**Mark 14:12-26 April 1, 2021**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I have noticed the rise of a line of thinking in the midst of this pandemic that is somewhat new and paradoxical over the past year. This is the idea of something that I can only describe as a “suggested imperative.” And here’s how I would describe it. The world around us is filled with concrete laws. Facts of life. Rules of conduct for how we live that in some ways also are understood through the laws that God has put forward, otherwise known as the 10 Commandments. The fifth commandment, “You shall not kill” applies to your life outside of the church as well as inside. The seventh commandment, “You shall not steal” also applies in our society as well as the church. It’s a sin and also a crime. These are imperative commands. Do not kill people. Do not steal from people. These are absolutes. But somewhere along the way with imperatives, maybe because of the stakes involved, or maybe it’s more to say just about how we view the authority of others, we start to misinterpret, or change, or…rewrite, imperative commands to be “suggested imperatives.” What I mean is we hear them as imperatives, we understand that they are being communicated as laws that are to be followed to the letter and yet, we view them as suggestions. We know we should cross the street at the crosswalk, that is the imperative, but we treat it as a suggestion, and cross in the middle of the road. We justify our action that the crosswalk was a suggestion because there aren’t any cars coming, so who cares? We know the imperative is that you don’t exceed 55 miles per hour, but again, we take that as the suggested imperative. We can go 60, we’re safe drivers, we’re paying attention, 55 for us is a suggestion, it’s alright, we’ll slow down if we see a police car. During this pandemic we’ve found this idea of a “suggested imperative” very popular because we’ve been adapting to new rules of conduct for being out in public and being around other people. We’ve heard the new imperative rules, and some we like, and others we don’t. We choose. Some have to be followed, others can be adapted, some can be ignored, and we go on with our lives. But the interesting thing is that they all remain the same wording, the same force, the same absolute. We add the suggestion, we add the wiggle room, we add the gray area.

For us tonight, as we meditate upon Christ in the upper room with his disciples, the ones whom we could really say are the final “witnesses on the road to Golgotha” to end our Lent sermon series, we have to stop for a moment and ask how we hear these words of Jesus Christ here in the institution of the Lord’s Supper, “And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them and said, “Take; this is my body.” In parallel texts from other Gospels we get the full words of Institution that you will hear this evening in the Service of the Sacrament in our liturgy that echoes the words of Jesus Christ, imperatively commanding and saying “Take, Eat, this is my body.” And “Drink of it all of you, this cup is the New Testament in my blood, which is shed for you for the forgiveness of sins.” If you look at the Greek you will find that these words are imperative commands. This Sacrament is imperatively commanded for us Christians to come, take, eat, and drink for the forgiveness of sins, and tonight, on this Holy Thursday, this Maundy Thursday, Maundy coming from the Latin word mandatum, where you can hear the word “mandate” or command, for us tonight we have to ask ourselves, as we continue on this lent journey, how do we view this mandate? This imperative command? And really, how do we view the reception of the very body and blood of Jesus Christ that He freely pours out for us and institutes for us on this holy night?

Now as we talked about, some imperative commands are for the benefits of others. We have laws against killing and stealing for the benefit of ourselves and so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor’s body or possessions. We have laws concerning crosswalks and speed limits for the same reason. We also have innocent commands by others for you to do things that will only benefit you, and if you choose to ignore those imperative commands, you are the only one who pays the price and suffers the consequences. If your grandmother tells you to eat, enjoy, and don’t be bashful but eat whatever you want at the Easter dinner table, the stakes aren’t as high as ignoring a law where you will pay a fine or go to jail. If you ignore her you will only have yourself to blame if you leave her table hungry. She is commanding you, imperatively, but you understand it as a “suggested imperative”, you don’t have to do it, but really, there’s no reason to not listen to this command from a woman who cares about you and wants to make sure you get enough to eat. So we have to make sense of this command of Jesus Christ for us here tonight in the Upper room. Is he commanding his disciples, and us in the same way to come, take, eat, and drink because it’s something we have to do? Or is it more of a suggested imperative that you can choose to do if you want, or choose not to, it really doesn’t matter?

