

Worship in the Beauty of Holiness Communion

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

The Bible begins in a garden and ends in a garden city, and in both places food is prominent (Gen. 2:16-17; Rev. 19:9). Adam and Eve do the will of the serpent and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Jesus refuses to do the will of the devil to turn stones into bread, instead feeding on every word of the Father (Matt. 4:1-4). The first Adam fell eating from a tree, and second Adam redeemed on a tree, “feeding” on the will of God (Jn. 4:34). Carolyn Steel: “Few acts are more expressive of companionship than the shared meal... Someone with whom we share food is likely to be our friend, or well on the way to becoming one.” No wonder our worship culminates in the Lord’s Supper—table fellowship with our God and each another! These visible words are given so that we would believe, eat, enjoy, and look forward to our final redemption at the supper of the Lamb.

I. Broken for You Jesus is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). The Jews would say “This is the bread of affliction which our ancestors ate when they came from the land of Egypt”, remembering the Passover and exodus.

Jesus

changed it and said “This is my body.” The angel of death took the firstborn of every Egyptian household and passed over those that displayed the blood of the lamb. The sentence of death was upon everyone in Egypt because everyone was in sin. Even after the Jews left, they rebelled against God and went back to Egypt in their hearts (Acts 7:39). Jesus is the true Passover lamb, the God who gave his life to save his people. This meal is a memorial of his execution on the cross, and he told Paul and the apostles to get the word out (v23). True worship, word and sacrament, always includes the cross. Remember Jesus died for you.

II. Do This If we have the word preached, why do we need to eat and drink? Because God is not just going to save your soul, but your body also. He thinks your body is important—a living sacrifice (Rom. 12:1). The sacraments are not just symbols, as if there could ever be “just” a symbol anyway. Nor is the rite primarily physical. We reject the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, that the elements physically change. We’re not in danger of spilling Jesus! This meal is covenantal, something we *do* as members of a relationship. Communion occurs in the eating just like baptism takes place in the baptizing. The physical bread, wine and water aren’t magic but take their power from word of God, like rings and vows in a wedding. Augustine said “Let the word be added to the element and it will become a sacrament.” We are physical creatures, and so God uses physical means to sustain and bless us. Because we have immaterial souls, it matters if we believe God and faithfully receive these means (e.g. Prov. 22:15). People who only attend to the physical are superstitious. People who ignore the physical are rationalistic. “Do this in remembrance of me”, body and mind together.

III. Examine & Discern This is not the happiest chapter in 1 Corinthians, and Paul addresses their abuse of the Supper. Some were left hungry and others were getting drunk which should not have been happening (vv21-22). To eat and drink unworthily is a sin against the body and blood of Christ, and so some were sick and had died (vv27, 30). Paul requires a person to examine himself, and then eat worthily, which means to love one another as we eat. It does not mean we decide if we’re worthy to partake based on last week’s spiritual performance. To discern the body means to identify Jesus both in the elements and the church. Your neighbor is part of the one body of Christ, the one loaf (10:17). That body is identified by baptism (Gal. 3:27), so all who are able to partake are welcome. Communing with the church grows us up; we don’t grow up in order to qualify for communion.

IV. An Open Table In the Bible, memorials are primarily for God: “When the bow is in the cloud, then I will look upon it, to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature” (Gen. 9:16). This memorial reminds God (which reminds us that he remembers!) that Jesus died for the world. It also teaches us to imitate God’s hospitality. He welcomes us to his table full of joy, simplicity, and a little danger. God gives us wine to gladden our hearts. Communion nourishes and satisfies while at the same time heightening our anticipation of the marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:9). This table invites us to baptism and then to eat of it every week, proclaiming the death of Jesus until he comes.

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today’s Passage: 1 Corinthians 11:23-28

23 For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, “This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1. Paul writes this letter to the church in Corinth. Where did he get his information about communion (verse 23)?
2. What reasons does Jesus give for taking communion in verses 24-26?
3. People in the church of Corinth were being unkind and foolish at the Lord’s Supper, so Paul warns them about how to treat people at the supper. “Communion” means fellowship! Rather than mistreating one another, he says a person should examine himself and discern the body. We see the body of Christ in the elements of the Lord’s Supper, the _____ and the _____ (hint: they’re on the table at the front of the church). We also see the body of Christ in our neighbor. List five people who are part of the body of Christ here outside your family.
4. A fun word for the Lord’s Supper is Eucharist (“you-ker-ist”), which just means thanksgiving, and communion is a small meal looking forward to *the* huge thanksgiving feast, the marriage supper of the Lamb when Jesus returns. Draw a picture of a huge table loaded with your favorite food with all sorts of people sitting around it.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

*For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. -1 Corinthians 11:26*