

Title: You Preach!

Text: 1 Corinthians 11.23-26

Theme: The sacrifice of Christ and our response

Series: 1 Corinthians #51

During Bible college, I had a course that was supposed to cover some of the practical matters of the life of a church. Such as, how do you perform weddings, conduct funerals, baptize and of course, how do you serve communion? These events, while recognized as being part of the life of a church seem to be put into separate categories. There is the category of procedure. How should communion be observed? Who should serve it, etc? What we usually do not realize is that for the early church, they gathered at night, not for a service in which to observe communion, but they gathered for a meal. The meal began with the breaking of bread, and the giving of thanks. The breaking of bread was followed by the actual eating of the meal, known as a love feast. And the meal was concluded with the drinking of the cup. So, the bread and cup were the bookends on either side of the meal. Obviously, in Corinth, there was too much emphasis on the actual meal, while the meaning of the bread and the cup was lost.

How communion should be observed is an important subject. It is true that communion is a ceremony of the church, but it is not a mindless ritual. But there is another important category that comes up when discussing this issue. What is the actual meaning of communion? This is where much of the discussion goes. Some of you were raised being taught the doctrine of transubstantiation. This is the teaching that when Christ instituted the Lord's Supper that He was teaching that the bread literally turns into His body and the wine literally turns into His blood. That teaching is the basis for the ceremony known as the mass, where it is maintained that the literal body of Christ is being broken and the literal blood of Christ is being poured out again, meaning that Christ is being crucified again and again. That is so wrong. We acknowledge and rejoice that Christ died for us. But we also acknowledge that when He died, He died once and that His one death on the cross was sufficient and remains sufficient to pay for our sins. When He said "It is finished." It was finished. There is no more sacrifice needed to pay for our sins. This is so clear from the book of Hebrews. 7.27 says, "He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself." And 2 verses later (8.1) says that "We do have such a high priest, who sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven." His work for our salvation was completed by His sacrifice on the cross. Instead of celebrating the cross, the mass is in reality a repudiation of it. Others of you grew up with a tradition called Consubstantiation. I have never met anyone who really understands what this means. It sounds like an attempt to say that there is something mystical that happens at communion, but we just aren't sure what. This we know. The observing and participating in the Lord's Table is absolutely central to the life of a church family, because this ordinance is a touchstone that brings us back to our roots and reminds us of our heritage, our health and our hope. On the one hand, when Christ instituted what the Bible calls the Lord's Supper, he did it in the middle of a meal. Granted the meal was the Passover meal and he probably did this as part of the observing of the 3rd cup, which is a fascinating study all on its own that we may dig into at some time in the future. But the

Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table or Communion as we often call it, is all at the same time a normal and sacred part of our church family life.

In fact, I want us to recover this balance in our church. I want us to see and appreciate that observing the Lord's Table is a practical, common, church community event. If you were one of the disciples eating at this meal, which by the way, was not how Da Vinci painted it (they were not all sitting on one side of a table, but were all reclining around a common table), but if you were one of the disciples there and Christ, leader broke the bread and blessed it, you would find this to be a very normal part of the event. It was customary for the host at a meal to break the bread, to share it, and to give thanks to God for providing it. That is very usual. That is very common. But, what he said, and of course what He did in the coming hours made all of the difference regarding its significance. So, in this context of a normal, customary celebration of the Passover comes these shocking words! "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me."

Now, hold the phone for a minute. Due to the fact that this is the passage I read every time we participate in communion, it is so easy to allow our eyes to glaze over and ignore why this is here. I want you to see that this text is more than an argument against the mass or consubstantiation. This text is more than a procedural manner on how to observe this. It is more than the familiar words that I read every month.

In fact, this passage has a whole lot less to do about the procedure of communion than it does the purpose of communion and their abuse of it. Taken in isolation as we often do, it appears as if this passage is telling us that we have to observe communion and when we do it, we had better be careful not to talk, pass notes, or goof off because you can get into big trouble. Of course, the rest of the service is fair game, but no talking during communion. A few weeks ago, a gal in our church was sitting here, and the bread was handed out, and while she was praying, she dropped the piece into her purse. Now, she is looking all through her purse. I thought, it's a good thing we don't believe in transubstantiation, because then Jesus would be lost in her purse – and that could be a problem. Well, she finds it, she thinks, only to discover it's an altoid. Now, she is panicking because I am talking, and she finally finds it and hurries up and puts it into her mouth only to discover that no one else has. Now, she is afraid to swallow, thinking that she will choke. Her sister is sitting next to her and the entire scene is actually pretty funny. Serious situations only create more tension for funny things to happen. If we only see these verses as rules that govern the ordinance of communion, we really miss the main point of the text.

