

3-2-22 Ash Wednesday 2022

Sermon- Come to the Table

Scripture- 1 Corinthians 11:23-30, CTW- Psalm 51:1-17

Hymns- 753, 747, 748, 751

Theme- Welcome to our Ash Wednesday Service where we traditionally observe the Lord's Supper. Ash Wednesday traditionally calls all of us to focus on repentance in order to prepare for the Lenten Season. Therefore I thought it appropriate to talk about Communion so that all would understand what it is, what it means, and that we can be on the same page in our understanding.

I. First of all, we need to know how the Lord's Supper came about.

A. We must remember that the entire nation of Israel was being held as slaves in Egypt for over 400 years. It was a severe time for them and they were feared and hated.

The Pharaoh hated them and kept them impoverished. And finally, after 400 years of this treatment, the entire nation called out to God and when that happened, He began going about the work that would lead them to their freedom. But it took the whole nation to do this.

This is much like the promise God made in 2 CHRONICLES 7:14, when He said;

"If my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land."

No matter what a nation might be going through, when the real believers of that nation turn towards God with all belief and reliance, God promises us to help us, personally as well as our land.

America is going through a bad time today. We have been told that we cannot pray in school because some would be offended and some people of God have said "**fine**".

We have been told to stop reading our bibles in some public places, and some people of God have said "**fine**".

And now, we are told to not mention the name of Jesus or to pray where people can hear us because it is "offensive" to some. And so far, some people of God have said "**fine**".

B. And we are suffering. Jesus says that all people who call themselves by His name should do just as the ancient Israelites did: Repent and Turn to God.

And God told the Israelites that, as their very last supper as slaves, they were to eat a meal that He described in detail and do so with their sandals on so they would be ready to go at a moment's notice.

He also instructed them to eat that meal yearly in celebration of what He did for them.

In this passage, Paul refers to the time that Jesus was in Jerusalem to eat the Passover Meal with His disciples. And later, He gave the Apostle Paul very important information as to what happened at that meal.

And so, exactly what is the Passover Meal? It is called the Seder, and is Seder is a religious ceremony with a carefully prescribed ritual that makes this dinner different from any other dinners a family might enjoy. The dinner is a ritual and is laid out in a book called the Haggadah.

The Passover Meal celebrates how God passed over the Jewish homes and spared them from the death of the first born and it also celebrates God's leading them out of slavery.

It was at this meal that Jesus changed the meaning of the Last Supper as it pertains to believers in Him.

For the Jews of today, they still follow God's command to eat that meal every year in celebration of His leading their ancestors out of slavery.

Jesus is now telling all the Christians to eat this meal in remembrance of Him and what He has done for us.

And ever since then, Christians have observed this meal. The early Christians met secretly in homes to remember the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and since then, the church has been celebrating the Communion Service.

Jesus did not tell us to remember His birth, even though we do celebrate it. He didn't tell us to remember the day He arose from the tomb, but we celebrate that, too.

The only two ordinances that Jesus commanded us to remember are baptism and the Lord's Supper, or what we refer to as Communion.

We certainly remember baptism in that whenever a person first comes to Christ, we baptize them into the body of Christ. And we observe Communion.

The message behind the Communion service is the message of being set free from the bondage of sin. I believe that should humble our hearts to the Lord and cause us to fall to our knees in repentance as in no other service.

I think that Communion is too often looked upon as being just being something we do in church. In reality, it is an opportunity for Christians to worship Jesus by remembering the sacrifice He was willing to make for our sakes, and to consider the sacrifices we must make in order to be called Christian.

But like all other memories, we cannot remember unless we have a personal experience involving the situation. For instance, you cannot remember the first time I ever rode a horse because you were not involved. All you can do is hear about my riding a horse.

In the same way, unless we are personally invested in the thing we are trying to remember, all we can do is hear about other people's memories of it.

As I continue, I want to explain what these verses I just read really mean to us today. The first thing is that the writer, Paul, was given this information by Jesus Christ himself.

Paul was given this information so that Christians throughout time could have a solid understanding of what Communion really is, what it really means, and how we are to properly celebrate it.

At the Last Supper, all the disciples were seated around the table with Jesus. At the first of the meal, Jesus took a loaf of bread and offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God the Father for that bread. And then He took a piece and passed the rest to the disciples.

In verses 24 and 25, Jesus told us that the bread and cup represent His body. Just as His body was broken and drained for our sakes, the bread is broken and the cup is drained at the meal. And we are called to remember that each time we partake of these emblems.

If we have not given ourselves over to Jesus and taken Him as our Savior, we have no relationship with Him – therefore, we have no memories of what He has done.

So, we cannot remember what we have never experienced. Just as you cannot remember the first time I ever rode a horse because you were not there to experience it, all you are able to do is hear about it. And if you have never experienced a personal relationship with Christ, you will not be able to remember anything He went through for your sake.

But the idea of remembering is more than just recalling an event that once took place. It is the stirring of the heart and mind to relive with Jesus Christ as much of His life, death and resurrection as is humanly possible.

Each time we observe this supper, we must remember how holy it is and what it means to our very salvation, the reason we assemble in church in the first place. It is a time of honoring Him for His sacrifice for us.

And in verse 26, it tells us that, as we do these things, we are proclaiming to ourselves and to others the fact that Jesus died for us and that He promised to come back for us.

So what do we remember? We remember what God's Word says about Jesus.

