

**The Festival of Maundy Thursday**  
20 March 2008  
*Concordia Lutheran Mission*  
Terrebonne, Oregon

## **“The Holy Communion Delivers to Christians the New Testament, namely God's Forgiveness of all Sins, in and with the Blood of Christ.”**

**“This cup is the New Testament in My blood ....”  
I Corinthians 11:25.**

### **Introduction**

What is the New Testament? The New Testament is exactly what Scripture says it is: The New Testament is the Holy Communion. For Jesus says, “This cup is the New Testament in My blood ....”<sup>1</sup>

But how can the New Testament be the Sacrament of Holy Communion? The New Testament is the Sacrament of Holy Communion because the Sacrament of Holy Communion delivers the remission of sins. Jesus says, “For this is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”<sup>2</sup>

And Scripture expressly states that the New Testament *is the remission of sins*. In Jeremiah the Lord says, “Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ... I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.”<sup>3</sup>

Jesus won this remission of sins through His Passion on the Cross. By His death, Jesus atoned for the sins of all men.

---

<sup>1</sup>**I Corinthians 11:25.**

<sup>2</sup>**St. Matthew 26:28.**

<sup>3</sup>**Jeremiah 31:31, 34.**

And in the Holy Communion Christ bequeaths to us the remission of sins He won for us by His Passion in and with something of inestimable value, His infinitely precious body and blood. Jesus says, “This cup *is* the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you.”<sup>4</sup>

The Holy Communion, then, is the New Testament, namely the remission of sins won for us by Jesus’ Passion on Calvary, in and with His blood for the remission of sins. And where there is remission of sins, there is life and salvation.<sup>5</sup>

## **I. The Holy Communion is the New Testament because the Holy Communion Conveys the Remission of Sins.**

### **A. The New Testament is the remission of sins.**

We frequently hear the name “New Testament”. But what does that name New Testament mean? New Testament means the remission of sins. The Lord says in the prophet Jeremiah:

Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: ... But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inwards parts, and write in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. *And* shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the LORD: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the LORD: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more.<sup>6</sup>

The New Testament, then, is simply this: the remission of sins.

### **B. The remission of sins is delivered in the Holy Communion.**

But where do we find this remission of sins? We find it in places like the Holy Communion. St. Paul writes of the Holy Communion:

---

<sup>4</sup>**St. Luke 22:20.**

<sup>5</sup>“*What is the benefit of such eating and drinking?* Answer. That is shown us in these words: *Given, and shed for you, for the remission of sins*; namely, that in the Sacrament forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation are given us through these words. For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.” *The Small Catechism, VI. The Sacrament of the Altar.*<sup>5-6.</sup>

<sup>6</sup>**Jeremiah 31:31, 33-34.**

After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.<sup>7</sup>

The Holy Communion, therefore, *is the New Testament* because Jesus expressly declares it to be the New Testament. And similarly, because we find the forgiveness of sins in the Word and in Holy Baptism, they too are the New Testament. St. Peter states regarding Holy Baptism:

Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ *for the remission of sins*....<sup>8</sup>

Jesus says:

Then said Jesus to them again, Peace *be* unto you: as *my* Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on *them*, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost: Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; *and* whose soever *sins* ye retain, they are retained.<sup>9</sup>

Wherever we find the forgiveness of sin, there we have found the New Testament, the Gospel. The New Testament we have then, not surprisingly, in the Liturgy or the Public Ministry of the Church. The Lutheran Church states on the Liturgy of the Church:

But let us speak of the word *liturgy*. This word does not properly signify a sacrifice, but rather the public ministry, and agrees aptly with our belief, namely, that one minister who consecrates tenders the body and blood of the Lord to the rest of the people, just as one minister who preaches tenders the Gospel to the people, as Paul says, I Cor. 4, 1: *Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God, i.e. of the Gospel and the Sacraments.* And 2 Cor. 5, 20: *We are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in God's stead, be ye reconciled to God.* Thus the term liturgy [liturgy] agrees aptly with the ministry.<sup>10</sup>

The Public Ministry or the Liturgy of the Church is the New Testament because it conveys the remission of sins.

