

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23

“A Psalm of David. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. 2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. 3 He restores my soul; He leads me in the paths of righteousness For His name's sake. 4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; For You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over. 6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me All the days of my life; And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”

"A Meal Among Our Enemies"

We are spending the final five weeks of ordinary time this year reviewing our practice of Covenant Renewal Worship. We are striving to rightly worship God by following the pattern that we see in the Scriptures with five elements that have been a part of Christian worship for thousands of years:

- **A Call to Worship our Triune God**
- **A Confession of our sins & forgiveness**
- **A time of Consecration of the Saints**
- **A Communion meal with our Savior**
- **A Commission to disciple the nations**

We come this week to the portion of the Covenant Renewal Worship where we share a meal with God!

Having a meal with God is a very simple but profound act...

- **As we consider the Lord's Table this morning I hope to give you one of those properly organized three point sermons!**

-- First we will consider the position of the glorious meal we have before us.

-- Second we will look at our specific practice and review why we do what we do here on Sunday.

-- And finally, we will see how this meal gives meaning and purpose to all the meals in our lives.

Position, practice and purpose...

- **So now you have a properly alliterated three point sermon!**

We position communion after our consecration and before we are commissioned and sent forth and we do so each every week... Jesus gave us simple commands for partaking, which we will review in a moment, and then told his disciples to do this as His memorial!

- **The remembrance of His suffering on the cross and the great victory that was wrought.**

Jesus came to save His people from their sins: He came as the Great Shepherd pictured so eloquently by King David in perhaps the most familiar Psalm which we read this morning.

- **The Lord is my shepherd!**

He makes sure we are properly cared for and protects us from danger. He guides and disciplines us in the ways we should go and then David says that He prepares a meal in the midst of our enemies! We are in the midst of a great battle raging against the results of Adam's sin: Death & destruction & deceit are everywhere we look.

- **Truly, we are surrounded by God's enemies. *[And we live in America!]***

- **BUT, just as we see from so many of the examples of battles in the Old Testament, with this memorial we are reminded that God has already won the victory.**

The Lord is not preparing a last meal for a helpless group that is about to be overrun on the battle field.

We have been recruited into God's army and we remembered this in our time of confession & forgiveness. Lord willing, we are a properly trained army that was prepared through our consecration...

- **An army about to be commissioned to serve in God's great battle!**

At this glorious meal we give honor to our General, if you will, bringing to His remembrance what He has done to prepare and assure our victory.

- **When we understand this, it is easy to see that God prepares a meal in the presence of our enemies right here each and every week!**

Here we see a simple meal as we prepare to go forth and serve in the simple ways that God has commanded us to serve. Each doing our part to advance the Kingdom of God: Be it changing that next diaper for one of our covenant children or making a million dollars so we can finance foreign missions.

What we know and believe is that the victory has been won and that ALL of these parts will one day complete the Spirit's work of filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus. After the Spirit's work is complete, Paul tells us in I Corinthians 15, that Jesus will then destroy the final enemy: Death.

John in Revelation tells us that death will be cast into the Lake of Fire and also speaks of the Great Marriage Supper of the Lamb: The great feast that is foretold by this Table.

- **The Lord's Supper is a simple and yet glorious meal where we remember the work Jesus has done on the cross and His final victory at the end of history!**

This is why we believe that it must be properly positioned in our covenant renewal worship...

- **Something that should be done each and every week.**

Some in the reformed world would argue that this is dangerous because we risk losing the centrality of the Word of God: But we must not put the Word and the Sacrament at odds with each other.

It would be like arguing that having a wedding feast somehow takes away from the importance and solemnness of the marriage vows. When two single people come together to take their marriage vows, that is when they are truly changed: They are no longer two but one.

- **They are now married!**

It is this reality that is then celebrated at the marriage feast, acknowledging what has been done with the vows...

- **AND looking forward to the glorious marriage that lies ahead.**

If on the other hand, two people decided that they wanted to live together and held a BIG party to celebrate their decision, they would NOT be married no matter how glorious the feast.

On the flip side, if two people just quietly take their vows and want no celebration, they are indeed married but have missed a time of celebration & have perhaps begun a pattern that will deprive them of many of the joys available in marriage.

I trust this illustration helps you to see the importance of both Word and Sacrament and why they are not at odds with each other in our worship.

So with that understanding of why we position communion here in the service each week, let me speak for just a moment about our practice. I cover much of this on a regular basis during our short meditations before we partake each week...

But it is always good to review, especially for the sake of our covenant children.

