

Epworth Chapel on the Green
April 5, 2012
Maundy Thursday
Rev. Brook Thelander

Exodus 12:1-14
Psalm 78:9-25
I Corinthians 11:23-26
Luke 22:14-30

We find ourselves once again at that point in our journey through the Church year where we enter most deeply into the mystery of the faith. I am increasingly coming to believe that sermonic commentary is best kept to a minimum during this time, in order to allow the actions of the worship itself to impact us.

Nonetheless, I want to focus for a few moments tonight on the Apostle Paul's words to the Corinthians. After reminding the Corinthians of the tradition he received about the Lord's Supper, Paul makes a very compelling statement to them. He says, "for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (I Cor. 11:26).

This is a very important statement, not only for the original hearers in Corinth, but also for us tonight.

What does it mean that we "proclaim" the Lord's death through the celebration of Holy Communion?

The word "proclaim" in the original is the word *katangelo*. It is a rich term. Basically it means "to announce," or "to proclaim." It is most often used of

announcing or proclaiming the Gospel. It is always used of an activity geared towards people, not towards God.

What Paul is telling the Corinthians, and us, is that the Lord's Supper is a very special form of preaching. The Lord's Supper is an *enacted* sermon. The simple actions of taking bread and wine, blessing them, and giving them away, tell and enact the Gospel story in ways that preaching verbally cannot. Sharing the Lord's Supper is a way of making Christ present to persons that preaching cannot do, at least not in the same way.

Every time the Lord's Supper is celebrated, an evangelistic sermon is being preached. Not by the preacher, but by the congregation. For in these simple actions we are *enacting* the Gospel, and the benefits and blessings of Christ's death are offered to people who are willing to receive them in faith. We are not merely saying to people, "Christ died for your sins"; we are *showing* people that Christ died for their sins.

And notice also what Paul says at the end. He says, "we proclaim the Lord's death *until he comes.*"

Holy Communion keeps us ever mindful that Jesus is coming again, and helps us to look forward to his return. When he comes to receive his Church to himself, the sacrament will no longer be necessary. There is a hymn in our Epworth hymnal that captures this truth so well, when it states:

*So, Lord, at length when sacraments shall cease,
May we be one with all thy church above,
One with thy saints in one unbroken peace,
One with thy saints in one unbounded love:
More blessed still, in peace and love to be,
One with the Trinity in Unity.*

So you see, not only is the Lord's Supper a great form of evangelistic preaching, but its message is one of which we always must be mindful. It is a message of the Church at peace with herself and with her Lord. It is a message of unity.

In some ways this night is a night of great irony. For it is the "birthday of the Eucharist." It is the occasion where we commemorate the institution of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

And while we give thanks for this great gift, we also continue to pray for the day when the sacrament will no longer be necessary. The day when God's Kingdom arrives in its fullness.

In the mean time, we continue to proclaim the heart of the Gospel, not just from this pulpit with words that are easily heard and forgotten -- but with actions that take us deep into the heart of God, a proclamation that *shows* forth God's love in ways the spoken word cannot do.

As we share at the Lord's Table tonight, may we do so with hearts of gratitude and joy. And let us remember the old, worn cliché which still speaks some truth: *actions really do speak louder than words.*

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.