We have a picture of Last Supper hanging in our livingroom. Age has faded the picture and frame. If I had to guess, it is probably over 100 years old. It may not look that great, but it holds a lot of meaning to us. It was given to us a number of years ago by 100 year old shut-in who wanted us to have. When I see that picture, I think of Elsie and the love she had for her Savior. Why do we need gifts to remember people by? Can any of us ever forget the people we have treasured in our past? I hope not.

But one of the ironies of life is the human capacity to put the past in the past. I suppose it is necessary. We cannot spend our entire lives aching to see people we once knew and loved. Our brains are hardwired to move on.

Yet sometimes we want to recall those people and their love, even if it hurts to miss them. The gifts they have given us help bring back all that we knew and treasured about them. So that we might always treasure what Jesus has done for us, he gave us something to remember him by - the Lord’s Supper. Tonight, we hear Jesus tell us: **DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME.**

When someone close to us dies, we often receive possessions of theirs that we associate closely with that person. Sometimes we choose things that just fit - like that Last Supper picture in living room reminds us of Elsie – it has personal meaning for us. But sometimes you kind of scratch your head when you see the gift someone gives you.

That is not the case in the Lord’s Supper. We treasure the gift Jesus gave us. Jesus said: **Do this in remembrance of me.** What is the this? It is the eating bread and drinking wine. Jesus was not trying to remind his disciples of the good times they had had together. Jesus called the bread his body and the wine his blood. How would bread and wine symbolize Jesus’ body and blood?

The truth is, they would not. If Jesus were looking for a symbol for his body and blood, he could have chosen something more obvious, but Jesus chose bread and wine – two elements that were on the table in front of him as they celebrated the Passover meal.

However, the heart of the Passover was the lamb. At the first Passover, the blood of a lamb painted on the doorframe saved the lives of God’s people. The Passover meal commemorated that deliverance for the next 1,500 years until Jesus gave his own life and by his blood delivered the entire world from sin and death. So the meat of the lamb would have made a great symbol for the body of Jesus, the Lamb of God, but that is not what he chose for Communion. He chose the unleavened bread and the wine.

Why? With the bread it might be because in the Bible yeast often represents sin. Jesus came here as a man without sin, represented by bread without yeast. The wine perhaps recalls the spilling of his blood, because drops of wine are spilled at various points in the celebration of the Passover. But that is just guessing. God does not tell us why he chose bread and wine, but he does tell us what they really are.

Jesus said: **This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me and this cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.** Jesus put his real body and blood into Communion. Now that does not mean the bread and wine are gone. They are present too. But Jesus’ body and blood make this the perfect gift. And it is ours when we **do this.** In other words, when we eat the bread and drink the wine, we receive the real body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the real bread and wine.

Jesus gave this gift to us. St Paul says: **For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you.** When did Paul receive Communion from the Lord? Not on Maundy...
Thursday. Paul was not yet a disciple then. If he was in Jerusalem, he was eating with Pharisees. If he was thinking about Jesus at all, he was wishing the authorities’d do something about him. Yet Jesus personally passed this on to him. When?

After Jesus appeared to him on road to Damascus and made Paul a Christian, the Holy Spirit led Paul into the wilderness and for three years Jesus instructed him there. Jesus told Pauk what he had done in the upper room and he commanded Paul to pass this gift on to every church he founded. Jesus gave this gift to all Christians everywhere.

In our celebration tonight, we proclaim the Lord’s death. We proclaim that God became man. God the Son joined himself to a human body and soul so that he could die and rise again. We proclaim that, after living a life of perfect service to God, Jesus died to pay for all our sin. Three days later, he rose to give us eternal life. That life and death and life again are what Jesus gives us in this gift.