---

<sup>7</sup>**I Corinthians 11:25**

<sup>8</sup>**Acts 2:38**

<sup>9</sup>**St. John 20:21-23**

<sup>10</sup>*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XXIV. (XII).*80, 81

## **II. Because the Holy Communion Conveys to Christians the New Testament, i.e. the Remission of sins, it Conveys also Eternal Life and the Resurrection of the Body.**

### **A. The New Testament is won for us by the Passion of Christ.**

And this New Testament of the forgiveness of sins was won for us by the Passion of Christ on the Cross. For the New Testament is in fact a testament. A testament requires the death of the testator. In this case, the testator is the Son of God, God Himself. St. Paul writes:

And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions *that were* under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament *is*, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament *is* of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.<sup>11</sup>

*The very fact that Scripture from beginning to end says man's salvation is a testament tells us in words writ large that God Himself would die for the sins of men and thereby save them.* Luther writes:

You see, therefore, that what we call the mass is a promise of the forgiveness of sins made to us by God, and such a promise as has been confirmed by the death of the Son of God. For the only difference between a promise and a testament is that the testament involves the death of the one who makes it. A testator is a promiser who is about to die, while a promiser (if I may put it thus) is a testator who is not about to die. This testament of Christ is foreshadowed in all the promises of God from the beginning of the world; indeed, whatever value those ancient promises possessed was altogether derived from this new promise that was to come in Christ. Hence the words “compact,” “covenant,” and “testament of the Lord” occur so frequently in the Scriptures. These words signified that God would one day die. “For where there is a testament, the death of the testator must of necessity occur” (Heb. 9[:16]). Now God made a testament; therefore, it was necessary that he should die. But God could not die unless he became man. Thus the incarnation and the death of Christ are both comprehended most concisely in this one word, “testament.”<sup>12</sup>

The New Testament, that is to say, the forgiveness of sins, then, is won by the Passion of Christ, the death the Son of God, God Himself, on the Cross for our sins.

---

<sup>11</sup>**Hebrews 9:15-17.**

<sup>12</sup>*Luther's Works*, Vol. 36, p. 38

**B. Christ bequeaths to us the fruits of His Passion in the Holy Communion and thereby gives us eternal life and the resurrection of the body.**

And Christ bequeaths to us the benefits of His Passion and the fruits of His labor for us in the Holy Communion. For just as the fruits of a mortal's life of labor will not transfer to his family unless he bequeaths those fruits to them in his last will and testament, so Christ bequeaths and gives to us the benefits and riches of His work for us in the Holy Communion. For the Holy Communion is the Last Will and Testament of the Son of God.<sup>13</sup> Jesus says:

This cup is the New Testament in My blood....<sup>14</sup>

Luther writes:

Had Christ been crucified a hundred thousand times and had nothing been said about it, what profit would the act of His being brought to the cross have brought? But when I come to this, I must draw this act into history and publish it for all the world. Also, if anyone had seen this, he would not have thought that the work of redemption was taking place there. The work is fulfilled on the cross, but no one knows of the redemption except the Father and the Son. Therefore to the act also the use of the act must be added, that it may be declared through the Word and that one may hold it by faith and, thus believing, may be saved. Paul's intent, then, is this: to the work of redemption belongs the Word of preaching, which does nothing else but impress the work of redemption. "You have urged this passage beyond measure.... Answer me. You credit the remission of sins to the Gospel, to Baptism, and to Scripture. But the forgiveness of sins lies in the shedding of the blood." Who has placed those words in your mouth so that you know that this is the redemption from sins? You did not see it on the cross. You heard it, but through the Word. They say: "Christ completed the redemption with

---

<sup>13</sup>"Now, surely there is no interpreter of the words of Jesus Christ as faithful and sure as the Lord Christ Himself, who understands best His words and His heat and opinion, and who is the wisest and most knowing for expounding them; and here, *as in the making of His last will and testament*, and of His ever-abiding covenant and union, as elsewhere in [presenting and confirming] all articles of faith, and in the institution of all other signs of the covenant and of grace or sacraments, as [for example] circumcision, the various offerings in the Old Testament and Holy Baptism, He uses not allegorical, but entirely proper, simple, indubitable, and clear words ... ." *The Book of Concord, The Formula of Concord. Thorough Declaration. Article VII. Of the Holy Supper*.50. "But if it is not allowable to annul man's testament, much less will it be allowable to annul the testament of Christ." *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII.2*

