

Several years ago, I heard a fellow Lutheran pastor make an interesting observation. He was responding to the claim that when Jesus said “this is my Body... this is my Blood,” He didn't actually mean “this is my Body... this is my Blood.” That Jesus was actually using symbolic language. This was merely a figure of speech.

And the Lutheran pastor's rebuttal to that was that, in all three Gospels and Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, Jesus refers to this meal as “*the blood of the covenant*” or “*the blood of the new covenant*.” In other words, Jesus is establishing a binding, divine, legal contract in these words. A covenant between God and man.

And this is simply not a place where you use symbolic language. It's not a place for vague figures of speech. It would be like writing a will and saying, “To my son I leave my house,” but you didn't actually mean your literal house. You meant that “house” should be interpreted as a symbol of your baseball card collection, or something ridiculous like that. Without ever explicitly making this clear at all.

That's absurd, of course. It makes no sense. It's bound to be misinterpreted. And, most importantly, you just don't do something like that in a legal document. It's too important to be clear.

And so there's something striking about how precise our Lord is on this night. Every word matters. Every action is deliberate and purposeful. The setting isn't accidental, and the meal isn't incidental. This is the Passover. The night of deliverance, when the blood of the lamb marked the people of God and death passed over them, sparing them from judgment and setting them free from slavery.

And into that ancient meal, already filled with covenantal language, Jesus speaks something new and greater. Something that both fulfills and surpasses what came before. “*Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*”

Just as there are those who gloss over “this is my Body... this is my Blood,” there are also those who quickly look past these words as well. But there are two words in this sentence that are incredibly important: “for many.” They're quite small but, like Jesus' other words, they're deliberate and full of meaning.

Although its easy to misunderstand these, as well. Because, at first glance, you might think Jesus is saying them to be restrictive. As though Jesus meant “this blood is poured out for many, but not all.” As if there are people for whom Jesus didn't die. When, in reality, the opposite is true.

Because these words actually reveal the breadth of human need. Our sinful nature naturally wants to think of sin as manageable, contained, and somewhat isolated within our own lives. We imagine it as a series of individual missteps rather than a deep and pervasive condition.

But Jesus says, “for many,” not for a few unusually bad people. Not for a handful of notorious sinners. But for a multitude. The need for forgiveness is not rare or exceptional. It is widespread and universal.

The disciples sitting at that table didn't yet grasp the depth of their need, even as they reclined with the Lord. Within hours, one would betray Him for silver, another would deny Him with oaths, and all would scatter in fear and abandon Him.

Yet Jesus gives them His Body and Blood before all that happens. Knowing exactly what they will do and how they will fail. “For many” includes them in all their weakness. And it includes us as well in ours.

Our sin is not minor, nor is it occasional, nor is it superficial. It's woven into our thoughts, our words, our deeds. It shows itself not only in what we do wrong, but also in the good that we fail to do. It is present in what we say and in what we leave unsaid. In our pride, our fear, and our self-centeredness. And so the number of sinners in need of Christ's forgiveness grows and grows. Not just a few, but many. A whole world of sinners in need of forgiveness.

And these words reveal the abundance of Christ's love in response to that need. If the need is great and stretches across many, then the answer must be greater still. Jesus doesn't say, "for a few who deserve it," or "for those who have proven themselves worthy," but simply "for many." As wide as the need extends, so wide is His mercy and His saving work.

Jesus doesn't ration his gifts to us. He doesn't measure out forgiveness in careful portions. We may measure out the wine of the Lord's Supper in tiny little cups or tiny little sips. But Jesus says His blood is poured out. Nothing held back. Nothing spared.

It is an abundant grace. Generosity that overflows to meet the full scope of human sin. "For many" is not a limitation of His mercy, but a declaration of its reach.

Think again of the Passover and what it meant for Israel. That first Passover night was not for a select inner circle or a privileged few, but for the entire people of Israel. Every household was given the promise. Every family received the command. Every door was to be marked with the blood of the lamb. Many were delivered in that single night. Not because they were different from one another, but because they shared in the same promise.

And even then, the promise was not inherently narrow or exclusive. Pharaoh heard the word of the Lord proclaimed through Moses, and the Egyptians witnessed the mighty signs and plagues. The power and truth of the God of Israel were made known to them as well. The Passover could have been for them too. But they rejected the Lord, hardened their hearts, and clung to their false gods instead.

Now, at this table, Jesus institutes a greater Passover, one that fulfills what the first one only foreshadowed. This is deliverance not merely from earthly slavery, but from sin, death, and the power of the devil. A gift "for many," drawn from every tribe and language and people.

Yet these words also teach something necessary and sobering for us to hear. This gift, though given for all, is received by many. That was true at the first Passover, where the lamb was sufficient for every household, yet only those who trusted the promise and marked their doors were spared. The gift was real and present, but it had to be received in faith.

So it is here at the Lord's Table. Jesus gives His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins, a gift that is sufficient for all and intended for all. But it's not received by all, because it's received through repentance and faith. Faith doesn't create or complete the gift. It simply receives what Christ freely gives.

And so we receive here, this very evening, the forgiveness of Jesus Christ made bread and wine and flesh and blood. We receive it directly and personally, in our hands and on our lips. "Take, eat... Take, drink." This is Christ's body, and this is Christ's blood, given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.

"For many" is a phrase that draws sinners into the wide embrace of Christ's mercy. It tells you that your need is not unique or isolated, and neither is the answer that Christ provides. You are not outside the scope of His saving work. You are not outside the bounds of his gracious love.

Christ has come precisely for sinners. Many sinners. Countless sinners. And that is exactly what you are. That is exactly why you are here. Which means that this gift is not just for many. This gift is for you.

So come to the table. Come as one who recognizes the depth of your need and the greatness of the gift. Come as one of the many who stand in need of forgiveness and life. And receive what Christ has poured out: forgiveness, life, and salvation, given freely and fully for you. Amen.