- **After our consecration we approach the Lord's Table as God's people, the Body of Christ.**
- **It is our practice to confess our faith with the singing of the Apostle's Creed as we approach the Table.**
- **During Advent we read the Nicene Creed and on Trinity Sunday and other special occasions we recite the Athanasian Creed. [The Creeds declare who we are and the singing of the Apostle's Creed gives us an opportunity to function as a body!]**

Coming to this Table is our time to gather and obey the simple commands that Jesus has given:

- **Take some bread, give thanks and eat it**
- **Take some wine, give thanks and drink it.**

Jesus said that we do this in remembrance of Him or as His memorial.

- **As with the rainbow that God put in the sky, the memorial or sign is there to bring the covenant promises to God's remembrance!**

Coming to the Lord's Table also reminds us that history is going somewhere: We have moved beyond the Passover meal where bitter herbs reminded God's people about the wages of sin and the blood of the lamb could be seen or remembered on the doorpost.

- **We have come to a meal of remembrance with good bread and rich wine knowing that Jesus has promised to come again after His Kingdom has filled the earth!**

Here at Church of the King we come to the Lord's Table each and every Lord's Day and we have all baptized members participate, including our baptized covenant children. These practices are not common in most American evangelical or reformed churches today, so we must be prepared to defend our practice. It is also a good place to remember that we must be humble when sharing how and why we worship as we do with people who attend other churches.

- **For example, today I hold that weekly communion is critically important for right worship.**

However, for the first twenty-five years of my walk with the Lord I gave it little thought and attended churches with worship services where the Lord's Table was offered about once a month.

- **I would not have reacted well to someone coming along and telling me boldly how wrong I was at this point, along with all the church leaders that I respected.**

If we believe this is the proper Biblical practice we should be able to effectively make the case for weekly communion and full participation, BUT we must be humble & patient in doing so.

- **So why weekly communion?**

There are two primary reasons: First, Jesus tells us to partake as often as we meet, and as we have been studying, this is speaking about when we meet for corporate worship.

- **We do not do communion when-ever we gather for a family meal or a few of us get together for coffee.**

And this relates to the second reason: As we have been studying how God renews His covenant with His people during the worship service we come to see that the Lord's Table is a critical part of what is done.

- **It is here at this Table that we gather to have a meal with our God & Savior as the sign and seal of the covenant between us.**
- **For these reasons it should be included each time we come together for worship.**

So what are the objections to having weekly communion and why is it so rare today in what we would otherwise consider very solid and Biblical churches?

Again I think there are two reasons: The main reason that you will often hear today is that the Supper should be special and doing it every week would make it too common... If we think of it like a photo album or the family movies then yes looking at them every night or even every week could get pretty old.

- However, if the Supper is a real part of our relationship with Jesus then we should not grow tired of it any more than we do all those family hugs or kissing our wife or husband.

The second reason is that by the time of the reformation the Lord's Table had been greatly distorted under a lot of pomp and circumstance and many very serious errors had been introduced. Because the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches put SUCH a wrong emphasis on the Lord's Supper many reformers were hesitant to restore weekly communion.

So why do we include our baptized covenant children?

- This is the family meal for the church and this is the reason that we believe that our covenant children are to participate as well. *[just like at home!]*

Those who are wearing the wedding garments are invited to the wedding feast...

- And our children are given those white robes by faith and baptism, not through knowledge and works.

Some will argue that we must exclude our children because they cannot examine themselves as Paul commanded in I Corinthians 11: Well, if adult warnings are going to be literally applied to our children then they are going to get pretty hungry because in another place Paul tells the church at Thessalonica that if a man will not work, let him not eat!

Many will argue that children cannot understand what they are doing:

- That while Baptism is passive, we are to participate in the Supper.

Yes, Elizabeth or Lucia cannot explain much about what we are doing... But who among us can really explain all that takes place at the Supper? In some ways the little ones practice communion better than we do because they are not as confused about it with a lot of knowledge that is not right!

As we instruct our children and others we must always strive to maintain a Biblical balance... As with most important issues there are two cliffs that we need to avoid:

On the one side are those who make too much of the Supper: In a Roman Catholic mass they believe that the priest is actually reenacting the sacrifice of Jesus and that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus. If you have been doing your homework in the book of Hebrews you know that the Apostle Paul clearly rejects such errors, as did the reformation.

Jesus came to save His people from their sins, to be THE sacrifice for sin pictured in the Old Testament and that sacrifice was ONCE for all... We can no longer go back to the animal sacrifices and we cannot, and must NOT try to duplicate what Jesus did on Calvary.

