

“All that the Lord has spoken we will do.” Did they have the first clue what they were agreeing to?

I mean, think of the two chief commandments, as Jesus gives them from the Law: Love the Lord your God with everything you’ve got, and love your neighbor as yourself. And the response is “All that the Lord has spoken, we will do.” Really? With your all? From the depths of your being?

Have you ever tried it--to love God with your all, I mean? Your heart undivided by competing loyalties, but given to God and to Him alone. Your only desire to enjoy His presence and to do His will; your only fear that you will cause Him some displeasure. And then there is your neighbor, the one made in God’s own image. Love him or her as yourself. Or as Jesus put it, do to others as you want others to do to you. How is your track record with that one?

The people of Israel put up a big promise, but their journey through the wilderness to the Promised Land was not exactly characterized by love of God above all and love of neighbor as self. Instead, there was grumbling against God and the way He led them; distrust that He would provide them with water and food; neighbor squabbling with neighbor and wearing Moses out as he tried to settle their petty squabbles. “All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.” Not so much.

So despite their words, despite their trust in themselves and in what they could muster, the covenant was sealed with blood. Part of the blood went on the altar; part, on the people. And with the blood came forgiveness. For there is no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood. And it was as blood sprinkled the people that Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders of Israel climbed the mountain to see the wonder of God’s glory. They saw Him. There He was upon His throne, and at His feet a pavement as of sapphire, blue and crystal clear as the sky above. And in God’s presence, as the blood-covered ones, they were able to sit down and to eat, and they did not die, but lived—though they knew they had no right to see such holiness and continue breathing.

They lived despite the fact that they did not keep their end of the covenant. They lived despite the fact that love for God did not characterize their all. They lived despite the fact that they did not love their neighbor as themselves. They lived because they were under the blood, and under that blood the presence of God came to them as an experience of life, not death.

Today is Maundy Thursday. Mandatum Thursday. Command Thursday. The command: "Do this in remembrance of Me." And just like the disciples who had gathered around the table in that Upper Room; Just like Moses, Aaron and the 72 at God's mountaintop table, we are well aware that we have failed to keep the covenant of the Lord. The Ten Commandments, which spell out the shape of love in our lives, accuse us endlessly: No, we do not love the Lord with anything close to our all. No, we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. Like Israel of old, we have not kept the words of the Lord to do them, no matter how many times we have promised to do better.

Yet Jesus still comes to us this day/night and prepares a gift for His people that has been on the heart of God from before time began. It is a gift that will go on sustaining His own until the day of His glorious return. He provides a meal for His wounded people, His broken people who do not live up to the covenant of love. He feeds his hurting people with His own body and blood so that they might live, so that they might be forgiven, healed, and restored. Under the blood of Jesus, the presence of God comes to you in this meal as an experience of life, not death.

And do you realize why there is life in that body and blood? Because it is the body and blood of the one in whom there was nothing but love—love for His Father with all His heart, mind, soul, strength, with His all. And just as surely, there was love for the neighbor, for you and me and for every human being, ever. Jesus loved you as he did Himself, indeed more than Himself. For you He allowed His body to be nailed to the tree and His blood to spill, wiping out the curse of the Law that is against you.

The Law could never condemn Jesus, for His whole being—His every word and thought and action—was always and only love. And He calls us to live under that blood.

To live under that blood is to taste something better than the food Moses and Aaron ever knew. We not only eat and drink in the presence of the All Holy one, but he plants within a wounded people a life that death cannot overcome. We live because of what He gives us to eat and to drink: the body and the blood of the One who is Love— Love crucified, Love risen and triumphant and coming in glory.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you” (John 13:34). The strength of your love for others and for Jesus will now always pour into you from this gift of His love for you. His gift in this meal guarantees that what you now enjoy in a hidden way will be fully and completely revealed in the life to come.

Here at the Lord's Table, you are held by a love that is stronger than death and a forgiveness that is greater than all your sin. Come eat and drink the healing meal of Jesus.