

MESSAGE: “What Is Communion?”

Text: I Corinthians 11:23-33

Purpose: the purpose of this message is to summarize the Seder roots of Communion, the introduction of a new covenant through Jesus and the purpose of Communion in worship.

Introduction

There are many reasons why some people do not take Communion seriously. Sometimes it is because we do not understand what it is. A seven-year-old cousin of mine, who perhaps had never been to a worship service, announced after receiving communion, “This was pleasant little tea party!” Sometimes it is because we are distracted by the particulars. Do I sit, stand or kneel? Do I wait for everyone to be served or eat the bread as soon as it is given? When I was a young teen, my family once visited a church while on vacation where actual wine was used. My little brother took a sip from the chalice, grabbed his throat, and shouted hysterically, “Quick! Somebody get me a drink of water before I die!”

Sometimes we do not take Communion seriously because it has become too familiar, too routine. We participate, but our mind is someplace else. There was a point in my young life when that was true for me until one Sunday I was caught short by something the preacher said, “People have died for not taking Communion seriously!”

“What??? Did he really say what I think he said?” he drew the conclusion from verses 29 and 30 which we just read...

“All who eat and drink without discerning the body, eat and drink judgment against themselves. For this reason many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.”

I decided right then and there, I better learn more about what Communion actually is. In my study, I discovered that Paul counsels the Corinthian church with the words, “Examine yourselves.” So I began to do that, and realized that my motives were often less than noble. How could I be sure that I had forgiven so-and-so? How could I be sure my repentance was genuine? How could I be sure that I was worthy to participate? Surely, I didn’t want to drink condemnation on myself! Because of this, I avoided communion for the better part of a year. I began to think I might never be able to join in communion again.

And then it hit me. Communion proclaims the Lord’s death until he comes. Why did Jesus die? His beloved disciple John tells us it was an atonement for sin, securing the gift of forgiveness for the likes of you and me. I began to understand that Communion is a gift, freely given and received. My fear of receiving communion unworthily was really a refusal to trust God’s grace, a refusal to allow the Holy Spirit to change my heart. I discovered that the one thing

God asks from me as I approach the communion table is honesty. King David sang about it in Psalm 51 after being exposed as an adulterer, “a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.”

When we come to God with a posture that says, “God, I am trying to forgive so-and-so, but it is really hard. I feel so hurt by what was done against me. Please help me.” Well, THAT is a prayer that God can work with, and that is an offering worth more than a \$1,000 dollars.

Now...that was a rather long introduction to a very short sermon, for sharing Communion is itself the message to be proclaimed today. Allow me to sketch a brief summary for a future message. Communion is rooted in the Passover Seder Meal which revisits the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in the land of Egypt. Before Pharaoh was compelled to permit Hebrew freedom, Egypt suffered ten increasingly severe plagues. The tenth was absolutely devastating, for it resulted in the death of every Egyptian firstborn son. To avoid this plague, the Israelites were instructed by Moses to kill a paschal lamb and paint its blood on the doorframe of their homes so that death would pass over their homes.

When Jesus celebrated this Seder Meal with his disciples on the eve of his crucifixion, he took bread and broke it saying, “This bread is my body, broken for you.” Also, he took a cup, the third cup of the Seder, known as the cup of redemption, and said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” In short, Jesus was telling them, “I am the Passover Lamb. The plague of judgment and death falls on me, so that you may be free to live for God, forgiven and whole.”

That is why I often refer to the Communion Chalice as the cup of another chance—because no matter what you have done or not done, said or not said, thought or not thought—God gives you a new beginning. The old has past; the new has come! I captured this in a bit of verse early in my pulpit ministry. I use it now to segway to the heart of this morning’s worship service.

Offer, “*The Cup of Another Chance*” from ***The Preacher Was Silent Today.***