

Maundy Thursday  
"Unwritten Law"  
Hebrews 10:15-25

Dear friends,

The epistle lesson for today captures the essence of what we celebrate this week. The writer to the Hebrews discusses that something new has come, it has not just replaced the old but exceeded it in every way. Here's what he says on that score:

**"And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for after saying, 'This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, declares the Lord; I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds,' then he adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more.'"**

As you know there already was a covenant in place between God and man. It involved behaving a certain way, walking a path that God laid out. It involved the creation of a kingdom, Israel, a human nation that served as God's representatives to the rest of the species. It was limiting and extremely easy to break. Israel had to walk the line or they paid for it. It couldn't be done. What we know now is this old Jewish way, with all the laws, the nation, the sacrificing animals, that was just to prepare for the real business, and that's what the author of this epistle talks about. He quotes the Old Testament to do it, which is kinda his schtick, because he's writing to Jews. He says the Holy Spirit Himself tells us that the new covenant, the new agreement that God has made with man, goes much deeper.

This new covenant is about transformation, it is, at its heart, God's promise to change you, and that is one of the most hopeful and positive things about it. That's what Hebrews reminds us. God tells us He's going to rewire us, tinker with the works, get into the guts of who were and turn it all upside down. As we are, in our sin, our own law is on our hearts and minds. My life, my rules. I make the decisions, I take the consequences, and we're programmed as Americans to resist outside influence in

our life. We're trained to stand on our own. God promises to break through all that, break into all that, and break down all that. The sinner in us resists this. God, don't touch me. Stay away. I'm fine the way I am, the problem is ABC or Z. God, of course, has always had a different message. No, you're the problem. Not your circumstances, the fact you don't have enough money, the job you hate, the family that drags you down, that ain't the problem. You are. We resist this hard enough to where we force God to kick in the doors and rearrange the furniture.

As much as we naturally push back against any attempt to tamper with our inner workings, this is a good thing. God promises not just a message that we can read or hear about, He promises a change that He will make happen. He promises a new heart and a new mind, something deeper and more visceral than any idea or agenda. And the epistle is clear as to how this is accomplished: **"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."** So in changing us, God changes how He views us. That is a welcome and badly needed change.

The problem is that we need God to make this a problem. I've always said that the thing that gets people the most about Christianity, particularly as we Lutherans express it, it's not how offensive it is, how it seems to divide people. The reason people get hung up on our faith is that we Christians offer a solution to a problem that nobody recognizes as a problem. Our problem as human beings is sin, but the Holy Spirit has to convict and break people down to the point where they see just how big of a problem they have, just how deep sin goes, just how much it screws up not only in their lives, in this world, but how seriously God takes it. Jesus dying on the cross for all our sins is a wonderful gift, but you gotta know what sin is and how bad it is for that gift to mean anything. In the epistle lesson, God promises that in this new covenant, the Holy Spirit is going to do just that. He'll come in, break down, knock us to our knees, shove our problem in our face, and get us to see, oh man, this is bad. Then, He comes with the good news, that those sins and lawless deeds, they're not remembered.

They're gone. It's a heck of a gift.

The question of today, Maundy Thursday, is how this gift comes to us, and that is where the rest of the reading speaks. **“19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”**

The writer makes several points. He reminds us that we have confidence to approach God because He has made us clean, and God does this when we meet together. He references Baptism with the washing and the sprinkling talk, but the meeting together is where God gives all these wonderful gifts, namely here in His church. Why meet together? The writer tells us so that we may encourage one another, and that's a big part of it, but he also tells us to hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering. Christ has established a way for us to do that, and that's what we're celebrating tonight.

But we can't celebrate it with each other. We can't get together. We still have God's Word, but we crave God's Supper. This is a unique challenge for His people, because we want what He has promised, and we have to trust that He gives us what He has promised regardless of the circumstances. Those promises are the root of the power of the Lord's Supper. They are the heart of what we are as Christians, and how we become and stay Christian. Those promises are God Himself, given to us, and they will never fail us.

Amen.