

Recently, my wife and I made an appointment with a lawyer at Trinity to make up a will for us. We had made one many years ago and some of the people we had mentioned in it are now dead. They were supposed to take care of our daughter should we have died 20 years ago. Obviously, their services are no longer needed. In addition, the old will stated that certain people should receive funds after our death. We have now decided to cut them out of the will, and to give more to world mission work in our church body. Wills that people make today can be quite interesting, especially as the giver selects the beneficiaries of the funds. There was once a Portuguese man who had no family of his own so he picked the names of his "heirs" out of a Lisbon phone book. When he died at age 42, Luis da Camara's last act on earth bestowed \$12,000 each to 70 astonished people who had never heard of da Camara before.

What are the chances that some rich person has picked your name out of the phone book and is planning on bequeathing you thousands of dollars? Not real good I imagine. But you have been named as beneficiary of a will more valuable than Luis da Camara's. The terms and benefits of this will are found in the sacrament of Holy Communion - your heavenly brother's last will and testament. Tonight we want to direct our attention to how Holy Communion came about and what it means that we have been named as beneficiaries. We are Beneficiaries of Our Savior's will.

Listen to our text from Matthew "On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.'" So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover... While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body." Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom."

The very first offering of Holy Communion took place the night before Jesus' crucifixion. Equally important to note is that it was offered during another divinely ordained meal, the Passover. The Passover was the last meal the Israelites ate before leaving behind their slaving days in Egypt. Among the items on the menu were unleavened bread and roasted lamb. The bread without yeast was both practical and symbolic. Since the Israelites would be leaving Egypt in haste, like a businessman rushing out of the office to catch the last bus home, they didn't have time to wait for yeasted dough to rise before baking it. But God also used the unleavened bread to impress upon his people that just as no yeast "contaminated" their bread that night so no sin was to contaminate their lips, hands, or heart. Of course that was impossible. It was one thing to bake bread without yeast but quite another to go a whole evening, much less a whole lifetime without a sarcastic remark calculated to hurt a sibling, or a half-truth designed to outwit a seemingly dimwitted parent for example. That flat piece of unleavened bread might as well have been a miniature stone tablet of the Ten Commandments. It was equally condemning because it upheld an ideal that the Israelite could not live up to.

That's why the roasted lamb was an indispensable part of the Passover menu. This was the lamb whose blood adorned the doorposts of those Israelite houses in Egypt. Like a scarlet velvet rope that marks a boundary the paparazzi may not cross to get at the celebrities on the red carpet, the blood of the lamb kept the angel of death away from these homes and from claiming the firstborn children who lived there.

As the disciples ate the Passover meal that night before Jesus' crucifixion, they would have been reminded of these truths: God's desire for them to be pure, and God's bloody plan to save them from their impurity. And so it was fitting that during the Passover meal Jesus took bread and said: "Take and eat; this is my body." And then he took wine and gave it to the disciples saying, "Drink from it, all of you. 28 This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:27, 28). Did the disciples make the connection? Did they understand that just as the unleavened bread had strengthened their forefathers for their journey to the Promised Land so Jesus was now offering his body to sustain them on their journey to heaven? Did they appreciate that Jesus was giving them his blood - blood which, the very next day, would be painted on the wood of the cross - that doorpost of the world? Just as the angel of death had passed over those blood-trimmed houses in ancient Egypt, he now passes over all those who stand under the bloodstained cross of Christ. No, you weren't there on Good Friday to stand under the cross, so in Holy Communion Jesus gives you his body and his blood.

Do you see what this shows about Jesus? It shows how much he loves you. Even though the crown of thorns, the nails, and the cross loomed large the night he instituted Holy Communion, Jesus still had time to think about you and me. "Given for you! Poured out for the forgiveness of your sins!" Jesus made out his will and named us sinners as beneficiaries. While most legal wills are written in ink this one is written in blood - blood of the New Covenant, God's pledge of forgiveness that now quite literally cleanses you from the inside out!

