. VII,7) and treated it as analogous to the divine-human union in the Incarnation. Referring to John 1:14; Colossians 2:9; Acts 10:38; and 2 Corinthians 5:19, they recalled that “the divine essence is not changed into the human nature, but the two natures, unchanged, are personally united...” (FC, Thor. Decl. VIII,36). They carefully added that the sacramental union is *not exactly* like the personal union of the natures in Christ. Rather, it is the sacramental union of “the true natural bread and the true natural body of Christ..., present together here upon earth in the appointed administration of the Sacrament” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,38). The analogy does not, of course, establish the doctrine. It illustrates it. In fact, neither teaching is comprehensible to human reason. Yet, each is taught by Holy Scripture. Rather than ask “how?” and attempt to find answers that will satisfy our philosophical or scientific sensibilities, we ought to be like Abraham, who “gave God the honor of truth” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII, 46). We “are simply to *believe* with all humility and obedience the plain, firm, clear, and solemn words and command of our Creator and Redeemer...” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,47).

Lutherans, with Luther, see the close relationship between this doctrine and the doctrine of Christ’s Person, the omnipresence of God (and thus of His right hand), the veracity of God’s Word, the fact that God is not limited by philosophical concepts (locality) but “has and knows of many modes of being in any place.” These modes of being anywhere include the “comprehensible,” which He used during His ministry and “can still use whenever He will, as He did after the resurrection and will use at the last day.” According to this mode He is not with us now, but has left this world and has returned to the Father. The “incomprehensible, spiritual mode...He used when He rose from the closed sepulcher, and passed through the closed door, *and in the bread and wine in the Holy Supper* (emphasis mine), and as it is believed, when He was born of His mother.” We attribute to Him “the divine heavenly mode, since He is one person with God.” Now God is both transcendent and immanent, and Christ (who is one person with God) is as far outside all creatures and as deep within all creatures as God is. We do not understand the unity or transcendence or the immanence. Yet they are true, and

“we should not deny His word” concerning His Real Presence in the Holy Supper (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,93–103). “God’s Word is not false, and does not deceive” (FC, Epit. VII,13). “As in all other articles of faith our reason is brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and this mystery is not apprehended otherwise than by faith alone, and revealed in the Word alone” (FC, Epit. VII,42).

Although transubstantiation was not at issue among Lutherans or other Protestants, the Formula takes care to exclude that papistic doctrine with its distinction between qualities and essence (*accidentia* and *subiecta*). In fact, that is what the words “in, with and under” are to prevent (FC, Epit. VII,21–22 and Thor. Decl. VII,35). Likewise, the reservation and adoration of the external visible elements were explicitly rejected (FC, Epit. VII,24 and Thor. Decl. VII,108). The Roman teaching that the Supper is a sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead is also excluded (FC, Epit.23 and Thor. Decl. VII, 109).

The Lutheran doctrine of the Real Presence in the Sacrament, with the oral reception of Christ’s body in, with, and under the bread, is not a *novum*. “The chief ancient teachers of the Church: Chrysostom, Cyprian, Leo I, Gregory, Ambrose, Augustine unanimously testify” to this (FC, Epit. VII,15). The earlier Lutheran confessions (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,9–11, 17, 20) and Luther’s own writings (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,28–33) also taught this doctrine in a clear manner.

Proceeding to verse 23 of our text we read και λαβὼν ποτήριον, “and taking the cup.” The Passover cup contained wine made from grapes, and its contents were not at issue among the Sacramentarians. Jesus gave thanks for the cup with its contents: εὐχαριστήσας. As with the εὐλογήσας of verse 22, we do not know the words of this thanksgiving. Quite evidently, then, the words of blessing and thanksgiving are not of the essence in the church’s continuing celebration of this feast. They cannot be included in the “This do” because we simply do not know what they were.

