

The meaning of the Sacraments – Communion

I was talking to a friend a number of years ago and I forget how we got on the subject but he was telling me about his brother and how he died. He said his brother loved to fish and was fishing on the Kenai River for red salmon one evening and he was standing in the river fishing and he had on his chest waders when he either stepped into a hole or slipped and his waders filled up with water and he drowned.

The Alaska State Troopers called him at about 2 or 3 in the morning and even though it has been years since it happened he said if the phone rings in the middle of the night it scares him and he's afraid to answer it. Memories can be powerful, can't they?

Memories can have powerful effects on us. And today we are going to talk about something that we do here in church that is done for that very reason. I am referring to Communion.

Last week we talked about the sacrament of Baptism. **And by sacrament I mean something that Jesus did Himself and wants us to do also.** Baptism is the sacrament that we act upon when we understand who Jesus is and that He died for us and was buried and rose again giving us the hope of eternal life. Baptism is the Sacrament we do when we accept Jesus as our personal Savior.

Communion is the sacrament that we do over and over so that we remember Jesus and what He did for us. We remember His body that was broken for us and His blood that was spilled for us.

The main passage we are going to be looking at is found in 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, *“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”*

It is interesting that Paul added the line *“on the night He was betrayed.”* I think he did that because he was making a valuable point that he wanted us to take careful note of.

Show video clip of betrayal.

Remember the circumstances in which this meal was first celebrated. It was the night that He was betrayed that it all started. And a lot of things happened that night.

And also, even though Jesus knew what was going to happen to him that night and what it would lead to, Matthew 26:30 says: *“When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.”* He not only gave thanks and they sang.

Just think, He gave thanksgiving and praise on the night of His **betrayal**. Because it was a Passover meal we even know which song they sang, Psalm 118. *“O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His steadfast love endures forever.”* It is incredible that in His darkest hour, Jesus was able to praise God for His goodness.

1. As part of the practice of communion we praise God.

That is still a part of the Lord’s Supper; we praise God for His Goodness in sending His Son to die on the cross for us. We remember and celebrate what Jesus did for us.

We read in Luke 22 that when Jesus and His disciples were at the table having this last supper, just hours before His arrest and trial and crucifixion, Jesus took a piece of bread from the table and everything got real quiet.

He took the bread and broke it. And then He passed the pieces around and He said, *“My body in just a matter of hours is going to be broken for you.”* And He said, *“Eat this now and do this very same kind of thing after I’m gone again and again. Do it in remembrance of Me!”*

Then the Scriptures say **He took wine** and He poured it out for each of them. And then He said, *“My blood is going to be poured out for you. Drink this now. And after I’m gone, do the same thing over and over again. And remember Me!”*

2. A big part of Communion is remembering Jesus and what He did for us.

Now, I think the disciples were saying to themselves: How could we ever forget You? I mean, no way! This is not a necessary sacrament! We will keep you in mind forever!

But Jesus knew them better than they knew themselves. And He certainly knows us better than we know ourselves. And He knows the human tendency to forget!

He knows the human tendency to allow the pace of life and the challenges of life and the defeats and the heartbreaks of life to slowly fade the recollection of the importance of what Jesus did for us on the Cross.

And the wonder of the love of Christ fades. And over time, our hearts start to grow cold and our souls start to dry up and, before you know it, we're **living beneath our privilege**. We're not responding to God like forgiven sons and daughters. We're estranged from Him. We're now operating in our own little kingdom, no longer tightly connected to the kingdom of God.

We may even forget that we matter to God and our spiritual self-esteem takes a beating. We fall into confusion and fear and apathy and superficial Christianity. And it can all be traced back to a memory problem! The exact reason why Jesus established the sacrament of Communion so that we would remember Him.

(DEFINITION of communion or the Lord's Supper:) The supper Jesus shared with His disciples a few hours before he was arrested and taken to His trial and death; the ceremony of the bread and wine that Christians have come to call Communion or the Lord's Supper.

