Many games run on the principle of passing it on. Think of a relay race. A runner runs her leg of the race as fast as she can. She approaches the next runner and carefully passes on the baton. Woe to the runner who drops the baton! The game of football has one goal in mind: advance the football over the goal line. One of the fastest ways to move the ball forward is for the quarterback to pass the ball. Woe to the receiver who drops the pass! Or think of children’s simple game of tag at recess. One child passes on the dreaded disease of You’re it until the one who is IT can pass the IT on.

Tonight, St Paul is going to Pass it on, but he is not playing games. What he passes on is as serious as the truth of Scripture and as precious as the person of Jesus Christ! Did you catch Paul’s passing of the baton of truth? I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed. Paul received the truths of the Lord’s Supper from Jesus. Paul handed those exact truths on to the Corinthians. Tonight, the relay continues. What Paul received from Jesus and passed on to the Corinthians is what I hope to hand off to you. As we prepare to celebrate a most sacred meal, the Lenten encouragement to repent - to turn in faith to Jesus - continues. Let’s: TURN TO JESUS AND RECEIVE A SPECIAL ASSURANCE OF YOUR FORGIVENESS.

If there ever was a church that needed of a refresher course on the celebration of Holy Communion, it was the Corinthians. They had by and large botched their celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Instead of a feast of salvation, the Corinthians had turned it into a celebration of self-indulgence. Just before our text, Paul went so far as to say that the Corinthians were no longer celebrating the Lord’s Supper. They were celebrating, just not what Christ had instituted. Their consistent misuse of the Lord’s Supper left them feasting at a buffet of drunkenness and debauchery.

Drunk at the Lord’s Supper? How did that happen? In the Corinthian congregation, it seems that there was a regular meal called an agape feast, a love feast. This meal was either included or immediately followed by a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. About the closest thing we could equate this to would be to have a Maundy Thursday potluck supper with PLENTY of wine flowing in the church basement before coming upstairs to celebrate Holy Communion.

Drunkenness was not the Corinthians’ only issue. Some were using terrible manners - cutting in line, elbowing others out in an effort to look out for number one. Others viewed the Lord’s Supper as an Old Country Buffet - an opportunity to cure a hungry stomach.

The abuse that topped the list, however, was the matter of divisions: some of the rich wanted nothing to do with the poor; some people followed Paul, others followed Apollos; some preferred Peter, still others boasted about their dedication to Christ. Instead of celebrating Holy Communion, they were celebrating an unholy disunion. Instead of a wonderful unity rooted in God’s Word, they were squaring off into petty factions. They were sanctifying their lovelessness and self-indulgence before the Lord’s altar! It is no wonder that we read toward the end of chapter 11: That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. The Lord’s Supper had become the Corinthians’ Supper - and they were not blessed because of it. They were sinning spiritually and suffering bodily.

How did Paul handle the drunken debacle that the Corinthians were mistaking for Holy Communion? He turned them back to a proper use of the Lord’s Supper by returning them to the clear words of Jesus: I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me. In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. With the clear words of Jesus, Paul called them to turn aside from man-made agendas and appetites. He reminded them it is Lord’s Supper, not theirs. It is a gracious gift from God, not something for man to tinker with. This supper proclaims
Christ's sacrifice for you, not another opportunity to cut loose with friends.

The Lord's Supper is Christ's gift to us. In his Supper, Jesus gives us a gift that keeps on giving. He blesses unworthy sinners with the gift of himself - in a most wonderful way! Jesus' Word assures us that when we receive the bread and wine, we also receive his true body and blood for the personal forgiveness of all our sins. Jesus says: This is my body and this is my blood. Jesus' body and blood are really present in, with, and under the bread and wine. How can the body and blood of Jesus be present? I have no idea. How can we be certain that Jesus' body and blood are present? Because the Son of God, who does not and cannot lie, promises it! The Son of God, with whom all things are possible, provides it! In other words, do not let your brain get beyond you tonight. The Lord's Supper is not given for your logical speculation or scientific investigation. The Lord's Supper is given for your comfort!

And we need Jesus' comfort! You come tonight as you are. You come with sins of youth and sins stockpiled in life's closet, sins open and sins secret, little sins and big sins, sins accidental and sins willful, sins ugly and sins awful. You come as you are - sinful from birth and by nature separated from God! And in spite of all of that, Jesus comes as he is tonight - the friend of sinners, the Savior of sinners. He comes to you tonight in mouth and soul to make you whole!