As noted above in connection with verse 22, the formulators believed that αὐτοῖς included Judas. They also believed that πάντες in verse 23 makes it clear that he did participate. On this basis they concluded that “not only the godly, pious, and believing Christians, but also unworthy, godless hypocrites, as Judas and his ilk who have no spiritual communion with Christ and go to the Table of the Lord without true repentance and conversion to God, also receive orally in the Sacrament the true body and blood of Christ, and by their unworthy eating and drinking grievously sin against the body and blood of Christ... 1 Corinthians 11:27” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,60).

As in the case of the eating we are reminded that both Luke (22:15–20) and Paul (1 Cor 11:23–25) record the Savior’s instruction that this observance is to continue in the life of the church. The πάντες should have prevented the Roman practice of withholding the cup from the laity (FC, Epit. VII,24 and Thor. Decl. VII,110). Likewise “the words of the institution of Christ should in no way be omitted but should be publicly recited, as it is written 1 Corinthians 10:16—‘The cup of blessing which we bless, etc.’ This blessing occurs through the recitation of *the words* of Christ” (FC, Epit. VII,9). And, “we believe, teach, and confess that no work of man or recitation of the minister produces this presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, but that this is to be ascribed only and alone to the almighty power of our Lord Jesus Christ” (FC, Epit. VII,8). “Not the word or work of any man produces the true presence of the body and blood of Christ in the Supper, whether it be the merit or recitation of the minister, or the eating and drinking or faith of the communicants; but all this should be ascribed alone to the power of Almighty God and the word, institution, and ordination of our Lord Jesus Christ” (FC, Epit. VII,74, 89).

Since we do not know with any certainty what Jesus’ words of blessing and thanksgiving were, we cannot appeal to them to prove anything. We *do* know what the words of distribution were. We know that with those words He distributed His body and blood under the bread and wine. We know that by the power of those words (that Word) He still is present to give Himself to us in the eating and drinking. But neither the texts (the Evangelists and Paul) nor the Confession fix a time outside the distribution and reception for the “moment” of the Presence. We should not do so either. In the eating and drinking we are dealing with the certainties of His Word. Before and after the distribution and eating we can speak only on the basis of surmise and conjecture, and there is nothing we can say with authority.

Και εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου. What was said concerning the Real Presence in connection with τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ σῶμά μου applies here, and the confessors' exposition of the latter included their understanding of the former. This unmistakable expression τοῦτό ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου also obviates any misunderstanding of the idiom used by Luke and Paul: Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ ἡ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι (1 Cor 11:25) and Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ ἡ διαθήκη ἐν τῷ αἵματί μου (Lk 22:20). Not only is the covenant established in connection with His blood; the blood of the covenant is proffered with the cup: "There is no doubt that also concerning the other part of the Sacrament these words of Luke and Paul: *This cup is the new testament in my blood*, can have no other meaning than that which St. Matthew and St. Mark give: This is My blood of the new testament..." (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,53).

What is the διαθήκη? In classical and Hellenistic Greek it most commonly means a last will and testament. There may be some echo of that meaning in the account of the Last Supper. But in LXX διαθήκη was regularly used to translate תְּרִבָּה. Because neither this study nor a sermon on this text is to serve as an exhaustive essay on διαθήκη, let this summary from Kittel suffice: "Neither 'covenant' nor 'testament' reproduces the true religious sense of the religious term διαθήκη in the Greek Bible. Διαθήκη is from first to last the 'disposition' of God, the mighty declaration of the sovereign will of God in history, by which He orders the relation between Himself and man according to His own saving purpose, and which carries with it the authoritative divine ordering, the one order of things which is in accordance with it... We are dealing with a one-sided disposition of grace" (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, transl. & ed. Geoffrey Bromiley [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmanns, 1964], vol. II, pp 133f).

