

Inheritance
1 Corinthians 11:23-26;
John 13:1-17, 31-35
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There's nothing more exciting than when you're getting ready for a new baby to enter the world. I vividly remember both times Johanna was pregnant, wondering what will they look like? Will they get dad's eyes, or mom's nose, grandma's smile, or grandpa's hairline? Wondering about what names to give them - an old family name that's been passed on through the generations from time immemorial, or something after a friend or someone from the Bible or from a favourite book? Even before they're born, that new baby has all sorts of things they're going to inherit from their parents and grandparents, genetics and family history, and then once they're born, then you get to teach them all about the things you love most and hope they love them too – you want them to grow up to be a fan of the Vancouver Canucks, you want them to have good taste in video games and movies, you want to shape them and train them and pass on all the good things you can so that they'll love what you love.

And that is what the Apostle Paul is talking about in our reading from 1 Corinthians today. Here, in the earliest account of Maundy Thursday recorded in the Bible, Paul tells the Corinthian church that he is passing on to them something that he received from the Lord himself, and both the greek words used here for pass on and receive are related to this idea of

inheritance. Paul is describing something that he inherited directly from Jesus Christ, and now he is passing that on to the Corinthians - this is their inheritance from Jesus, passed on to them from Christ through Paul. And the treasure that they have inherited from Christ isn't a family heirloom or name or some genetic material, their inheritance from Christ is this: a piece of bread and a cup of wine, and a story that explains why, why this bread and this cup are so important, why this bread and this cup mean so much. Just before he died, knowing full well that he was going to die, Jesus gathered his closest friends around him and gave them their inheritance, gave them the things he wanted them to have and cherish in the days after his death, and through the church, those disciples had continued to pass on that inheritance to all the new believers who had committed themselves to following Jesus Christ as the resurrected Son of God. The church in Corinth has been struggling with divisions and dissention, and when they celebrated the Lord's Supper it had turned into a disaster, with the poor leaving hungry and the rich getting drunk, and so Paul reminds them of why they do it in the first place. The bread you eat, the cup you drink, it's not your own, it's a gift, it's your inheritance, handed down to you from Jesus Christ to Paul and from Paul to you, and every time you eat and drink this meal, you announce the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Of course, that inheritance didn't stop there in Corinth. The amazing thing about this table is that when we gather here, when we share this bread and this cup, we are receiving our inheritance directly from the hands of Jesus

Christ. It has been passed down from generation to generation over the centuries by many different faithful men and women, but if you were able to trace the line backward, it will lead unbroken to that Upper Room on the first Maundy Thursday to the hands of Jesus Christ. Today the elders and I will share these gifts with all of you, just as we have received them from many other elders and ministers over the course of our lives, and they received them in their turn from others, and so on and so forth, all the way back to that very first Thursday night in Jerusalem when Jesus first shared this meal with his disciples. Tonight, we pass on to you what we received from the Lord himself. Tonight at this table, you receive your inheritance, you receive the gifts that Jesus Christ gave for you.

But that isn't all we receive tonight. This bread and this cup, they aren't our only inheritance. In 1 Corinthians we read the earliest account of Maundy Thursday, and in the gospel of John we get the latest one, in the last gospel to be written we get the final word on what we need to know about what happened in that Upper Room on the night our Lord was betrayed. And here Jesus gives his disciples another inheritance, another gift - he washes their feet, taking on the role of a servant for his closest friends, and then he gives them a new commandment - Love each other. In the same way that I have loved you, you should love each other. Just as Christ's disciples pass on the bread and the cup that they have inherited from the hands of Jesus, so they are to pass on the love that they have inherited, they are to serve one another

as Christ served them, they are to give of themselves in the same way that Christ gave himself for them.

And the same is true of us today. Just as we are sharing the same bread, the same cup, the same new covenant sealed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the same table passed on from Jesus to Paul to the church down through the centuries to this place here today, so we are to share the same love. The things we have inherited from Jesus Christ aren't ours to keep - they are meant to be shared, to be passed on in the same way we received them, so that the world around us will come to know the love of Jesus Christ in the same way we know it. We have Christ's commandment to love as we have been loved, to serve as we have been served, and every time we eat and drink from this table, we are reminded of that love, love that sent the Son of God to the cross, love that raised him from the dead, love that left the tomb empty and set the church on fire, that love is here today, here in this church, and for two thousand years that love has spread across this planet and touched the hearts of billions upon billions of people, all the saints of the church of Jesus Christ who have received this inheritance from the hands of those who have gone before. We have been called to share that love with the world around us, to become another link in that eternal chain that leads back to Jesus Christ, so that as we love, as we serve, as we share these gifts together, the world will know what it means to be part of the body of Jesus Christ, to be heirs of the kingdom of God. The world will know that we belong to him, and through us and in us, they will see the love of God. Amen.