We will eat the bread and drink the cup and proclaim Jesus’ death until he comes. We will proclaim the forgiveness of sins and life in God’s name because when we eat and drink, we share the very body Jesus offered on the cross and the very blood that he spilt. We share the price God paid to free us from death and hell. We call this teaching real presence. Jesus’ body and blood are really present here in Communion. I cannot explain how, but Jesus tells us this is true. And he tells us to treasure this gift until he returns. Jesus said: Do this in remembrance of me. Communion is a real presence remembrance.

Not long before the grandmother of a young mother died, she gave the young mother a set of crystal dishes. One day, one of the young mother’s children knocked over the china cabinet holding the crystal and it was all destroyed. His mother cried when she lost those tokens of love. The Lord’s Supper is more than a token. It is more than just something by which to remember Jesus. It is the visible preaching of the gospel. It is the real body and blood of Christ given to us every time we kneel here.

What if someone abused that? The congregation in Corinth had been abusing the Lord’s Supper. Some of them were even getting drunk before they celebrated it. So Paul said: 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. Do those words send a chill up your spine? What does Paul mean by unworthy? Sin makes us unworthy - but Jesus has washed all our sin away – that is what the cross was all about. Only one thing makes us unworthy: unbelief. Only one thing makes us worthy: faith. If we trust in Jesus and in the promises he attaches to Communion, we are worthy. If we do not trust in Jesus, we are not worthy.

Practically speaking, that means an unbeliever cannot be a worthy communicant. He cannot trust in Jesus to make him perfect in God’s sight. In the same way, a Christian who is not repentant cannot be worthy. If you are guilty of sin and you refuse to confess your guilt or to turn from your sin, you are unworthy.

There is one more way to be unworthy. Paul says: Those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. If you do not recognize the body and blood of Christ in, with, and under the bread and wine - if you do not believe in the real presence - you do not receive the blessing God put into this sacrament. Instead, you receive judgment.

Jesus is present in this sacrament whether we believe it or not. We receive Jesus’ body and blood when we eat and drink whether we repent of our sins or not. If you receive the sacrament without faith or repentance, the Bible says that you receive judgment instead
of forgiveness, death instead of life. For that reason, it is a very dangerous thing to come to the Lord’s Table unprepared.

That is one reason why we practice **Close Communion.** We only admit those who can examine themselves. Paul says: **Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup.** What does that mean? In the hymnal, there is a section called **Personal Preparation For Holy Communion** (page 156) to help you do it. It basically comes down to three questions: Do you know you are a sinner? Do you trust that Jesus paid for your sin and rose to forgive you? Do you trust that his body and blood are in the bread and wine to give that forgiveness to you personally? If you answer, **Yes, Yes, Yes,** then you are worthy.

But what if I have not been worthy in the past? Am I going to hell? No. Did you receive judgment instead of blessing? Yes. But Jesus did not give us this gift to torture us with doubt and guilt. He died and paid for all our sin. He gave us Communion to comfort us and stifle the accusations our own hearts throw at us.

That is what it means to do this in remembrance of him. It means remembering that we are forgiven for all our sins, even for all the times we did not come to Communion in faith. It means hearing Jesus speak to us as we eat and drink. He says: **This is the new covenant.** He says: **This is for you.** That means he has taken away all our sins. Come, trusting in the forgiveness even of the sins that torment you most. Come, trusting in his promises and receive the blessing of the body and blood of our Lord. Jesus said: **Do this in remembrance of me.** Communion is a gospel remembrance.

Jesus put his body and his blood into bread and wine. It would be sad if we did not come regularly and receive that blessing. It would be sad if we ever forgot what Jesus said or failed to trust in his promise and so rob ourselves of this blessing.

This is a treasure from God. It is not like the treasures of this life. Sometimes we stop treasuring the gifts of love we have received. Sometimes, we find something we have not looked at in years and when we try to remember why we treasured it, it no longer moves us. That cannot happen with Communion because the power is not emotion. It is not nostalgia. The power is the body and blood of Christ given by Jesus’ Word and command to take our sins away. That gives us peace, no matter how unfaithful we may have been in the past. Do this in remembrance of Jesus. Amen.

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