At Exodus 24:8 (LXX) the expression τὸ αἷμα τῆς διαθήκης appears in connection with the ceremony which ratified the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai: "So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people and said, 'Behold, the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words'" (NASB). There the blood of the covenant is the sign that the LORD has bound Himself to keep the covenant. Likewise in Zechariah 9:11 we read: "Because of the blood of My covenant with you, I have set your prisoners free from the waterless pit" (NASB). This is an expression of His faithfulness and it appears in a strong Messianic context: "Behold thy King cometh unto thee" (Zech 9:9). Isaiah 42:6 and 49:8 actually identify the Messiah and the covenant. When that Messiah—Jesus—speaks of "My blood of the covenant" that is a strong reminder to us that God's gracious disposition to us does not change. It is an effective means to strengthen our faith. His initiative established the covenant relationship. His grace maintains it. His blood of the covenant is the seal of His gracious disposition. That blood was shed for the forgiveness of sins, and in giving it to us He gives us forgiveness.

Following the preponderance of manuscript evidence, the Nestle text does not include the modifier καινή with διαθήκη. The variant can easily be accounted for by its occurrence in Luke and Paul. That something *new* is involved is obvious from the occasion. Never before has the God of the Covenant connected the death of His Son with His gracious disposition. *Prophetically* that connection has been made (e.g., Isaiah 53), but *actually* it has not occurred until now. God has always been graciously disposed toward mankind, but the blood of *beasts* has been the sign of that disposition until now.

Like the blood of beasts in the Old Testament, the blood of Jesus is poured out. It is that blood τὸ ἐκχυννόμενον ὑπὲρ πολλῶν. The inevitability of the cross was in those words as Jesus spoke them. He was not talking about heaven and glory in connection with the testament, but of Calvary and death. The pouring out of blood over (ὑπὲρ) the many reminds us of the ceremonial pouring referred to above (Ex 24:8). But now it is *His* blood that will be shed and *His* blood that will be the sign of God's gracious disposition. But the concept of the pouring out of blood reminds us also of Hebrews 9:22, where we are told that "without αἱματεκχυσίας there is no remission." And it reminds us that LXX regularly used ἐκχέω (of which ἐκχυννόμενον is the passive participle) or προσχέω for the ceremonial use of blood at the altar of sacrifice (Ex 24:6; 29:12; Lv 1:5,11; 4:7,18,25,30,34; 8:15; 9:9,12). Jesus' choice of words is making clear that His death will be a sacrifice for the remission of sins.

Πολλῶν tells us that it will avail for many. The word "many" certainly informs the disciples that Christ's sacrifice will be intended for and extend to more than their immediate circle. But *how inclusive* will the

circle be? For *how many* was His blood poured out? The literal Greek reading of πολλοί here is “many.” We do not even have οἱ πολλοί, “the many.” But it is possible to understand πολλοί in the Semitic sense of “the many who cannot be counted,” “the totality which embraces many individuals” (Kittel, *op.cit.*, vol. VI, pp 536 ff). That the teaching of a universal sacrifice does not depend entirely on this linguistic argument is clear from 1 Timothy 2:6—ὁ δοῦς ἑαυτὸν ἀντίλυτρον ὑποὶ πάντων.

That, of course, is pure gospel. It is unconditioned good news. Christ for all is Christ for me! Christ’s blood for all is Christ’s blood for me. It is this gospel that makes the Sacrament a means of grace. Like the gospel preached, so the gospel in the Lord’s Supper announces the forgiveness of sins. It creates and renews and strengthens faith. And it can be rejected.

It is this understanding of the Sacrament as the gospel in another form that underlies the Formula’s discussion of worthy and unworthy recipients. “All the worthiness of the guests of this heavenly feast is and consists in the most holy obedience and perfect merit of Christ alone, which we appropriate to ourselves by true faith, and whereof we are assured by the Sacrament, and not at all in our virtues or inward and outward preparations” (FC, Epit. VII,20). “And worthiness does not depend upon great or small weakness or strength of faith, but upon the merit of Christ” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII,71). “(We reject) the teaching that worthiness consists not only in true faith, but in man’s own preparation. Likewise, the teaching that even true believers...who lack the said sufficient preparation of their own, could, just as the unworthy guests, receive this Sacrament to condemnation” (FC, Thor. Decl. VII, 124,215).