Why is Paul talking about communion here? The obvious point is because it was being abused so badly by the church. But what was being abused? Was it simply that they were being disrespectful? That was certainly a factor, but the problem goes much deeper than that. Follow Paul's line of thinking.

The rich, strong, intellectual, "spiritual", knowledgeable ones were treating the rest of the church like dirt. The ordinance of communion was established at the pinnacle point of

Christ's ministry when He was pouring out His life for others. The God-man, was giving up of Himself completely for undeserving people. While we were the enemies of God, He died for us. While we were sinners He died for us. His act was the supreme act of sacrifice, that not only paid the penalty for our sins, but it also demonstrated the selflessness and self-giving of Christ on our behalf. In anticipation of the cross, Christ tells his disciples that his body and his blood were being used up for them. For you! For you! My body – for you! My blood – for you! That is an awesome thought. Then, the Corinthians who had been bought by the death of Christ, born into His family not because of status or fame, but only because of the mercy of Christ, used the very ordinance that reminded them of the humility and sacrifice of their Savior to be the occasion to advance their own self-centeredness. That is despicable. So, while this text certainly gives us some insight into the ordinance of communion, it actually gives us more insight into the community of believers called the church. Paul is not trying to teach us something new about the Lord's Supper. He is not trying to straighten out the theology of the Corinthians here. He is taking them back to the original setting and purpose of the Lord's Supper to show them that what they are doing at the Lord's Supper is the exact opposite of what the Lord did at the Last Supper, that is the basis for the Lord's Supper.

1. **We are Commanded to Observe.**

A. **This Command is based on a pattern from Christ.** (v.23-25)

People like to talk about being creative with church. There are some creative things that we can do. Messing around with communion is not one of them. There is a basic pattern that we have to follow, because this is how the Lord did it. The Lord's Table is a biblically mandated, Christ-ordained tradition that we do. We call it an ordinance. The setting of this command was betrayal. Christ was handed over to the Romans that night. His being given over was in reality the giving of Himself. In the middle of this giving of Himself, he told His disciples to perpetuate this tradition as a means of reminding them of this critical truth.

B. **This Command is based on a promise from Christ.** (v.24, 25)

- i. He physically died for us. – his body was given for us.

Observing the bread takes us back to the cross where we taste again of the fact that Christ literally died on a cross to pay for our sin. He physically experienced death as the recipient of the wrath of God so that God's justice against your sin could be satisfied, in order that you could be forgiven.

- ii. His death came through intense suffering.

Our salvation that we celebrate at the Lord's Table came to us at the price of His blood. The cup reminds us that this New Covenant that we have with Christ was established on the basis of the greatest sacrifice that was ever given.

C. **This Command results in the proclamation of Christ.** (v.26)

When we observe this – we are preaching! We are proclaiming! The proper observance of the Lord’s Table is a sermon all in itself. Your children sit here Sunday after Sunday drawing pictures, coloring, listening, but when the tray is passed by, they want to know – can they have some? When you take the bread and they don’t, if they have not made a clear profession of faith in Christ, then, they want to know – why? Why not? The observation is preaching a sermon. Do not keep them from this sermon!

2. **We are Commanded to Remember.**

A. Remember demands action.

“Hey, “I’ll be thinking of you!” - Have you ever said that? What good is that? To really remember somebody means that you have to do something about it. Remember in gratitude, worship, trust, acknowledgement and obedience. The activity of Communion demands the activity of obedience. If you really remember Christ you will do something about it.

B. Remember also demands acknowledgement.

The One “there” is the One “here.”

C. Remember is a group project.

The cross event not only changed us individually, it defines us corporately as a family, a body of believers. Your identity and position is given definition and meaning from the death of Christ, who did all of this “for you.”

The church at Corinth had so abused this because they ignored its intended purpose and the result was serious problems for them. Let’s ask God to help us recover in our thinking and our actions to each other and our world, a correct understanding of the cross and the ordinance of the Lord’s Table that can preach the gospel loudly and clearly.