

Are you ready to meet God? Generally, when someone talks about meeting God, or meeting their maker, this is a euphemism for dying. When we speak this way, it implies that God is far off from us, and that it is only when we go to the judgment that we meet God.

This is a scary thought. After all, if we first meet God at the judgment, then we are in big trouble. If we first come to God when He is evaluating our lives to see if we have lived up to His perfect standards, then we will find only condemnation.

But what if God would come to us, not in judgment, but in grace? What if God would come to us to give us His love and mercy? He did just that when Jesus walked this earth. But what about now?

Christians often talk about taking our sins and guilt to the cross. But there is a problem with this – we can’t get there! We don’t have any sort of time machine to go back to Jesus’ ministry. We can’t transport ourselves to be with Jesus. So, we need Him to come to us. This is exactly what Jesus does in Holy Communion.

This is, along with the sermon, one of the two high points in the service. In preparation for this, we continue the dialog with God. This part of the dialog contains two main parts. First, we speak to God in the Lord’s Prayer and then He answers us in the Words of Institution. You might notice that as we near the climax of the service, we are using Jesus’ words for all of this.

So, why do we use the Lord’s Prayer, and why do we use it here? First, we need to understand that this is not Law; it is not a requirement. We can pray in our own words. However, the Church has tended to use Jesus’ prayer at this point.

Why? Because it is both a model and the perfect prayer. When Jesus’ disciples asked Him to teach them how to pray, He gave them this prayer. The Lord’s Prayer therefore is a model for how we should pray and the things that we should ask God for in prayer.

Since this is the prayer that Jesus gave us, we also know that it is a perfect prayer. All too often in prayer, our own selfishness comes in. We tend to tell God what to do, rather than just ask. We find ourselves with a laundry list of things that can sound like demands. We also, to be honest, all too often ask for things that we don’t really need and may not be the best for us. Think of that old Janice Joplin song, where she sang “Oh Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz.”

To avoid this, and to make sure that we are praying for what we should pray for, we can use the Lord’s Prayer.

At this point of the service, we are focusing more and more on Jesus and His Words. It is not about us, but Jesus coming to us. So, we use even His words as the prayer.

Then comes, immediately, the answer in the form of the Words of Institution. There are some options to add a few other elements in, but I prefer the more ancient practice of getting right to the Words of Institution. Here, we are hearing what Jesus said and did to create the Lord’s Supper.

There is a little more of a challenge than you might think in coming up with the Words of Institution. The reason is that the Lord’s Supper is contained in four places in the Bible. Matthew, Mark, and Luke include Jesus institution of the Lord’s Supper in their Gospels. Interestingly, John does not. My guess is that John assumed we already had it in the other Gospels.

The last place is our text from 1 Cor 11. The way Paul introduces this gives it some gravitas, as he says, “For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you.” This is not something new, but what has been passed down to Paul and through him to us.

The problem regarding the Words of Institution is that each of the four accounts contains slightly different wording and therefore different nuances. So, Matthew and Mark both recount how Jesus said of the bread: “This is my body.” Paul adds to this, “This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” And Luke adds one more aspect to this: “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”

In much the same way, regarding the Cup, Mark records Jesus saying, “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.” To this, Matthew adds, “this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Luke’s account says that Jesus said: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.” With Paul recounting essentially the same thing as Luke.

So, which of these do you choose? To come as close as possible to what Jesus said, we use a harmony of them. We want to get it all the words and nuances that we can. Here the focus is on Jesus and His Words, so we want to get it right. The whole focus should be on Jesus and His Words.

Christians of different traditions have widely different interpretations of what is happening in the Lord’s Supper. Many Protestants say that this is just a memorial meal, after all, Jesus does tell us to “Do this in remembrance of me.” Calvinists say that believers, and only believers, spiritually ascend into heaven and communion with Jesus. Roman Catholics say that the priest

turns the bread and wine into Jesus’ body and blood and offers them anew to God in an unbloody sacrifice.

How do we know what is the right understanding? As always, we should go back to the Bible. So, what does Jesus say that this is?

He clearly says: “Take eat, this is my body,” and “this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.” We simply take Jesus at His Word. We should never try to explain His Words away. Likewise, since the Bible doesn’t tell us how it happens, we don’t try to explain how this happens.

We should trust. This is an act of faith. With this, we need to remember that God’s Word is powerful and He does things by speaking His Word. In the beginning, God spoke and everything came into being. Jesus said to people that others were healed, and they were. Jesus called to the very dead Lazarus to come out, and he walked out of his tomb, alive. When Jesus says something, it happens. So, we should trust that if Jesus says that His body and blood are here, they are here.

Furthermore, in 1 Cor 11, Paul warns us about sinning against the Sacrament. He says “Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.” To do this unworthily is to sin against Jesus’ very body and blood, and Paul even warns that some have become sick and died from misusing it. This again shows that Jesus’ body and blood are really here, because we cannot be guilty of sinning against something that isn’t really here.

When we look at the Sacrament, it is important that we not only look at what Jesus says it is, but what He says that it does. What does Jesus say

about this? He says: “Take eat, this is my body, which is given for you,” and then of the cup, “Drink of it, all of you, this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.” This is not a threat, but a promise. He says that these are given “for you.” He likewise connects this directly with “the forgiveness of sins.”

In other words, this is for you – a gift to be received through faith. And this gift is for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus is coming, in His body and blood, not in judgment, but in grace and mercy. How do we receive this worthily, and thereby not sin against Christ’s body and blood? We do so in the same way we otherwise receive His gifts: by faith. We simply believe Jesus’ words and trust that He has the power to do exactly what He says.

Here is the answer to how we come to Jesus to get forgiveness. We cannot go to Calvary. That was almost 2000 years ago on the other side of the world. We cannot ascend to heaven to be in Jesus’ presence. We need Him to come to us. And He does. He comes to us! He comes, hiding His glory, hiding His very body and blood in bread and wine. But, as sure as His Word is true, He comes.

He comes to bring forgiveness. He comes to take away our guilt, yet again. He comes, because He says that He comes.