

Maundy Thursday
Matthew 26:26-29 and John 19:30
Lenten Questions that Demand an Answer
Do You Know What I've Done, Sinner?

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Winchester, VA
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²⁶ While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

²⁷ Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. ²⁹ I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Matthew 26:26-29)

²⁹ A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips. ³⁰ When he had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

(John 19:29-30)

There wasn't much time left. As Jesus sat in the upper room with His disciples there was so much that He wanted to share with them. More than anything else, He wanted them to know how much He loved them. He wanted them to be able to share His love for them with each other. So He got up from the table went over and grabbed a towel which He tied around His waist and then picked up a basin of water and set to work washing their feet. It was menial work, a servant's job, and as Jesus made His way around the room I'm sure more than one of His disciples wondered just what he was doing. But it's not until He gets to Peter that we hear the baffled question, **Lord, are you going to wash my feet?** to which Jesus responded, **You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.**

For five weeks now, we've been devoting ourselves to different characters of the passion history and questions that need answers as we look at those characters. Our question tonight, addressed to sinful me and sinful you, is based on that statement from Jesus to Peter: **You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand.** For us, as we look back at the events of holy week with all the hindsight God has blessed us with, our Savior's question is *Do You Know What I've Done, Sinner?*

While washing His disciples' feet was a demonstration of Jesus' love for them, the greater demonstration would come the following day. It was clear to Jesus that His disciples, both past and present, needed more than just a foot washing. What they really needed was to have their souls cleansed from the guilt of their sins. That was something they couldn't do on their own and neither can we. And it was going to take much more than a towel and a basin of

water to wash away the mess of sin. To find how He brought us that kind of cleansing that brings peace for our souls, we have to fast forward a few hours.

We stop in front of a hill with three men hanging from crosses. In the middle, the very man whom we just saw washing His friends' feet and speaking of the future. But here He is dying, so evidently, we can write Him off, can't we? Well, hold on, not quite yet! You see, this man on the cross is speaking.

He's spoken before from the cross: words of forgiveness and love, promises for the future, words of commitment to His Father and to His Father's purpose. The rest of God's Word tells us what that purpose was: to save humanity from their sins, reconciling them to God so that—just as He had always willed—they might be His people and He their God.

We're told the sins of the entire world were laid on Jesus as He hung from the cross that Friday afternoon. But is it possible that He, one man, could bear the guilt of all those sins? Last Wednesday, we heard His mournful cry, **My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? (Mt 27:46)**. Tonight we heard His final answer: **It is finished**. He had done what the Father assigned. He had done it for us. As Isaiah so aptly summarizes it, **He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on Him, and by His wounds we are healed (Is 53:5)**. He accomplished the impossible task. He finished it for us.

But how can you be sure? The cross on which He won that victory has long since turned to rot and decay. The witnesses of that most important day died centuries ago. How can I, a sinner, be sure that what happened on that day was done for me? How does Jesus bring the fruits of what He accomplished to us today? He does it through His means of grace, the Gospel, which He presents to us in Word and in Sacrament.

Tonight, our Lord and God assures us that He wants us to receive what He has won for us; He wants us to know it, to believe it, and to rejoice in it. **While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to His disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is My body."**

Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

Our hindsight, knowing what took place at the cross at helps us to understand those words, but it doesn't make what's taking place any less a miracle. It will always be a miracle. With the bread He gives us His body; with the wine He gives us His blood.

If you doubt that statement of His, you would have to also doubt the other one too, "It is finished." But we have proof for that one because on the third day He rose again verifying that death had been overcome and sin had been defeated. And who are we to question that the one who has the power to destroy death would have power as well to give us His body and blood in this bread and wine?

But why would do it? What's the purpose? The key to understanding that is in the words He speaks when He gives us the bread and the wine. **Given for you.... Poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.** That's the blessing He's bringing us. When on the cross He said, **It is finished,** He had won for us and all men forgiveness of sins and pardon for all our guilt. And in this Sacrament He gives us that forgiveness and that pardon; He gives it to everyone who in faith partakes of His body and His blood. What we couldn't do for ourselves—what for us was an impossible task, that Jesus did on the cross and still today gives us the benefits of every time we commune at His table. Here, even as in Holy Baptism and His Holy Word of forgiveness, is the promised blessing: forgiveness from all sins and membership in His body. Through Him, and in Him we are made one with God because He has reconciled us to the Father. We are no longer lost sinners, but pardoned children of God.

And as great as that sounds, that's just the beginning. Don't forget the next part of what Jesus said that night: **I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.** Jesus looks beyond the cross, beyond His **It is finished,** beyond even our time here, to the ending that lasts forever, an eternity in His Father's kingdom. In this bread and in this wine—His body and His blood—we have the promise that this meal is but a foretaste of the great feast to come.

Jesus is with us tonight, in His Word and in His Sacrament asking, *Do You Know What I've Done, Sinner?* We can answer because He tells us in that same Word and Sacrament, "Yes, Lord, we know what You've done. You have brought to us tonight what you finished for us on the cross: forgiveness from our sins, and the pledge of everlasting life."

Brothers and sisters, rejoice today! Your sins are forgiven. Peace be with you. Amen.