<sup>14</sup>**I Corinthians 11:25.**

a single work.” Yes, but He distributes it, applies it, and tells it by testimony. There is a testimony in Baptism. We are baptized into Christ. His Word is present. I am baptized into Christ the Crucified. In Baptism, therefore, there is a use of redemption—an application of its use. In this way the Gospel is the spoken Word, but it gives and brings this that Christ is, etc. Thus the Word of God brings out the remission of sins. Therefore there is remission of sins in the Gospel. This one fact—that Christ once, etc.—is divulged and spread in the Word. Thus there is remission of sin in the Sacrament. No one says that Christ is crucified in the Supper and in Baptism, but we say that in the Eucharist His body crucified for us is given to us, as the words say: “And He said: ‘Take this.’ ” This word “Take”—this word offers me Christ crucified.... They say that neither water nor bread saves us, but Christ crucified. But it profits nothing unless we receive in the Word that which in Baptism, in the Sacrament of the Altar, and in the Gospel brings this Christ to me. And wherever the Word of the Gospel is, there is the remission of sins. Therefore, Christ redeemed us once with a single work, but He did not pass out redemption with a single means. He gave it out through the medium of washing in Baptism, through the medium of eating in the Sacrament of the Altar, through the media of comforting the brethren, of reading in the Book, that the fruit of His passion might be spread everywhere.<sup>15</sup>

And, moreover, Christ bequeaths the forgiveness of sins in and through something of infinite value and inestimable worth: His precious blood. For Jesus says,

This cup is the New Testament *in My Blood*....<sup>16</sup>

Like a precious seal and an earnest deposit in order to persuade us of His ardent desire to give us forgiveness and salvation, Christ adds His own precious blood when He gives us the forgiveness of sins. With this precious voucher accompanying the remission of sins Jesus further inclines us to trust in Him and awakens faith in Him. Jesus says:

With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer....<sup>17</sup>

The Lutheran Church states:

[T]he Sacraments were ordained ... to be signs and testimonies of the will of God toward us, instituted to awaken and confirm faith in those who use them.<sup>18</sup> ... For

---

<sup>15</sup>*Luther's Works*, Vol. 28, pp. 268, 269.

<sup>16</sup>**I Corinthians 11:25**

<sup>17</sup>**St. Luke 22:15**

these are [seals and] signs of [the covenant and grace in] the New Testament, *i.e.*, signs of [propitiation and] the remission of sins. They offer, therefore, the remissions of sins, as the words of the Lord's Supper clearly testify, Matt. 26, 26, 28: *This is My body, which is given for you. This is the cup of the New Testament*, etc. Thus faith is conceived and strengthened through absolution, through the hearing of the Gospel, through the use of the Sacraments, so that it may not succumb while it struggles with the terrors of sin and death.<sup>19</sup>

Through the precious Sacrament of the Holy Communion Christ bequeaths to us the forgiveness of sins, salvation, and the resurrection of the body. The Lutheran Church states:

For here He offers to us the entire treasure which He has brought for us from heaven, and to which He invites us also in other places in St. Matthew 11, 28: *Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.* ... We must never regard the Sacrament as something injurious from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy imparting salvation and comfort, which will cure you and give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved.<sup>20</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Holy Communion, then, is the New Testament. For Christ expressly states that it is the New Testament.

And the New Testament is the forgiveness of sins. And where there is forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation.

The Holy Communion, then, is a precious treasure of the Church of inestimable value. For in and through the precious blood of Jesus Christ, the Holy Communion gives forgiveness of sins, the life everlasting, and the resurrection of the body.

*Amen.*

---

<sup>18</sup>*The Augsburg Confession, Article XIII. Of the Use of the Sacraments.*1, 2.

<sup>19</sup>*The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XII. (V.).*42, 43.

<sup>20</sup>*The Large Catechism, The Sacrament of the Altar.*66, 68.