..... He left heaven to be born in a human body- Philipians 2:5-6
..... He became poor that we might be rich- 2 Corinthians 8:9
..... He bore our sins in His Own body on the tree- 1 Peter 2:24
..... He took our place on Calvary- Isa. 53:4-6
..... He shed His blood for our redemption- Rev. 1:5; Rev. 5:9
..... He conquered death for us forever- Matt. 28:1-6; Rev. 1:18
..... He ascended back to Heaven- Heb. 7:25

III. Communion is also a time of self-reflection and repentance for our sinful life which serves to pull us away from the things of God

A. Verses 27 & 28 both give us a clear warning about how we partake of this meal:

1. We must insure that our hearts have nothing in them that would distract our focus away from the Lord Jesus as we eat this meal. We are told that if we eat this in a manner that is not worthy of Jesus, then we are purposely sinning against Him.

That is why Christians should never take this sacrament if they have something on their hearts such as unforgiveness.

If you have something on your heart, such as negative feelings towards another for any reason, please do not take this meal this evening.

Paul tells us that we should not have anything in our hearts that might detract from the underlying purpose of the sacrament.

2. In verse 30, it tells us that sickness and even death can sometimes be attributed to how we partake of Communion. We must understand this meal well enough to know that if we partake of it with a heart and mind that is not fully focused on Him, that is a sin, and we are bringing that sin into the presence of Christ.

And since that is a sin, and all sin calls for punishment, then we suffer the punishment for our actions, whether those actions were intentional or not.

IV. Communion Is A Time Of Personal Declaration

A. It is possible for a lost person to partake of the Lord's Supper and never be saved. This event holds no saving power! However, for those who are saved, it is a time for us to declare publicly that we believe His death and resurrection were for us!

Let us take our stand with the redeemed and loudly proclaim our faith in Him and our dependence upon His sacrifice. The Lord's Supper is a prime time to identify yourself with the Lord Jesus!

B. This is to be a time of education as well as a time of worship. We must always take the time to explain what we are doing when we take the bread and juice. This service is a prime time for declaring the Gospel message to those who do not know it.

For instance there are some practices that the people of God have instilled that were not present in the original observance with Jesus in the upper room:

1. The elements present were wine and bread. These elements were chosen because they would have been part of the Seder meal and also would have been common elements on the table for every family meal. Pasteurized Grape juice was specifically invented by Methodist Thomas Welch in 1869 as an alternative to fermented wine for church communion services. Alcoholism was rampant at the time and the church officials were glad to have an alternative made from grapes.

2. Many churches insisted that "the Cup" be exactly that- one common cup that was filled by the officiant and then passed around to all who cared to partake of it. For sanitary purposes this practice was ended as well.

3. In the same vein, "the body" was meant to be a common loaf of unleavened bread, passed to each participant who tore off

a piece and passed the loaf to others who did the same, holding theirs until all could partake of the body together.

4. I know that in the history of our denomination and others, there was a time when all those who wanted to participate in Communion came to what was called the communion rail. This is commemorated in the hymn we are about to sing, Number 748, "Let Us Break Bread together on our knees". The contact here to scripture is seen as a bit stronger because of Paul's words in the beginning of the passage advising all who partake in the communion service to do so only after confessing their sins.

In fact, during John Wesley's ministry, Class Leaders would visit the houses of the congregants the week before communion to determine from each person whether they were truly repentant of their sins and after being satisfied with the content of their answer would give them each a medallion to hand in at the time of communion.

In recent years the practice of coming to the rail has all but disappeared in EC churches. Aging congregations with hip and knee replacements attributed to this. It was also felt that the practice of the rail got in the way of the directions that the people of God partake of communion together.

In churches where hundreds of people part in communion at the same time, it sometimes would take hours for an entire church to come to the rail at the rate of 15-20 at a time.

Therefore, the idea of falling to your knees in repentance IS in scripture and should not be ignored by those who sincerely want to approach the table in true repentance of their sinful lives.

In a day when many churches are becoming "seeker friendly" and others are abandoning the doctrines of salvation by grace through faith alone, as a church, let us determine that as long as there is breath in our bodies, we will strive to protect the message in this church!

B. As a child, many of us can remember our mothers telling us to "wash up for supper." Well, that is what the Lord is telling you and me this evening! Is your heart in the right condition to come into the very presence of Jesus

and receive the Lord's Supper? While each of us is urged to have that discussion in their own prayer of confession and then wait for God's answer in return. We must proceed as the body of Christ to honor Him and one another, with upright and sincere hearts.

With all that in mind tonight we have reopened the rail so that you may come forward at my invitation to receive the elements. If you choose to kneel, you may do so, or you may simply stand here in support of one another until instructed to eat the bread and drink the juice together as the body of Christ.

If there is anyone who does not feel able or compelled to come forward, just stay in your seats and the Stewards will serve you there as well.

May I have the Stewards come forward?

Pastor will demonstrate the elements and then lead us in a prayer of confession, followed by a moment of silence. After the moment of silence, we will partake of the body and blood of Christ together.

Let me re-read these verses as we partake.

In VERSE 24, Jesus said, "This bread represents my body, which is being given for you. When you eat of this bread, do so in remembrance of me."

Let us remember Jesus Christ.

In VERSE 25, Jesus continued by saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people - an agreement confirmed by my shed blood. Each time you drink of this cup, do it in remembrance of me."

Let us close in prayer.