If it doesn’t matter….why do it? Or a better question, if it doesn’t matter…then what exactly is it? Is this just a symbolic representation of the body and blood of Jesus Christ? Is all this just a game? A remembrance meal? A time to look back on what those men experienced so long ago but nothing more? Because if there is no power in this bread and wine, if this is just a snack in the middle of a service, then it is a suggested imperative. You can be part of the show or not so to speak. You can come and join in the reenactment, if you want, but otherwise stay in your seats and soon we’ll move on. And some churches believe that. That’s all this is. Jesus is suggesting for you to come forward, eat, and drink “In remembrance of Him.” As he himself states in the word of institution, and that’s it. That’s all you get out of it, and since the stakes are so low, who cares, it’s up to you. It’s just a suggestion.

And that’s sometimes how we view it. Which is to our own detriment, and our ignorance causes lasting and serious consequences for our faith. There are some who are hearing me speak, via the internet, or reading these words after I have uploaded this sermon on our website, who have not communed in over a year. Over….a year! This pandemic has brought on a new set of imperatives for the sake of people’s health and well being which we all know very well, especially those who are seated here tonight, distanced and masked in our sanctuary. But to go so long without this sacrament, this imperatively commanded sacrament of Christ’s body and blood, in with and under bread and wine for the forgiveness of sins can’t be ignored. If it doesn’t matter, then why is it commanded? If it doesn’t matter, why do we need to receive it? If we have an aloof manner about receiving this sacrament, or grow tired of eating and drinking the body and blood of Jesus Christ, it is a clear sign of the state of our faith and how weak it is. And we all are guilty of treating the Lord’s Supper as a secondary part of our faith, and our worship, and our liturgy and time together. To disregard it and abstain from it and see these words of Jesus as a “suggested imperative.” As something we have the authority to pick and choose in God’s Word. Which is wrong, and a sin, and must be repented of. We are witnesses on our own road to our own Golgotha, or our own deaths, of all the times we’ve taken the clear, absolute, authoritative, written in stone laws of God and turned them into “suggested imperatives” because we don’t like what they say. And that’s wrong, and that’s a sin, and that must be repented of. God’s Word is clear, and we are not the ultimate authority.

It does matter. Jesus says it matters, our church has always emphasized that it matters, our liturgy builds up to it, it’s the high point of the service, it matters because of what it is. The very body and blood of Jesus Christ, given for us to eat and drink for the forgiveness of our sins, and tonight is the celebration and remembrance of it’s institution. It matters because of what it gives, it matters because of what it reminds us of, it matters because it’s imperatively commanded. But again, while it holds this weight, it also should be seen as your grandmother commanding you to eat more ham, to grab a chocolate egg or bunny, and to come and give her a hug before you leave. Because it’s for your benefit. There is no law about how often you should receive it. You don’t need to punch a card a certain number of times in a year for it’s benefits to be yours. It’s simply yours, God gives it to you through His Son Jesus Christ, Your Savior, who in the final moments of his freedom institutes something for your benefit, for your comfort, before he goes off, prays, and is arrested. He’s thinking of you, providing for you his very body and blood sacrificed for the forgiveness of your sins. How could you not come and receive it? He commands you to! It’s not a suggestion. But it’s all for you, His Word, His love, His Supper, His life. For you. Given for you, for your benefit. You are a witness to that truth, on the road to Golgotha, because that’s where we are going. We are leaving the room, the lights, and the calm peace of a fellowship together, and it’s all being stripped away. Soon there will be nothing but black, and sadness, and tears for sin. So before that is all we see, let’s come together for a meal of forgiveness and remembrance. Come and receive.

Amen.

The peace of God which surpasses all human understanding keep our hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Amen.