Turn to Jesus tonight for a special assurance of your forgiveness. Know for certain that just as surely as you stand before the Lord's altar, just as surely as your ears hear the words of Jesus' institution, just as surely as your tongue tastes the bread and your lips sip the wine, so surely do you receive the body and blood of Jesus - the body and blood given upon the cross to save you from all your sins. There is no more personal, no more intimate way of bringing Christ's forgiveness to us as individuals than his Holy Supper. Jesus deliberately gives sinners the gift of himself! And where there is Jesus - there we have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through him!

Such a gift! That is why Satan works hard and long to get people to drop the baton when it comes to the Lord's Supper. The objections to Jesus' body and blood being truly present with the bread and wine are legion. Every one of these objections comes from people's brains working too hard instead of simply trusting in Jesus' promise with childlike faith. Some of the more popular objections include the following:

- But IS does not mean IS. What Jesus actually means is This represents my body. The only problem is that throughout the world, in every language, IS always means IS. Jesus would have used another word if he meant represents.

- Others say: But how can Jesus' body and blood be in more than one place at once? The answer is: This is not the body of a sinful man. This is the very body of the Son of God - the same body that walked on water and through walls!

- Others challenge: But what good can physical eating and drinking do for the soul? Jesus answers: This is my body and blood given for the forgiveness of all your sins.

- Others try to do the math: But how can Jesus give us body and blood, bread and wine all at the same time? Answer: How did God create the universe in six days? How can God be Father, Son and Holy Spirit - yet only one God? How can Jesus be true God and true man in one person? The answer: With God, all things are possible.

This evening, Jesus gives us his body and blood for our forgiveness and our strengthening. Let us praise him for it! Jesus deliberately gives his children the gift of himself!

Such a great blessing needs to be treated reverently and responsibly. It is that way with anything in life. We purchase a new car - a wonderful blessing. That car needs to be taken care of. The Lord blesses us with a child. That child needs to be fed, educated, and trained in the Word. The Lord blesses us with a husband or wife. Our spouse requires our total commitment and loving care. Blessings carry responsibilities. So it is with the awesome blessing of the Lord's Supper: It needs to be received reverently and used responsibly - in a word, faithfully.

Paul concludes: So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an
unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. Because Jesus' body and blood are really present in this meal, we need to make sure that we are partaking of the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner. We do not want to run the risk of sinning against the very body and blood that is given to save us!

What does **unworthy manner** mean? First of all, let us be clear on what it does not mean! The Bible does not say: **Whoever is unworthy will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.** Over the years, I have spoken with several brothers and sisters who were refraining from Holy Communion because of something they had done. Their guilt made them feel **unworthy** to receive the Lord’s Supper. I reminded them that this is the meal in which they receive Jesus’ forgiveness precisely for what is ailing their conscience! Jesus’ body and blood pays for that sin that makes them feel so badly! The Bible is not talking about unworthy people. If we needed to wait until we were worthy to receive the Lord’s Supper, no one would ever receive it. No pastor would ever be worthy enough to administer it.

Paul is not writing about unworthy people. He is writing about an unworthy manner. The word **unworthy** originally meant **a scale or balance.** The word also was used to denote **something that equals another thing.** In other words: Let our use of the Lord’s Supper be equivalent to what the Supper really is. The Lord’s Supper’s for my forgiveness; therefore I need to recognize my need for forgiveness. The Supper is the Lord’s Supper; therefore, I dare not treat it like it is mine alone. In the Supper, we receive Christ’s body and blood; therefore, in simple faith, we rejoice in Jesus’ real presence, rather than rationalize it away. A worthy, faith-filled reception of the Lord's Supper is one that simply takes God’s Word on the matter of what Holy Communion is, gives, and means.

A faithful receiving of the Lord’s Supper means that we will examine ourselves before receiving the Supper. That has behind it the idea of testing something to see if it is genuine or not. So we need to examine ourselves to make sure that our reasons for receiving the Lord’s body and blood are genuine and biblical. Test yourself by asking the following questions:

- Do I have sin? Yes!
- Do I desire the Lord’s forgiveness? Yes!
- Does Jesus offer me his forgiveness in his Supper? Yes!
- Do I believe that Jesus’ body and blood are truly present in this meal? Yes!
- Do I find myself united in mind and heart with what this body of believers believes and teaches? Yes!

Now what? Receive the gift of the Lord’s Supper, the food of Christ’s forgiveness! He instituted it for you, just as surely as he lived for you, died for you, and lives again for you!

Brothers and sisters, the Lord has passed on an awesome treasure to you this evening. He deliberately gives us himself when he blesses us with his body and blood. And so tonight, we turn again to Jesus for a special assurance of his forgiveness. This assurance is always yours, only through Jesus. Amen!

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