In the sacrament of Communion, Jesus is saying to His followers, "Don't forget Me, **for your sake** don't forget Me. Don't forget who I am. Don't forget **what I did** for you. Don't forget **what I'm going** to do for you. Don't forget I am with you.

And He says: To help you remember, partake of Communion. And at the Communion Table, you will eat the bread and drink the cup.

And in doing so, you'll remember that the body of Jesus Christ was broken and the blood of Jesus Christ was shed for the forgiveness of your sins. And it'll remind you that it was real, that it really happened, and that it happened for you!

What can we do at the Communion Table?

- You can take spiritual inventory.
- You can confess failures and heartbreaks to Him.
- You can worship Him.
- You can remember Him.

I just keep getting this sense that God is a whole lot more serious about the sacraments than we are! And I think we have to get back into a position where we can say: Lord, we're serious about them also.

So let us look this morning at what the Lord's Supper means:

Luke 22:14-20: *“When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. ¹⁵ And he said to them, “I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God.” ¹⁷ After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, “**Take** this and divide it among you. ¹⁸ For I tell you I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes.” ¹⁹ And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.” ²⁰ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.”*

Video of what it might of looked like.

Notice the Lord's Supper was established by Christ Himself.

The Lord's Supper is a particular reminder of the death of Christ and His sacrifice on our behalf.

What was Jesus doing in the passage we just read? (Luke 22) He was eating the Passover meal with the 12 disciples. And at this particular Passover meal He changed the nature of what the meal symbolizes.

What did the Passover symbolize? What was the Passover?

The Passover was a celebration of what God did for the Hebrew nation when He freed them from slavery in Egypt. God had a covenant or contract with the Jews that if they would be His people He would take care of them and save them.

When Jesus sat down to eat the Passover meal it was to remember and celebrate that 1,500 years before the birth of Jesus, the Jews had been released from bondage and spared from the death of their first-born.

The way this happened was that the Jews had taken the blood of a lamb, and painted it on the doorpost of their home. When the angel of death came to kill all the firstborn sons in Egypt he **PASSED OVER** the Jew's homes that had the blood on the doorposts. Which is how the Passover got its name.

So in this way the Jews were **saved by the blood of an innocent lamb. It appears that God used this method to fore-shadow how we were going to be **saved by the blood** of the innocent Lamb of God, Jesus.**

And Paul refers to this in 1 Cor 5:7, “*Christ our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*” So Jesus changed forever the meaning of the celebration. Now what we celebrate and remember is how we have been spared from the **angel of death forever** by the blood of an innocent lamb, His blood.

Back in Egypt in Exodus 12:12-13 God had told His people: “*That night I will go through the land of Egypt and kill all the firstborn animals and people in the land of Egypt. I will also punish all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD.*”¹³ *But the blood will be a sign on the houses where you are. **When I see the blood, I will pass over you. Nothing terrible will hurt you when I punish the land of Egypt.***”

And in Romans 5:9 it says, “*So through Christ we will surely be saved from God’s anger, because we have been made right with God by the blood of Christ’s death.*” **Just as the blood of a lamb saved the ancient Hebrews from the anger of God so the blood of God’s lamb saves us from His anger.**

Now here is a very important aspect of what Jesus was doing at this last supper with his disciples: (Luke 22:14-20).

We notice in the passage we read that it says **Jesus was putting in place a new covenant** or contract, but this time it was with all the people of the earth. And He says if you, or anyone from any nation, will be my people I will take care of you and save you for all of eternity.

So the Lord’s Supper is a time of praise & thanksgiving and a reminder of how He died and how His body was broken and His blood spilled on our behalf.

1. The **Passover looks back** with thankful remembrance to the people’s redemption and liberation from Egypt by an act of God, associated with the sacrifice of the Passover lamb.

2. We look back to the Lord’s Supper with thankful remembrance to our redemption by an act of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ the Lamb of God.

3. It is for these reasons that we believe in THE NECESSITY OF **REPETITION**.

Believers celebrated the Lord’s Supper from the beginning. The church that Paul wrote to in 1 Corinthians appeared to not only celebrate communion once a week, but a number of times during the week, perhaps every time they met.

