

The Blood of the Lamb

A sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

27 March, 2024

Children's Talk: Sharing a Meal

- Sharing a meal brings people together
- At Easter the Lord shared a meal with His closest followers
- The Lord wanted to be close to them before people tried to get rid of Him

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, "Take, eat; this is My body."

Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. And He said to them, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (Mark 14:22-26)

- A few things:
 - The wine is called blood; it is red like blood
 - The bread is called flesh; it is skin-coloured
 - That won't be our focus
- The Lord wants to share a meal with us too
- So like them, we have bread and wine
- But we only have 1 loaf: how can we share it? Jesus broke it into pieces so that everyone could have some
- And we only have 1 cup: how can we share it? Jesus passed it around so everyone could have a sip
- The Lord wants to share with everyone
 - He doesn't just love 1 or 2 people, but everyone
 - He doesn't just teach and lead the smartest people, but all of us
- We are all the Lord's children
- So we will share this meal as a church
- Just as the Lord shares His love and wisdom with us, and we in turn share with each other.

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What image comes to mind when you think of Easter? One of the first images that comes to mind for many is Jesus, blood streaming down His face, hanging from a cross, covered in the marks of the whips. There is a reason this image exists; and there is a place for contemplating it; but if we remain focused on this image we actually miss the real purpose and meaning of Jesus' death and His blood that is mentioned so frequently.

The Word itself gives us much of this imagery and language. In Holy Supper the wine is referred to as His blood. This came from the words of the Lord Himself:

Then Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him." (John 6:53-56)

At the Last Supper the Lord again referred to His blood, this time referring to it being spilled for the forgiveness of sins:

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the forgiveness of sins. (Matthew 26:27-28)

After the supper was finished the Lord prayed in Gethsemane, and in his desolation drops of sweat fell like blood (Luke 22:44). At His trial He was crowned with thorns and beaten (Mark 14:65; 15:17). On the Cross His side was pierced with a spear and blood and water gushed forth (John 19:34). Outside of the context of the Easter story there are references to Jesus' death using the imagery of blood. The book of Revelation describes those who are washed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 1:5, 7:14). Michael and his angels, who fought the great red dragon, are said to have,

overcome him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. (Revelation 12:11)

The narrative of the Lord's life is filled with blood, and we are commanded to remember and partake of that blood.

If that sounds off-putting, you are not alone! The Teachings of the New Church push us to see things on a deeper level, in a way that might help us see the Lord's blood in a much healthier light. They explain how the angels understand the "blood of the Lamb:"

It cannot be thought that Michael and his angels overcame the dragon by anything else than the Divine truth of the Lord in the Word; for, in heaven, the angels cannot think of any blood; nor do they think of the Lord's passion, but of the Divine truth and of His resurrection. Therefore, when a person thinks of the Lord's blood, the angels perceive His Divine truth; and when he thinks of the Lord's passion, they perceive His glorification, and then His resurrection only. (*Apocalypse Revealed* §379:5)

The angels do not focus on the gruesome details of the crucifixion, and in fact, when we are thinking of those things, they think only of Divine Truth, and the Lord's resurrection. Where we see pain and suffering, they see that which endures and leads out of pain and suffering; where we see death, they see new life.

Now we think of blood as a symbol of pain, suffering and death, because that is how it is used in the Easter story; but that's not at all what blood brings to mind when it's in its proper place. The blood inside your body circulates life throughout all your limbs and organs. This illustration of the circulatory system shows blood, but it speaks of health and wellbeing. It's only when blood is spilled that it takes on that dark meaning. And it is true that the Lord was willing to "spill His blood," on the one hand meaning to literally suffer and die; but on a deeper level He was willing to expose His life-giving, Divine Truth to the attacks of hell. That's what His whole life consisted of: telling people the most profound truths about how to live a good life, about how to love and be loved; and for this He was scorned, mocked, and rejected.

Imagine vulnerably sharing with people you love the principles that you most value, only to have them be scorned, mocked, and rejected. It hurts deeply when we share our values and have them treated in this way. Now imagine the Lord, whose love for all is infinite, and whose Truth exists solely to make love and goodness possible, willing to put that truth out there for our sake, knowing that it would be treated this way.

But that is not how we have to treat the Lord, and so it is not where we have to focus our attention. Instead of focusing on the ways truth was rejected, we can, like the angels, focus on truth in its proper place, giving life and overcoming evils.

Truth is the means by which we are recreated spiritually:

In the sense of the letter of the Word, "the blood of the Lamb" means the passion of the cross, but in the internal or spiritual sense it means Divine truth proceeding from the Lord; for it is by this that a person is purified from falsities and evils, that is, his garments are made white.... It is by means of Divine truth, when it is received, that a person is reformed and regenerated by the Lord and saved, and not by the shedding of blood on the cross. (*Apocalypse Explained* §476)

The Lord did indeed bleed and die; but that is not what saves us. What saves us is when we willingly take in the Lord's truth, apply it to our lives, and so are regenerated. EXAMPLES GO HERE

So if the blood means something to beautiful and good, why does the Word present such a gruesome picture? In part it has to do with the way things appear to us. When, from a place of selfishness, we look at the things that truth teaches, it does seem like it is going to be a violent process. It takes making sacrifices; it takes giving up things that we are attached to; it means moving past the very things that define us and letting the Lord define us; it means humility and hard work. And so from this side of things spiritual rebirth looks like a fairly unattractive proposition. But we still need to be willing to face that hardship, and be willing to go through it, so we

cannot just ignore the appearance. We see this in the Lord's case: when He predicted His death, Peter told Him not to talk that way; but Jesus sternly warned Him that it could not be avoided:

From that time Jesus began to show to His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day.
Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!"
But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men."
(Matthew 16:21-23)

It's not that Jesus wanted to die or had some kind of martyr complex or obsession with death; but He knew He had to face what was coming, the inevitable response to Him preaching and teaching truth to a world attached to selfishness.

But although we cannot ignore the challenges that are coming, we also should be willing to emphasize the purpose, and what comes after, especially once we have moved through the challenging bits. The Lord compares this to the pangs of childbirth:

A woman, when she is in labor, has sorrow because her hour has come; but as soon as she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you. John 16:21-22)

Childbirth (as far as I understand, being a male with no children), is not in itself a fun proposition, and there can be quite a lot of anxiety in anticipation of it. But if a woman is pregnant, the birthing process has to take place one way or another for the child to be born. That being said, once the child *is* born, the joy of having that little baby far exceeds the pangs of birth, and puts them in the past. Why focus on the prior pain when you have the greater joy in the present.

The same is true of the Lord. In the lead up, He could not ignore what must be faced; and we too need to remember what He went through for our sakes. But after

the fact the result is what matters most. The fact that the Lord rose from the grave is far more significant than the fact that He died on the Cross. I was talking recently with some folks about an interesting way of thinking of this: a crucifix is an image or model of Jesus hanging on the Cross; but the cross as a symbol is empty, and I think that really is where the focus should be. It isn't about Jesus dying; it's about the Cross being empty because He lives.

Likewise the same is true of us. We cannot turn away or ignore the things that challenge us to grow spiritually. There will be times when the path to growth leads us through despair, hardship, anger, sadness, loss, frustration, and all manner of pain. But the point is the heavenly life that follows, and heavenly life is more joyful than we can possibly imagine. The blood that seemed like it was going to be spilled is actually the blood pumping through our veins, keeping us alive; the truth that seemed to condemn us actually shapes us into beings of love and charity.