Jesus called this a new covenant. It was different from the old meal they had and the old covenant. If you remember, with the old covenant - they had to make sacrifice after sacrifice. And these sacrifices only pointed forward to a greater sacrifice to come - never actually paying for sins. But this was no longer only a promise of something better to come. Eating this would be much greater than just partaking of a dead lamb or unleavened bread. It was a partaking of the real and living body and blood of Christ. Jesus' body and blood wouldn't just provide a superficial cleansing. Now Jesus was providing a way to convey forgiveness to his people through this Supper. As they ate and drank, His blood would wash their mouths, their hearts, their stomachs, and even their souls. It would penetrate their deepest being and wash them from the inside out. His life would be integrated into their lives. He and His holiness would now become their holiness. Every time that they tasted that body and drank that blood they would remember that Jesus blood was shed for them. Every time that they partook of the Supper their sins would be wiped away. In a very personal and a very physical way Jesus was providing away to be connected with his people after his death and resurrection.

But many have questioned Jesus' words. Did Jesus really give his disciples (and us) his body and blood to hold in our mouths? Or did he mean these words symbolically? Perhaps the bread and wine just represent and remind us of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross? Think again of the setting. This was the night before Jesus' death and he knew it. Therefore Jesus spoke simply and clearly, like a man writing out his will so that his heirs know exactly what he intends and the matter doesn't have to drag through the courts for clarification. When Jesus said: "This is my body. This is my blood," that's what he meant. The bread of Holy Communion is also Jesus' body. The wine is also his blood.

Some, however, still object and say that Jesus' words are no different than someone saying about a photograph: "This is my son." Clearly the photograph is not really that person's son but just a representation of the boy. That's true. That's why you can't turn that sentence around and say, "My son is this picture." But when Jesus said of the bread, "This is my body,"

he could have said, "My body is this bread." What's more, the Apostle Paul warned the Corinthian Christians that if they did not receive Holy Communion while recognizing the presence of Jesus' body and blood in the sacrament, they would be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Jesus (1 Corinthians 11:27). How can you sin against Jesus' body and blood if it's not really present in Holy Communion?

Of the 70 people who made it into Luis da Camara's will, I wonder how many thought it was a joke? Did any stubbornly refuse the summons to the lawyer's office to hear the terms of Camara's will? If so, they may have forfeited their share of the inheritance. In the same way it's easy to think that a summons to Holy Communion is a bit of a joke. A bite of bread and a sip of wine. It doesn't seem like much, but neither does the paper on which a million dollar check is written or the key to a dream home. But the fact is with the bread and wine of Holy Communion you'll be receiving Jesus' body and blood for the forgiveness of all your sins. That makes this little meal a key to the heavenly banquet that is to come. Jesus assured his disciples of that when he said: "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matthew 26:29).

When I was young - my favorite sandwich was a garlic summer sausage from Ted's meat market in Saginaw. I could eat those sandwiches every day. And if my mom packed me any other sandwich, I would be angry with her. In the same way, we never get tired of the Lord's Supper. We can never get enough of it. When we come to worship we are often weighed down with a heavy burden of sins. We feel the pressure of the world trying to get us to fall and attack us. We feel the burden of giving in to our sinful natures time and again. But when we taste of the bread and wine and the body and blood of the Lord, we spiritually taste that we are forgiven. God whispers in our ears, "it's ok. I love you. I have forgiven you." This Supper is able to take all of our worries and sorrows and throw them on the back of Christ. It tastes so good, that we love to come every time it is offered. It never gets old! It keeps us coming back. And best of all, it doesn't cost a thing! It's free!

No stocks, no bonds, no real estate holdings, no silver or gold, no family china. But as we sit back and hear the reading of the will, we are beneficiaries of something far better. Jesus gives himself to you and me. His body, His blood, together with bread and wine for you and me. Wow, are we wealthy! Amen.