

Scripture Reading: Mark 14

“22 And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, “Take, eat; this is My body.” 23 Then He took the cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 24 And He said to them, “This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many.”

"A Table for God's People"

I promised last week that I would give some expanded thoughts on Communion in this message, and Lord willing they will be helpful. In looking back, I found that I have taught on our covenant renewal worship with a series of sermons at least five times over the past twenty years, as a review for all of us and especially the children & new folks among us.

Some were quite long, so I will try to be more concise this morning as we consider the communion text Pastor Walters expounded on last week from our series on Mark.

First, we will consider the of the Lord's Table in our worship service.

Next, we will consider just how we actually practice communion.

- **Finally, we will consider how another purpose of the Lord's Table here at church is to bring more meaning and purpose to all of the meals in our lives.**

An alliterated three points of placement, practice and purpose to help us remember the points and even in alphabetical order!

Where we place Communion relates to where it fits into our covenant renewal worship service. There are five elements, and with each one it is God Who acts & we respond:

- **God calls us to worship and we respond by gathering together.**
- **God demands that we be Holy and we respond by confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness.**
- **God changes us with instruction from His Word & we respond by listening & learning along with bringing our worship, gifts & prayers.**
- **God sets before us His Holy meal and we respond with the eating of the bread and drinking of the wine in faith.**
- **Finally, God commands us to go forth and serve His Kingdom and we respond by living faithful and obedient lives during the week.**

Thus, Communion is properly placed after our consecration & before we are commissioned so we are prepared to serve.

- **And this brings us to a discussion of our practice here at Church of the King starting with the fact that we commune each and every week.**

Some in the reformed world have argued that this is a dangerous practice because we risk losing the centrality of the Word of God in the worship service:

- **But we should not put Word & Sacrament at odds with each other.**

It is like someone arguing that the wedding feast somehow takes away from the importance and solemnness of the wedding vows. When two single people come together to take their wedding 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 wedding feast, acknowledging what has been done with the vows...

- **AND** Lord willing begins the celebration of a glorious marriage with them together for many years.

On the other hand, **IF** two people decided that they wanted to just live together and held a **BIG** party to celebrate their decision, they would **NOT** be married in God's eyes no matter how glorious the feast they held.

And considering how this relates to communion, if the first two people just quietly take their vows and want no celebration, they are indeed married! But they have missed a time of celebration & have perhaps begun a pattern that will deprive them of many of the joys available in marriage.

- This marriage illustration helps us to see the importance of **BOTH** Word and Sacrament and why they are not at odds with each other in our worship.

It is also our practice to stress how we approach the Lord's Table as God's people, the Body of Christ.

We announce that the Table is for those who have been baptized and we then confess our faith together with the singing of the Apostle's Creed: This demonstrates the reality of the one and the many in a very practical way, something I will expound upon when we come to Trintiy Sunday.

With our Creed we declare who we are and by singing the Apostle's Creed together, it gives us an opportunity to demonstrate our function as a body!

Coming to this Table is our time to gather & obey the simple commands Jesus gave in our text & related Scriptures:

- 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 of salvation to God's remembrance!

As we come to the Lord's Table each and every Lord's Day, 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 should be prepared to defend our practice, when questioned about it.

It is also a good place to remember that we must be patient & humble when sharing how and why we worship as we do with people who attend other churches.

- For example, today I hold & teach 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 leaders of the church offered the Lord's Table only once a month.

- I would not have reacted well back then to someone coming along and telling me boldly how wrong I was on that 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.

As Pastor Wilson reminds us, sometimes it can take us years to learn a particular lesson or Truth and then we often turn around and expect the next Saint to get it in 15 minutes! Thinking why can't they see it? It is **SO** obvious.

