

Willingness to Change

1 Corinthians 11:23

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

On the first Sunday of every month, we here re-enact the last supper. Those of us who are Catholic in background know it as the Mass and we think of it as the Mass and there are maybe those of us who are Baptist who think of it just as the Lord's Supper. Others of us with Episcopal or Methodist background think of it as Communion or the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

But whatever we call it, to us here, it has meant the clearest explanation that God has ever given of why His Son Jesus died and that's of course what it was to the disciples around that table. They were Jews and when Jesus said, "This is My body", as He broke the bread which is broken for you, they as Jews had often heard that language used before because in the ancient days of Israel, when a priest offered an animal on the altar, he would explain that, "This is offered for you, this is offered for your sins", and the Jews knew that they weren't simply trying to appease a heathen God by killing their own animals. They knew that this animal stood for some incredible event that had taken place somewhere in eternity that somehow enabled their God to be satisfied with the death of this animal instead of their death, and so they knew very well that when you said, "This is for you", it meant that this animal was bearing the death and the punishment and shedding of blood that you yourself should have borne.

So when Jesus looked at them over the table and gave them the bread and said, "This is My body which is for you", they knew very well that at least it meant that somehow Jesus was bearing some pain and some agony that they should have borne for their sins. And yet loved ones, in a way there was a sinking of their hearts because that's all they had ever known in Judaism. All they had ever known was that they could make sacrifices to God that He would regard in place of themselves and He would therefore forgive their sins.

But the next day they would be back in their same sins and they would make more sacrifices for those day's sins and then after the night passed, they would be back sinning again next day. Every Jew who heard those words, "This is for you" had a sinking feeling in his stomach because he knew the agony that Paul knew. "The law was good but I was carnal" and "The good that I would, I cannot do, and the evil I hate, is the very thing I do."

So Jews for thousands of years had known that God was willing to forgive them of their sins. For thousands of years people like David had written in their songs, "Blessed is the man whose sin is covered", but they longed for another promise that was made in the Old Testament. Jeremiah put it like this, "Behold the days are coming when I will make a new covenant with the children of Israel, not like the old covenant which I made with them in the days of their fathers when I took them out of the land of Egypt. I will make a new covenant with them and I will put a new spirit within them. I will write my laws on their inward parts. I will write them in their hearts."

And Ezekiel said the same thing, "A new spirit I will give them and a new heart I will give them and I will sprinkle clean water upon them" and every Jew knew that promise and he longed for a day when he would be able to stop this eternal sinning, this eternal sacrificing for sins that he could not avoid. He longed for the day when he would have a new heart and when he would want to do what God

wanted him to do from inside his heart and not just from outside in the books that he read.

That's why the disciples' hearts rose when Jesus, after He had distributed the bread, took the wine and said, "This is the cup of the New Covenant in My blood" and their hearts bounded because they realized then the promise is going to be made real. We are not only going to be free from the guilt of our sins but we are going to be free from the power of sin. This man is somehow going to write God's law in our hearts so that we're naturally and spontaneously like God.

Loved ones, that's how the disciples explained it to all those who listened to them. Paul said to them, "Now are we to sin, that grace may abound?" because that's the way some Jews were doing it. They were saying, "Well, God blots our sins out from His memory, He forgives us for our sins, so the more we sin, the more He'll be able to show us forgiveness", and Paul said, "Are we to sin that grace may abound?" And he immediately answered "by no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?" and then loved ones, he explained the miracle that took place in Jesus' death.

He said, "Do you not know that all of us who are baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death. We were buried therefore with Him by baptism into death so that as Christ was raised from the dead, by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For we know that our old self was crucified with Him, so that the body of sin might be destroyed and we might no longer be enslaved to sin." Loved ones, that's what happened in Jesus on Calvary.

It wasn't just that an angry God beat up on His son instead of those of us who really ought to have received the beating, it wasn't that at all. Our God is not a God who is unjust. The truth is that in Jesus' death, God did something to free you and me from that irrational streak of perversity within us that prevents us being what we want to be, that's it. And you know it, you know what it is, it is actually the body of sin. Our body has been so used to living independent of God that it has come under certain habits and addictions that we cannot get rid of.

Oh the easiest one is the dirty joke. You know that you don't, you shouldn't laugh at it, you know you ought not to laugh at it but you are so preoccupied and so enslaved to the esteem of your colleagues at the office or in class that you have to in some way appear to appreciate it or enjoy it.

