**Heaven on Earth**

Based on [Matthew 26:26-29](https://biblia.com/books/esv/Mt26.26-29)

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Holy (Maundy) Thursday

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On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper. It is a ceremony. In it He gives his own true body and blood, with bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink.

There has been much debate over what Jesus means in taking the ceremonial bread and saying “this is my body”, and taking the ceremonial cup and saying “this is my blood”. Some have said that he *changed* the bread into his body, and he *changed* the wineinto his blood. Others have taught that he meant to present the bread as a memorial picture of his body, and the wine only a memorial picture of his blood. Contrary to both of these, we maintain that his body is *in*, *with*, and *under* the bread, and his blood *in, with and under* the wine. As St. Paul says “Is not the bread we break a communion *in* the body of Christ; the cup a participation *in* the blood.”

There are many things the Scripture teaches about this Sacrament. And with all the debates over the years, tracking the issues and learning the jargon can be complicated and confusing. But there is one practical point that shows us simply what is at stake in the debate. When Jesus took the bread and said, **“This is my body**” did he actually mean he was holding his body right there in his hands, or not? Likewise in the church today, when the minister takes the bread and quotes Jesus’ words “This is my body”, does he actually mean to say that he is holding Jesus true body in his hands?

The body and blood of Jesus Christ makes all the difference in what it means to go to church. In the time of the Reformation, some people disputed said it didn’t make a difference and pleaded with the Lutherans to agree to disagree about it. Luther responded that *he cannot extend the right hand of fellowship to them, for I am saying that at the Lord’s Table Jesus’ body and blood are there for me, but you teach that when I sup, his body is still as far away from me as heaven is from earth!*

Imagine that you had front row tickets to see a professional ball game. And when you arrived the host sat you down in front of a TV to watch the game. The actual players were playing elsewhere. In effect, you have front row seat to see, not them, but pictures of them…lively moving and accurate pictures to be sure. Pictures that adequately communicate to you what happens at the game…but ***still only pictures***. Even if the players were shown on a nice screen, a jumbotron, IMAX, you wouldn’t pay the same price as you would to see them live…because there’s a real difference in being at the game.

If Jesus body and blood are only in heaven, then going to church to be with jesus, would be like going to sports bar a bar to participate in the game. **Participation is one-way, from a distance, through a screen, staring at pictures that are not themselves things they present.** And so, if the church has only been given instruction to use bread and wine as pictures of Jesus, and the Lords Supper some merely symbolic gesture…why go to the church? Why go there to pretend eat Jesus body and blood, when you can have wine and crackers at home? The social aspect? For a scene change? Because Jesus said to do it? To prove you’re a Christian?...And these are reasons you hear for going to church. But they are not the real reasons why Jesus gave us the Lord ’s Supper. He gave us the meal to truly give himself to us in it, and to share his salvation with us by communion in his flesh and in the blood.

Now, if Jesus had decided not to come to church with us bodily, that would be fine. He knows what he’s doing and he would not fail to provide us what we need, even if he decided to rule from a distance. But wouldn’t the church be so much more alluring if it had Christ there bodily, if attending church was a real pilgrimage, if Divine worship were a portal of heaven on earth? What if the church offered a real tangible gifts from God, that you can’t get at home? What if you could receive then and there (and only there) something that forgives your sins, and really, truly, in space and time materially gives you spirit and life and salvation?

I have Good News…that’s exactly what Jesus did on that first Holy Thursday. He promised to make his body and blood available in the Lords Supper as often as you eat and drink it. And as often as you eat and drink it, your sins are forgiven through these things that you cannot do without the church. Martin Luther once said, *If people really knew and believed what they are offered in the sacrament, they would be beating down the church doors to get at it.*

And another thing. Jesus is not only present bodily ***as the meal***…but also bodily ***as the host***. Jesus promised to join with us in this holy meal saying, “**I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s Kingdom.**” In his resurrected human body, Jesus shares the supper with us, along with angels archangels and all the company of heaven. We confess the real bodily presence of Christ in both the sacrament of the altar, and in the office of the holy ministry.

If Jesus’ body is only in heaven--nesting and warming the throne of his Father--then you are no closer to him at church than you are at home. But where two or three are gathered in his name faithfully invoking his instituted words and ceremonies, his body and blood come to your churches altar in bread and wine and ministry. In instituting the Lord’s Supper, ***Jesus has made the difference between church and home, the difference between heaven and earth.*** Church becomes heaven, and the ceremonial bread and wine are ***Jacob’s ladder*** upon which the whole heavenly host ascend and descend on the Son of Man to join us in the feast…where he is present in the body to serve you his body and blood.

This is what he instituted on holy Thursday, not just a picture, but a real holy communion.