Conversely, “there is only one kind of unworthy guests, namely, those who do not believe, concerning whom it is written, John 3:18, ‘He that believeth not is condemned already.’ And this judgment becomes greater and more grievous being aggravated by the unworthy use of the Holy Supper, 1 Corinthians 11:21” (FC, Epit. VII,18, cf. also Thor. Decl. VII,68). “Also the unworthy and unbelievers receive the true body and blood of Christ; however, not for life and consolation, but for judgment and condemnation, if they are not converted and do not repent, 1 Corinthians 11:27, 29” (FC, Epit. VII,16, cf. also Epit. VII,17).

Here is an attempt, in the form of a detailed sermon outline, to answer the questions which the Formula was written to answer.

The Supper of the Lord

I. The nature of this Supper

A. It is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1. That is what His words say.
2. It was not a night for riddles, parables, figures of speech.
3. “Truly” and “orally” body and blood are present and received.
 - a) Not representationally, as the Zwinglians taught
 - b) Not only spiritually by faith, as the Sacramentarians taught (and Calvinists teach)
 NB: There *is* a spiritual eating (John 6:54) but this is nothing else than faith.
4. Faith does not put them there but finds them there.

B. Under the bread and wine

1. “While they were eating” Jesus distributed bread; “taking the cup”—whose contents were not at issue in the 16th century—He distributed the wine.
2. No transsubstantiation took place.
3. There was (and is) rather a sacramental union. This is analogous to the divine-human union of the Incarnation: not a change but a union. This does not establish the doctrine but illustrates it. Neither doctrine is comprehensible to human reason, but each is scriptural.
4. We do not ask “how?” but “give God the honor of truth.”

C. For us Christians to eat and to drink

1. That this is to continue in the church for all time is clear from Luke 22:15–20 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–25.
 2. There is nothing in Jesus’ instructions concerning the reserving and/or adoring of these elements.
 3. This eating and drinking are not to be understood Capernaitically, a view falsely attributed to us by others.
- II. The recipients of this Supper
- A. It is intended for us Christians.
 1. The gathering of *His disciples* in the upper room
 2. The breaking of the bread is for distribution to the disciples and the “all” should prevent the withholding of the cup from the laity.
 3. His disciples recognize one another by confessing all the apostles’ teaching with all the apostles: close communion.
 - B. But *all* recipients receive Christ’s body and blood.
 1. This would include the impenitent (1 Cor 11:27–29).
 2. This is not a Lutheran invention, but the doctrine of the ancient church, revealed in Scripture.
 3. The Real Presence does not depend on the word or work of man, the merit or faith of any communicant, but only on Christ’s Word of power.
- III. The benefit of this Supper
- A. “Given and shed” is gospel.
 1. Jesus was speaking of Calvary and death, and the shedding (pouring out) had already begun (perfect tense).
 2. The blood is the sign and seal of the covenant: God’s one-sided disposition of grace, His saving purpose. (Ex 24:8 and Zch 9:9–11).
 3. Not the blood of beasts, but His blood is given as a sacrifice for the remission of sins (He 9:22 and Is 53).
 4. This was done for the uncounted totality of the human race (1 Tm 2:6).
 - B. As gospel it creates and strengthens faith.
 1. Not a sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead.
 2. “Given for you” and “My blood of the covenant” are strong reminders that God’s grace avails and prevails.
 3. *He* is there, and so forgiveness, life and salvation are there.
 - C. The blessing is received by faith.
 1. Not any preparation on our part, but faith alone—small or great—in the merit of Christ.
 2. The gospel in this Sacrament can be rejected.
 - a) Hypocrisy, impenitence, and unbelief are sins against the body and blood of Christ.
 - b) *Without* faith the sacramental or oral eating in the Supper is not salutary but even injurious and damning.
 3. Faith *finds* Christ, His body and blood, and His salvation in this Supper.