AND WE BELIEVE THE LORD'S SUPPER IS SOMETHING THAT WE SHOULD CONTINUE TO PRACTICE OFTEN. (SO WE DO.)

3. Communion represents what it is that we depend on, the fact and meaning of Christ's death.

1. Our **entire belief system and hope** are based on what communion symbolizes. As we remember His death on the cross we cannot help but remember the fact that death could not hold Jesus and He arose again.

And not only that He triumphed over death but also He ascended into heaven where He intercedes for those who have faith in Him.

2. So every time we partake we **proclaim** that He not only did these things but that we are looking forward to when He comes again.

Paul specifically indicated that the Lord's Supper is a form of proclamation. 1 Cor 11:26, "*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim** the Lord's death until he comes.*" It reminds us that His death is the basis of our salvation and when we partake of communion we are proclaiming that we believe **He is coming again.**

There is also a **spiritual benefit** to the taking of the Lord's Supper.

1 Cor 11:29-30, "*For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.* ³⁰ *That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*" We see that many at Corinth had become weak and ill; and some had even died. The value intended by the Lord was not being realized in their cases.

It is evident that the effect of the Lord's Supper depends upon the **heart condition** of the partaker. It is clear that a correct understanding of the meaning of the Lord's Supper and an appropriate faith and heart condition are necessary for the rite to be effective.

1 Cor 11:28 says, "*A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*"

What does that mean? **Examine yourself?** First, examine yourself that you are thinking about the right thing, how Christ was nailed to a cross for you and how He was buried and rose again and set the world free. Then examine yourself to see if there is any unconfessed sin in your life.

1 John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

Next, think if there is anyone who has offended you whom you have **not forgiven**. Mark 11:25, *“When you are praying, if you are angry with someone, forgive him so that your Father in heaven will also forgive your sins.”*

After all, what you are remembering in your taking of the Lord’s Supper is the One who forgave us all of everything. 1 Cor 11:27 tells us, *“Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.”*

If you want to make sure you are not taking communion in an **unworthy manner**, then as you meditate, **confess** to the Lord any unconfessed sin you have in your life and forgive anyone who has offended you.

In order to emphasize the unity of partaking together we are going to partake in a certain way. The **bread and the juice will be passed to everyone**, please take it and hold onto it so we can all take it together.

While you are waiting for everyone to receive theirs please **be meditating** and praying silently to the Lord and confess and ask for forgiveness for any sin in your life.

Also examine yourself and if you find anyone who has offended you or you are angry with please **forgive them at this time**. Pray for the Lord’s help in doing this.

Let us pray: Lord, we come before You this day remembering how you died in our place, a death we should have died. And how you were buried and rose again and how Your broken body, that this bread represents, was made whole again and was glorified. Lord we freely confess to You any sin that has been in our life and ask for forgiveness. Amen

Please bow your head and **visualize these scenes** as I describe them:

Think of Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem. See, in your minds eye, Jesus riding on a donkey and the people are laying down their cloaks and palm branches on the road for Jesus to ride over and they are singing, *“Hosanna, Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!”*

This was on Sunday. See the people embracing Jesus and shouting praises. Think of the glowing and happy faces in the crowd as they look upon Jesus.

Then on Thursday Jesus has the Last Supper and tells His disciples to partake of the bread and wine as a remembrance of Him. See Jesus giving the bread to the twelve and telling them, *“This bread is my body which will be broken for you and this wine is my blood which will be spilled for you.”*

And then that night and the next day they took Him and spit in His face and struck Him with their fists and slapped Him and said, *“Prophecy to us Christ. Who hit you?”*

Just four or five days earlier some of these same people had been singing “Hosanna” and welcoming him into Jerusalem. See the hatred on the faces in the crowd as they jeer Him and shout “Crucify Him!” and how He bore it all for me.

See the soldiers take Him and slap a crown of thorns on His head and mock Him and spit on Him and strike Him.

See how they drove the nails through His hands and His feet and they crucified Him, He died and was buried.

Then think of His resurrection and the hope we have in Jesus!