

“The New and Better Covenant”

Jeremiah 31:31-34

During this Lenten Season, we have focused our attention on the person of Jesus, the humanity of the Son of God – Behold the man. We have seen the mercy and promise of salvation in the Son of God who came in flesh and blood to be the Second Adam and fulfill God’s promise to the First Adam that He would crush the head of Satan.

Throughout the Old Testament, God kept revealing more and more of the plan, and even though the full flowering of the plan was not fully revealed to the Patriarchs like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, God assured them that “their faith was credited to them as righteousness.” The plan has not changed along the way. Through the prophet Jeremiah, God sums up His promise that is already in place but will be more fully revealed in the new covenant: “I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

Even though they often stumbled and struggled, for the most part, those Old Testament saints experienced a full and rich relationship with God. However, they did not see the complete fulfillment of the promises made.

They only experienced a foreshadowing of a greater reality.

Tonight, we experience the greater reality of the Passover lamb who was sacrificed so that God's people would not suffer death. It is a shame that the word gets translated "Passover", because the actual word is "Pasca" which means "suffering." The suffering lamb's blood was shed and put on the homes of the people to free them from God's judgment of death.

It was on Passover (Pasca) that Jesus broke bread with His disciples and broadened the understanding of that meal. He took the Matzoh, the unleavened bread, and (most likely) the third cup of wine that is passed around during the Passover meal – which is the cup representing God's promise to redeem His people, and He says, "This is my body given for you...This is my blood of the covenant shed for you."

The suffering Lamb sheds His blood and offers it to the people of God to free them from the guilt of their sin and God's judgment of death. God's plan does not change along the way. Throughout the Old Testament, the promise made to Adam of the "Seed of the woman" – that is, the Messiah, the Son of God, would be a man. He would be the final Passover Lamb, the Pasca Lamb, the Lamb of the Passion, the Lamb of suffering. The promise of the Gospel moves seamlessly into the New Testament and the coming of Christ, the coming of the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. God's plan never changed.

Throughout this season of Lent and certainly during Holy Week (Passion Week), the mercy and promises of God's plan are revealed more and more. But the plan has never changed.

Jesus ate and drank with His disciples that night in the upper room, and a new and better covenant was established with the 12. There is this seamless connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament. God has always been consistent in dealing with His people.

In Exodus 24, we read about God establishing the Old Covenant with His people. He gathers with Moses, Aaron and the seventy elders of Israel as representatives of the 12 tribes. Moses records, "They saw God, and ate and drank."

But there is more similarity than just the fact that a meal took place as both covenants were established. There is also something else which is present at both – blood. There is no covenant without the shedding of blood. There is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood.

Blood is life. Sacrifice, by definition, entails suffering, Pascha, some sort of loss. Making a true sacrifice involves more than offering your leftovers or table scraps. Giving that which you don't need is not sacrificial giving. Payment for the sins of the people required a real sacrifice – real blood.

The forgiveness of sins is not cheap, but for us it is free. Christ paid

the price for us with a real broken body and real shed blood. His sacrifice was not a symbolic gesture. And when we partake of the Sacrament of the Altar, as St. Paul says, there is a real participation in the body and blood of Christ. This is not some symbolic gesture.

As we all learned in our confirmation classes, through a Sacramental Union (one which we certainly do not fully understand, yet we know is the truth), through a Sacramental Union, the body and blood of Christ is present in the bread and wine, with the bread and wine (the bread and wine are still also present), and the body and blood are present under the form of bread and wine.

These truths Luther explains succinctly in his “in, with, and under” statement in the Catechism.

Tonight, as you leave and prepare for the coming events of this week – Good Friday and Easter. Know that, like the disciples, we have a real connection also with Abraham, and Jeremiah, and Moses and the 70 elders on Mt. Sinai, but with a greater understanding as we have seen the full flowering of the promise of the Messiah. There is a new covenant which has been established in the blood of Christ. “We saw God and we ate and we drank.” And He has forgiven your iniquity and He will remember your sin no more. Amen.