

“Do This in Remembrance of Me”

The Passover could not simply be ignored, or cancelled. As Moses writes in Exodus 12, at the institution of the Passover – “This day shall be for you a memorial day, and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord; throughout your generations, as a statute forever, you shall keep it as a feast.” (Exodus 12:14)

So important is this feast that St. Luke spends a lot of ink on the preparations for the Passover – how Jesus directs His disciples in what they are to do – taking care of every detail. After all, as Jesus says – “I have earnestly desired to eat THIS Passover with you ...”

Jesus had eaten the Passover meal many times throughout His life – and this was the third time He had celebrated the Passover with His disciples – so what makes THIS Passover so special? Jesus says, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.”

Jesus knows that His suffering – His Passion – is at hand. On this very night He will be “handed over” – betrayed. His blood will be shed – and with THIS blood – the Passover is brought to its fulfillment.

In Egypt, the Lord promised that the blood of the Passover lamb spread upon the doorposts and the lintel of their houses would cause the angel of death to pass over their house – and their firstborn would be spared.

And the blood of the lamb did deliver them! The Lord not only delivers them from death, but brings them out of the bondage of slavery and leads them back home, to the Promised Land.

There, in this land flowing with milk and honey – each year they would celebrate this “memorial day” – eating the bitter herbs of the Passover that recalled the bitter days in Egypt – and in faith, remember how God had delivered their forefathers in days of old.

Living in freedom, surrounded by the bounty of the land, they were still to observe this “memorial day” and celebrate the Passover Feast. But everything was not always “milk and honey” for Israel, even in the Promised Land

When the Assyrians, or the Babylonians threatened – when they were being taken away into exile and slavery once again – when the Lord’s deliverance of old seemed like ancient history – the Passover also directed them to look forward to the greater deliverance yet to come.

Rather than a deliverance from Egypt or Babylon – a rescue from toilsome labor or exile – the Lord has promised, through His Messiah, to deliver His people from sin, death, and eternal damnation. This is what they were to remember, to hold onto, to believe – not just once a year, but throughout their lives.

So once again, Jesus and His disciples gather on this “memorial day” to celebrate the Feast of the Passover. But THIS Passover is unlike any other! In the midst of all the remembering – Jesus institutes a new covenant – with His own blood! He is THE Passover Lamb whose blood is shed to atone for the sin of the whole world – and with His blood – death passes over, and eternal life is given.

Like the Passover which it fulfilled, the Supper which the Lord institutes is also a “memorial” meal. Jesus tells His disciples to – “Do this in remembrance of me.” So, with the Lord’s Supper – what it is we are to DO – and what are we to REMEMBER?

Dr. Luther writes in the Small Catechism, that the Sacrament of the Altar – “is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ under the bread and wine, instituted by Christ Himself, for us Christians to eat and to drink.”

It’s clear what we are to DO – Jesus Himself tells us to “take and eat ... take and drink.” This is what we are to DO “in remembrance” of Jesus. But this is not just some human action – a little role playing by which we remember what Jesus did in the past, in days of old, on the cross of Calvary.

If that were the case, then it’s no different than the Passover Feast – remembering something that God did for His people in the past. For their forefathers, the angel of death did pass over their houses – death did not come to their firstborn. That is the divine action the Lord promised to them in Egypt – but He did not promise that His Passover would deliver them from the Babylonians, or exile, or even their own sin.

The Augsburg Confession speaks of Christ's command that the Supper be done in memory of Him. "The Mass [the Lord's Supper], therefore, was instituted so that the faith of those who use the sacrament should recall what benefits are received through Christ and should encourage and console the anxious conscience. For to remember Christ is to remember His benefits and realize that they are truly offered to us. It is not enough to remember the history, because the Jews and the ungodly can also remember that. The Mass is to be used for the purpose of offering the sacrament to those who need consolation, just as Ambrose says: 'Because I always sin, I ought always to take the medicine.'" (AC, XXIV, KW 71.30-33).

The Lord's Supper is not ancient history – it is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself – giving you His Body and Blood to eat and to drink. And the covenant, the promise? I give this to you "for the forgiveness of all your sin." THIS is the greater deliverance – the deliverance from sin, death and everlasting damnation!

When you receive the Lord's Supper do you remember what Jesus did for you in the past, on Calvary? Yes! But He is also doing something for you now. His sacred act is to give you His resurrected Body and Blood to resurrect you from death – to give you His everlasting life.

The Lord's Supper is for sinners whose sin wars against them, holding them captive, threatening their lives. The Lord's Supper is for sinners whose conscience is anxious, burdened, enslaved.

The Lord gives His Supper to you – not so that you, in the midst of your anxiety and burden, can remember what He did over 2,000 years ago – and hope that He will do something like that for you today.

No, the Lord is at work in His Supper, to deliver you today. That's His promise. That's His covenant with you. That His blood blots out all your iniquity. That His blood pays the penalty and takes away God's wrath at your rebellion. That His Body and Blood is the medicine that heals you.

Dearly beloved, “do this in remembrance of me” Jesus says. Indeed, do this in faith – remembering what Jesus has done for you on the cross – and receiving what He is doing for you now --- for He earnestly desires to eat this holy meal with you now. Amen.