

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.”
I Corinthians 10:1 “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.”

"Communion With God"

Here at Church of the King 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 worship in Christian Churches 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 have stressed that with each of these elements, God is the one who acts and we are to respond:

- God calls us and we respond by gathering together.
- God demands that we be Holy and we respond by confessing our sins and receiving His forgiveness.
- God instructs us from His Word & we respond by listening & bringing our worship, gifts & prayers.
- God sets before us His Holy meal and we respond with the eating of the bread & drinking of the wine, in faith.
- God then Commissions us to go out and take His Kingdom to all the earth and we respond by going forth to live faithful and obedient lives during the week.

We do not gather for worship to be spectators, we do not gather to simply give something to God, nor should we be here to see only what is in it for us!

- God calls us together to renew His Covenant with his people each Lord's Day in order to equip us for service in His Kingdom!

We come this week to the portion of our Worship service where we share a memorial meal with God! Having this meal with God is a very simple but profound act...

We position this 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, and told his disciples, and all of us, 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 as our text.

- **The Lord is my shepherd!**

He makes sure we are properly cared for and protects us from danger. The Great Shepherd 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! In history, we are in the midst of many great battles raging on as a result 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 with many of the battles detailed in the O. T., 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 about to be overrun on the battle field.**

We were recruited into God's army at our baptism and we remembered this in our time of confession & forgiveness. Lord willing, we are now an army that has been more thoroughly trained in our time of consecration...

- **And thus we are an army that is about to be commissioned and sent forth to serve as God's soldiers in the battles of the coming week!**

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 the victory.

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

Here we partake of 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: Whether by changing the next diaper for one of our covenant children or finding a cure for cancer!

- **The Lord's Supper is a simple and yet glorious meal where we remember the work Jesus has done on the cross & 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 should not put the Word and the Sacraments 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 and rejoicing in what has taken place 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 just live together without marriage, and held a BIG party to celebrate their sinful decision, they would NOT be married no matter how glorious the feast.

It would also be possible for two people to just quietly take their vows and want no celebration... They would indeed be married, but miss out on a time of rejoicing and perhaps sadly begin a pattern that will deprive them of many of the joys of marriage in the future.

- 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... *[what did that big word mean kids?]* we approach the Lord's Table as God's people, the Body of Christ.
- It is our practice to confess our faith together with the singing of the Apostle's Creed as we prepare to approach the Table.
- This creed declares who we are & what we believe: Singing it gives us an opportunity to function as the 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!

The elements of the Lord's Table remind 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 brought forth a new creation & promised to come again after His Kingdom has filled the earth!
- A meal truly prepared for us in the midst of our enemies!

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 on this point, as were 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 this is speaking about when we meet for corporate worship as the Body of Christ.

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

This relates to the second reason: As we study 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. *[Like the meals shared with Abraham we saw in Genesis or the Peace Offerings at the Tabernacle or Temple and of course the great Passover feast!]*
- Thus the Supper 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?

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... Now if we think of Communion as only a photo album or the family movies then yes, looking at them every night or even every week could get pretty old.

- However, if Jesus is truly present at this meal, then we should not grow tired of it any more than we do our family meals, or giving the kids 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 have weekly communion. They rightly wanted the Word of God to be central, as we do today, & feared that too much attention would be placed on the Supper if it was practiced every week.

- As we have noted, the Word preached & the Table celebrated are NOT at odds with each other when properly understood, but rather complement one another!

Our other distinction is that we include our baptized covenant children: Arguing that they should come to the Church's meal in the same way we invite them to the family dinner table.

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.

Many argue that we must exclude our children because they cannot examine themselves before coming 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, if a man will not work, let him not eat!

Many will argue that children cannot understand what they are doing, insisting that while Baptism is passive, we are to participate in the Supper.

- The Apostle Paul said there must be discernment involved which mean the children must be older & instructed.

Well yes, Birken Jr. or Augustine cannot explain much about what we are doing when we take communion...

- But who among us can really explain all that takes place at the Supper?
- We should also remember that Jesus said that we need faith like the little children & not the other way around!

It is also important to remember how the Apostle Paul began this discussion about the Supper in Corinthians which was our other text for this morning: Paul declares that God's people ate and drank Christ in the wilderness and unless those weaned children did not eat manna nor drink the water from the rock, then they were surely included as they should be today!

So, as we instruct our children and others we must always strive to maintain a Biblical balance...

Because 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 at Calvary.

The other cliff is to believe & teach that the Supper is no big deal, just a way to remember what Jesus did like having that 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 warnings that the Apostle Paul does give us 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 try to 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 covenant children and other covenant members from the Table.

Paul's bottom-line at verse 29 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 because of 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 & quietly eat it by ourselves or even as families:

- **We partake together and should rejoice together as we do so!**
- **Lord willing, each week we can & will continue to experience the richness that God offers us at His Table!**
- **We also hope and pray that regular weekly partaking by all those who are baptized will once again become a very common practice in our American churches.**

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 such meals 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!**
- **This can give new meaning to our giving of thanks at a meal! ☺**

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.

- **In my life it can be as simple as popcorn on a Sunday night or a five course romance dinner!**

AND we must also see 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: With the Saints 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]

Thus we see Communion as the next portion of our right worship:

- **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 wonder.**

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. "