We believe God renews His covenant with His people during the worship service, and believe the Lord's Table is a critical part of such right worship. In teaching about this important sign and seal which Jesus instructed us to continue as oft as we meet, there are two cliffs 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 bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus, so the priest can actually reenact the sacrifice of Jesus. This is wrong because Jesus came as the Lamb of God to be THE sacrifice for sin pictured in the Old Testament and His sacrifice was ONCE for all...

- **In the New Testament, animal sacrifices are forbidden and we cannot, and must NOT try to duplicate what Jesus did on Calvary.**

The other cliff is believing the Supper is not that important, merely a way to remember what Jesus did in His sacrifice, like having a family photo album or some home movies to watch.

This was the view held and defended by Zwingli and some other reformers and is sadly 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 argued 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.

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

The main reason you will often hear is that the Supper should be special and doing it every week would make it too common: But is that the case?

If we think of communion as a mere remembrance like photo album or those family movies, then yes looking at them every night or even every week would 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. [try telling your spouse you think refraining would make it more special]**

There were historical influences as well. By the time of the Reformation the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches had introduced serious errors and put SUCH a wrong emphasis on the Lord's Supper, that many reformers were hesitant to restore weekly communion.

The other objection that will be raised relates to those historical influences when someone says that too much focus on communion can take away from the centrality of the Word of God in worship, a hallmark of the Reformation.

- **Here at Church of the King, we put a healthy focus on communion and partake each week, and I think it would be hard to argue that we neglect the Word in our worship services.**

Our other distinction comes with the fact that we have all of our baptized covenant children participate in communion each week when they are able to come.

- **Our children are members of the Body as we learned with Malichi this morning: Thus they should participate in the Communion meal for the Church, just as they do the family meals at home.**

The major argument for excluding our children comes from calls for self-examination by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 11, where ironically the Apostle is calling for unity in the Body.

What he gives there are adult warnings! IF we apply such warnings literally with 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, little ones like Geneva or Armond cannot explain much about what we are doing... But who among us can really explain all that takes place at the Supper? Adults have been debating it for two thousand years!

- Jesus spoke of child like faith, and we have our children participate because we want them to know that they belong to the Body of Christ!
[think about how kids would feel if they were sent to there rooms at dinner time?]

Their understanding will increase, just as it would with a new convert, and thus we instruct our children and others about the proper placement, practice and purpose of communion.

Almost all the opposition to bringing children comes from that single passage in I Corinthians. Since it has 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 and the context in which they are found.

The Apostle's discussion of the Body & Communion began back at the beginning of chapter ten where he says about the people in the wilderness: "Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, 2 all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ."

[Ask the children if they would have been hungry without the Manna and mentioned weaned children]

And the Apostle shows that he has communion in mind when he says at verse 16: "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? 17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread." There is 'the one and the many' again, but the Apostle's focus is on unity!

Paul has been addressing the problems of division in the body there at Corinth & goes on to show how it has even impacted how they celebrate communion.

As we read on in chapter 11, he gives examples of their divisions even in the worship service. Paul's main point is that these divisions are BAD and that NO one should be excluded from the Supper... What he had in mind with this conclusion: 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

- 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: Paul was 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.]

- **We partake together and should rejoice together as we do so!**
- **Lord willing, each week we can and will continue to learn and experience the richness 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 and around the world.**

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.

Now I want to turn to a broader purpose of the Supper:

- **This Table should have impacts in our broader 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 modern world & forgotten the importance of meals & fellowship;

then we need to repent & 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, a peace offering, where the priests and/or the worshippers have a meal before God often with grain and wine!

- **A foreshadowing of the Table before us here this morning!**

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.

As we strive to follow their example we must remember to include ALL the members of our body, not just those we get along with or who are most like us...

Remembering those who are often neglected: Like our singles or the large families.

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

- **And finally we must strive to pass on this love of food and fellowship to our children.**

So this morning we have considered the Lord's Supper with three points:

-- How it is positioned...

-- How we practice it each week...

-- And how a broader purpose impacts even our everyday lives...

- **May we always marvel at what is revealed in its mysteries, and 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, how 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!**

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. "