Text: Lord’s Supper, Mark 14:12-26

**Introduction**

Who is Christ for us today?

That is the question that Dietrich Bonhoeffer was contemplating in prison in his letters before he was executed. As much as Life Together and The Cost of Discipleship – his works that come from the midst of his struggle for a Confessing Church in Nazi Germany – are invoked by those who would emphasize continuity of the church, his prison letters are typically invoked by those who often push for necessary ruptures or revolutions. The sparkling phrase pulled out of those letters is typically “religionless Christianity.” Both of those strains – the continuity and the rupture – tend to have a way of thinking about what Bonhoeffer said. The rupture typically looks at normative creedal Christianity until the enlightenment and says “that doesn’t work, nobody can believe it, too magical and mythological” and thinks we need to completely re-translate the Jesus story for audiences who no longer have religion. But the continuity group would say not so fast in a couple of ways. The first way would be to remember the short parable that the Kingdom is like a bit of leaven put into a massive amount of dough. How is Jesus the Lord of the World if the world doesn’t seem to need him – is religionless? And those who would argue for continuity would say it has always been this way. The leaven is working even if you don’t see it. The world not receiving Christ, in fact the world crucifying him, doesn’t change who he is.

In the high enlightenment – Bonhoeffer might be the last fruit of that era – the idea that the world was becoming religionless might have made sense. But today I don’t think there is any need to respond to some idea of a world that has left religion behind. Chesterton’s aphorism that “when men give up belief in God it’s not that that they believe in nothing, but that they believe in anything” has been proven true in spades. Every heart has created their own religion. A Religion with a god who is about power, not about the cross. Why are we polarized? Why does every problem create a division or multiple factions who would rather war with each other than try multiple things to solve the problem? Because everyone is answering from their own catechism which is about power – having dominion over your fellow man. Which is in complete continuity with what Jesus taught that the heart is an idol factory.

So I don’t find most of the ponderings of religionless Christianity to be very meaningful, but a rather banal pondering of glory instead of the God of the cross. But Bonhoeffer’s overriding question – Who is Christ for us today? – I think is the eternal question.

**Text**

What Paul would say not long after our short epistle text is that to eat and drink unworthily is to do so without discerning the body of Christ. That’s another way of saying Bonhoeffer’s question - Who is Christ for us today? – is central to this supper. This cup is a participation in the blood of Christ. This bread that we break is a participation in the body of Christ. This meal is a participation in the cross. Maybe we should know who this Christ is for us.

So the first thing I want to say is that Christianity is never religionless. Because the Christ of Christianity gave us this meal on this night. It is just that this religion is not like all those of the world – about power. It is about the cross. It is a religion the “proclaims his death until he comes.” It is Luke and Paul that record “do this in remembrance of me.” For those two gentiles the Supper was already liturgy. Paul says “he received from the LORD what I also delivered to you.” As much as we Lutheran’s stand on slogans such aa Word Alone, the Word that is given to us directly is this Sacrament. When Paul talks about people falling ill and dying it is because they have not discerned Christ here. Any renewal, and return to strength, starts with discerning what takes place at and around this table. The renewal always starts with picking up the cross.

Who has prepared this meal? Christ himself. The disciples ask Jesus “where he would have then go and prepare for him to eat?” And Jesus response is essentially “I’ve already prepared.” They have something to do, but everything they need will have already been made ready. “And they found it just as he had told them.”

Who is present? The simple answer is sinners. The scene that Mark records has a pathos for sinners. Because when Jesus says that one of you will betray me, and they all start asking “Is it I?” I don’t get the feeling that they are trying to justify themselves. This is not Peter’s assertions a short time later that he won’t. No, everyone around that table knows: “It could be me.” Maybe even go so far as to say “it is me, and he knows how I have done it.” The division in this meal is not between sinners and righteous. The division in this meal is between those who recognize Christ and are sorrowful for their sins, and the one who does not discern the Christ who he is betraying.

What is given to us? The body and blood of Christ. The blood of the covenant. The blood of the cross. Not the covenant of the law sealed with the blood of beasts that demanded obedience. The blood of the Gospel that simply asks recognition. Christ for us is the Christ on the cross. The Christ of the throne comes, but now we live by the cross. Christ gives himself for us. Not gave but continues now to give himself. “I will not drink it again until that day.” We have need of this, and he will supply, until that day.

It is by grace alone that we have this meal that Christ prepares. Its benefits are only for sinners. Sinners who believe that here we receive Christ himself for us.

Any answer to “Who is Christ for us today” must start here at this table. Start with the blood of the covenant and the bread of life which come from the sacrifice of the cross.

**Application**

If we discern the body of Christ present on this altar. We also need to discern the body of Christ created by and around this altar. Paul says “we who are many are one body.” I like how Mark end his supper passage. “They sang a hymn.”

Who is Christ for us today?

Christ is the one who has revealed to us the Father. The God who is worthy of praise. The Son, joins together with his disciples in a hymn praising God the Father. A God who has not in power destroyed us to save us, but in the weakness of the cross bids us see his love.

The hymn is also a bit like Paul’s metaphor of the body. I’ve never heard a bad congregation singing. The vast majority of people in a congregation are not blessed with great voices. But somehow, together, it is always beautiful.

Somehow, out of a bunch of sinners, if we recognize the body of Christ in each other. If we share each others crosses. If we are singing the same praise. Something beautiful happens.

Who is Christ for us today?

The one who gave us this meal. The one who gave us our song. The one who bids us to see him in each other. That we have been united to God and to each other by this act of love.

That is far from the end of discerning the body of Christ. But if we think we have lost it, we can always come back to this table. Here is the body of Christ, for us, today. And whenever two or three are gathered.