The other cliff is to believe that the Supper is no big deal, just a way to remember what Jesus did like having a family photo album or some home movies to watch. Seeing the Supper as merely a way to remember, was the view held and defended by Zwingli and some other reformers and is now the predominant view in most American churches today.

- Those who struggled to avoid these two cliffs and stay on solid Biblical ground were men like Martin Luther and John Calvin.

Both would argue that each cliff was wrong, and both believed strongly in the real presence of Jesus at the Supper and that the Supper should be practiced on a weekly basis as we do here at Church of the King.

Finally I need to say just a word about the call for self-examination and the warnings that Paul gives in I Corinthians. Since these have been wrongly used by many to exclude our children and those who may not have a full mental capacity from the Table, we must understand what Paul meant. Paul is not calling on us to have a private time of examination prior to partaking:

- This we should have done when we confessed our sins. *[If one did not do so, then yes, they should do so before coming to the Table.]*

Paul has been addressing the problems of division in the body there at Corinth & now shows that it has even impacted how they celebrate communion. Paul's main point is that these divisions are BAD and that NO one should be excluded from the Supper...

- It is truly sad that this Scripture is used today to exclude our children and other covenant members from the Table.

Paul's bottom-line is that because they have neglected the body [the gathered Body of Christ not the bread] there are some among them who are suffering and even dying from such neglect.

- It is the opposite of what we saw after Pentecost where the believers had all things in common and took care of all their needs!
- Again, this is why we sing our creed: We affirm what we believe as a body and have to function as a body to sing it well!

This is why we don't take the bread and wine and bow our heads to quietly eat it by ourselves or even as families:

- We partake together and should rejoice together as we do so!

We have looked at the position & our practice to better understand the rich meaning & importance of the Supper!

- Lord willing, each week we can and will continue to learn the richness that God offers us at His Table!
- We also hope and pray that regular partaking by all those who are baptized will once again become a very common practice in our American churches.
- Asking God to give us the patience to allow our brothers and sisters the time they need to learn the truths we are blessed to practice.

In closing I want to consider a broader purpose of the Supper as well:

- A way in which it practically impacts our Christian lives...
- We should come to see the Lord's Table as the meal which gives meaning to all of the other meals that we share with one another.
- And on the other hand, all of the other meals that we share, if done properly, should contribute to our right understanding of what happens here at the Lord's Table!

If we have gone the way of much of our busy world & forgotten the importance of meals & fellowship; then we need to return to more Biblical ways. Remembering how important they are to us and any children that God may have put under our care... It is good to remember and instruct our children about the basics of food: How things just left on the plate or even in the refrigerator will simply rot...

- Yet when eaten they give us life!

We must remember and teach them that family meals or fellowship meals are a time where we see good food & drink encouraging and enriching good discussions and right relationships.

AND how good relationships and beautiful tables encourage and enhance the enjoyment of food & drink.

We come to understand the importance of this when we consider the prominent place that food has in the Bible:

- As we often say, you find food everywhere in the Bible.

You can argue that the entire creation was a banquet table set out before Adam and Eve to enjoy: When God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food."

In the Bible, we see many times where God sits with those He has come to make a covenant with around a meal, as He did with Abraham when He gave him many of those covenant promises. We should know well how the covenant families in Egypt gathered for the Passover meal...

- This meal was commanded to be held each year as a remembrance of God's great deliverance.

Then we see in the midst of all the Tabernacle and Temple sacrifices, there is a time where the priests and/or the worshippers have a meal before God often with grain and wine!

This flows naturally into the fellowship that we saw and studied in the Book of Acts: Breaking bread both here at the Lord's Table and from house to house.

I think we have done well in this area as a Church, but we can always do better...

We must strive to pass on this love of food and fellowship to our children.

We must also remember to include ALL the members of our body, not just those we get along with or are most like us...

We need to remember those who get left out: Our singles or the large families [tell the Laningham story]

We have considered the Lord's Supper:

-- How it is positioned...

-- How we practice it each week...

-- And its broader purpose in our everyday lives...

- May we always marvel at what is revealed in its mysteries
- May we grow to understand how truly profound it is in all of its simplicity.

And with the child-like faith that Jesus said was required to be a part of His Kingdom...

- May we always remember, that it is here at the Table of our Lord that He meets us each week, nourishing us with all that we need to properly serve in His Kingdom:
- The Lord's Table is truly a table set in the midst of our enemies, where we partake of true meat & drink indeed!

Communion Meditation: Isaiah 55:

"1 "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price.

2 Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance.

3 Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David. "