And you know that their opinion often dominates your life. You know that you often go into the office or you go into the classroom and that little eye is looking out for someone's approval. Looking out for someone to praise you so that when you come to situations where you know what is right to do, you can't do it. The good that you would, you cannot do, because this body of sin, this body that is used by this independent life, this life that is rebellious against God and that runs itself the way it wants. That body of sin prevents you doing it. The same, whatever the problem is, whether it's the diet problem or whether it's the sex problem or whether it's the worry over money problem, they're all the same, aren't they? They're all the same.

It's our personality, that has got so used to trying to live depending on money for its security, and pleasure for its happiness, on other people's approval for its sense of importance, that it is utterly enslaved to these things. So that many of us here this morning don't feel in charge of our own lives; so that we hear the things that God tells us he wants us to do this morning but we have to cry out, "The good that I would, I cannot do". And the answer is, "Because my personality is so addicted to things for its security, to people for its sense of significance, to experiences and events for its happiness that it won't obey me."

Loved ones that's why Paul said, "For we know that our old self was crucified with Him so that the body of sin might be destroyed, might be rendered inoperative and we ourselves might no longer be enslaved to sin." This is what happened in Jesus' death. God took your personality with all its addictions and with all its habits and with all its compulsive feelings and He put it into His son Jesus and when Jesus died, your old self died with Him and when Jesus was raised up, God raised a version of you up that is new, clean and free and is able to obey Him. That's it.

Einstein has only helped us to understand it more. Einstein has shown us how every event that takes place in the universe, somehow is happening somewhere in the universe throughout time. That somehow if you could get far enough away, you could see the events that took place 2000 years ago, that they're still occurring. And so it is with this eternal death of Jesus, loved ones.

God has put your personality into His Son and has utterly destroyed it with His Son that's why Paul says, "We were buried with Him", so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life and you can be free today. That's what this communion is about. This isn't us offering up another sacrifice to God, trying to bribe Him to forgive us and overlook our shortcomings. This is an opportunity for every one of us again to come into a new deliverance from our old selves.

God is able to make real in you the transformation of your personality that took place in His Son Jesus. God is able to do that for you today. He is able to recreate you. Why even question it when you see new primroses every spring, why even doubt it when you see trees that look dead with brown leaves or no leaves come alive in the springtime, why even question? But that of course God is trying to get over to us in every way possible, "I can make you new this morning", and He can.

If you say to me, "What do you need to be to do?" Ask God where He wants to change you today, what part of your life He wants to change and then decide whether you're willing to have that changed. See, lust finds its power in your feeling that your body is your own and you have a right to make it happy whenever you want. Now, being changed in Jesus, being baptized into His death means saying, "Lord, you never had a woman. You were willing to be without, what physical happiness or satisfaction you maybe had some right to. Am I willing for the same thing?" And you can see the issue is not asceticism. The issue is not, never having intercourse again. The issue is, are you willing to have only what Jesus wants you to have, are you willing therefore, to die to your right to have what you want, when you want it.

The incredible thing is that if you come to a willingness to join Jesus on the Cross, God will give you a new spirit this morning that will bring purity and cleanness and incredible though it is, satisfaction and peace and fulfillment in that part of your life and of course it's the same with everything else. The same with the enslavement to people's opinion. Would you be willing therefore not to be liked by people? Would you be willing therefore only to have God's approval on your life? Would you be willing to be criticized tomorrow morning, to be run down, to be thought the most foolish person in your class, would you be? That's what God wants each of us to deal with this morning and He will minister it to us if you look to Him, you know. The Spirit of Jesus is here in this room and He will explain it to you and our place is to be willing for Him to change us.

Well are you willing? If you are, doesn't matter whether you are Catholic or whether you're Presbyterian, doesn't matter whether you're Christian or not, doesn't matter whether you have ever taken communion or not. If you are willing for God to change you so that who you are the kind of

person He wants you to be and you're willing to face the consequences of that change, then you can receive the bread and the wine this morning and know that you are receiving the Spirit of Jesus into your life and that Spirit is supernatural and miraculous in its power and can transform your life today.

Loved ones you need to decide if you're willing for that. I think in a moment we all should stand so that none of us feel embarrassed at all, but even if you do stand, only take the words to yourself and the invitation to yourself, if you really are willing, really, do. Because otherwise you drink damnation unto your own soul, you do. You just bring God's wrath down upon you if you are unreal this morning about the things. So only receive the invitation if you are willing to be what Jesus actually made the new version of you to be in His death and resurrection. Only if you are willing to live like Him, I ask you only then receive the invitation and take it to yourself. But if you do, you can go out of here a changed person, changed and transformed.

Will you stand and receive the invitation.

You that do truly repent of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbors and intend to lead a new life following the commandments of God and walking from henceforth in His holy ways to draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to your comfort and make your humble confession unto Almighty God.

Let us be seated as we pray.