Text: Maundy Thursday

**Introduction**

The key word in texts for Maundy Thursday is covenant. But that is a word that we don’t really use much anymore. Some Presbyterian churches and schools are Covenant. There is a healthcare system. But in daily use covenant has been replaced by either a simple contract or the word testament. We used to say things like marriage covenant where today we have marriage contracts. The workings of a living language are always tough to discuss. Why do certain words fall out of usage and others come in? Why do definitions move over the years? But in this case I think we can posit something of a reason. A covenant has religious overtones. It might be an agreement between two or more humans, but it usually invoked God as a guarantor. Marriage was a covenant because while two people pledged themselves to each other, it was God who put them together and pledged that they should stay that way. But we like to break agreements. And at least for a season we didn’t like taking the Lord’s name in vain. So covenants became mere contracts.

In regard to testaments, that is a special case of a covenant. A person dies and leaves their final wishes for the disposition of property and maybe some final acts. The implied counter-party are the heirs. But the person themselves is dead. They are really relying on an implicit curse. If you do not carry this my last wishes out, may God avenge me. Likewise we’ve replaced God with the justice system. And likewise, if the estate is worth enough, we can get any last testament thrown out.

So, while we’ve been abandoning covenant in regular use, it is still a robust religious use. Because God has made contracts – covenants – with humans. And since God is both the guarantor and the counterparty, appealing to the state or anything else is just foolish. And while Caesar may accept salt or a signature as a seal of the contract, a covenant demands blood. The life is in the blood, and a covenant is a living thing.

**Text**

The Old Testament reading has the sealing of the covenant of Sinai and a foreshadowing of a better covenant. Moses has taken down all the words of the Lord and all the just decrees and read them to assembled Israel. What is this book of the covenant? Most commentators would say it is Exodus 20 – 23. That starts with the 10 Commandments, but it also includes several other laws covering everything from economics to festival days. It starts with recounting what God has already done for Israel bringing them out of slavery in Egypt and ends with he promise of what God is going to do – drive out the Canaanites and give them the promised land. But this covenant is a quid pro quo. God shall do this, if Israel pays careful attention to him and obeys his voice.

That is what Moses asks them in reading it. Do you agree? And all Israel answers “All the words that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And to seal the covenant Moses offers the sacrifices and sprinkles the blood on the people. May this blood testify against the one who breaks it. If I break it, may my blood likewise be spilled. And within a month Israel is worshipping the Golden Calf.

The covenant of Sinai, of the law, has always been trouble. God would remain true to his portion. Israel would get the promised land. But they only received it by grace. Because they broke the law. The following short event which goes unremarked upon in Exodus seems the more important. The 70 went up the mountain and “they saw the God of Israel…the beheld God, and ate and drink.” You can pass it by as simply the meal between counterparties of an agreement. A requirement of hospitality. But it is quite remarkable. No one sees God. Yet here they do. And He has feet. Spirits don’t have feet.

As part of that covenant of the law the Jew would offer the sacrifices. And once a year the High Priest would enter into the presence of God in the Holy of Holies seeking the forgiveness of all Israel by the blood of beasts. That is what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews recounts. That first covenant of the law was a covenant broken on this side, on Israel’s side. And it required blood to satisfy it. For all of Israel’s existence that blood was “the blood of goats and bulls…for the purification of the flesh.” But now Christ offered himself without blemish. And his blood closed that covenant. It “purified our conscience from dead works to serve the living God.” Christ closed the covenant of the law by his death. We are no longer bound to that Mosaic law if we are in Christ. “A death has occurred that redeems us from the transgression committed under the first covenant.” But we are only out of that first covenant if we are covered by the blood of Christ the mediator of a new covenant.

And what is that new covenant? The covenant that we celebrate tonight?

It is not a covenant of works. It is not the quid pro quo of Sinai. But it is that meal after Sinai. God has invited us night only to eat and drink with him, but has given us himself to eat and drink. It is a covenant that asks nothing of us but faith.

We do not need to know anything but Christ. Adam and Eve took the apple because the wanted to know good and evil. And so they did. Although they were not like god. Israel in that covenant of Sinai needed to know a lot of things. The appropriate sacrifices. The calendar of when to offer them. The meaning of the 10 commandments. When to use the name of the Lord and when not to. The burden of knowing is immense. And we are simply not made for knowing such great things. But in the new covenant we need know but one thing. Christ has given himself for us.

And that is the purpose of this meal tonight. Christ gives you his body here tonight. Tonight we see the body of Christ. And he has given us his blood which is for the forgiveness of sins. This is not blood that is splashed on you calling out if you break this covenant. This is blood that works inwardly in you. To purify our consciences from dead works to serve the living God. The life is in the blood and in this blood is our eternal life.

**Application**

That is the promise Jesus leaves the now 11 with. He will not drink of it again until we have another meal. “When I drink it new…with you…in my Father’s Kingdom.” In that first covenant Israel was promised the land. In this covenant we are promised the Kingdom. You will eat and drink with Christ. God keeps his promises.

And you don’t have to do anything. Just believe. That is the covenant. That is the last will and testament of Jesus. Jesus wants to give to you the Kingdom. The promise of this meal. And he’s called his Father as the guarantor. The Father Almighty ensures it. He gives us the Kingdom of His Son.

Come, receive the supper which gives you the Kingdom.