

Staying Connected With The Lord

Jesus never asked His disciples to remember His birth – that is, Christmas. But He did remind us to remember His death. At His last meal, before His arrest, He shared bread with His disciples saying, ***This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me, Luke 22:19...*** and Christians have been doing so ever since. ***For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes, 1 Cor. 11:26.***

“Do this in remembrance of me -- by which, as the apostles were obliged to bless, break, and give the bread to all that joined with them in these holy things, so were all Christians obliged to receive these signs of Christ's body and blood.” So said John Wesley, the preacher who started the Methodist movement.

Christian believers repeated Jesus' actions even before the New Testament was written. What we find in scripture about the Lord's Supper are the practices the church had already been observing. They were doing what the Lord had told them to do. [The institution narratives - Mk. 14:22-25, Mt. 26:26-30; I Cor. 11:23-26; Lk. 22:15-20 - of the Lord's Supper tell us about the churches' ways of doing the Lord's will.]

It's interesting to note that while heresies and controversies raged over the early church on various subjects, the practice of the Holy Communion remained tranquil. Whatever the name - communion, mass, Lord's memorial, Eucharist, breaking bread, service of the table - the content throughout Christianity is the same. This is the most common and widely used form of Christian worship because it is a sacred meal based on Jesus' actions at the Last Supper.

We usually call it Communion or Holy Communion. “Communion” is related to other words we use; like communication, communal, etc. All these words have to do with people connecting with one another. Jesus knew what He was doing when He said, “Do this in remembrance of me.” **Holy Communion connects us with Jesus in a way more deeply than reading or praying.** Each month when we share Holy Communion each of us is given another opportunity to reconnect with our Lord.

Saying “No” To Death

As we step into the New Year let's commit ourselves to sharing the Lord's Supper, at least each month. Here's why: **at the heart of our faith is a marvelous work of God.** We often talk about the gospel but maybe just as often forget what it really means. The Lord's Supper brings us back to the Cross, where the Son of God died for our sins. We go back to the table again and again lest we forget the awful cost of our salvation. Every time we are tempted to think that somehow we have done something to deserve God's favor, or when we begin to get impressed with who we are or what we've done, this table teaches us that everything we have depends on the Lord. As the Bible says, *if any man boasts, let him boast in the Lord* (1 Cor. 1:312).

The Lord's Supper also teaches us that our faith deals with the hardest reality of all: the fact of death. No other faith has the answer to death that is found in Jesus Christ. For the gospel is not just that Christ died, but that on the third day He rose from the

dead. He defeated death. This is important because death comes eventually to all of us. Over the years I have done my share of funerals and it never gets any easier. But thanks be to God, there is an answer that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ: ***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die,*** John 11:25-26.

You could die before this sermon is over... and maybe some of you are dying for this sermon to be over! But really, any of us could die before this day is out. Just think of everything that must function normally for you to survive. The only people who think about their hearts functioning are those with heart problems. Most of us take for granted our kidneys, liver, lungs, and other internal organs that we're dependent on to keep on living. Christian author Frederick Buechner once wrote: "Intellectually we all know that we will die, but we do not really know it in the sense that the knowledge becomes a part of us. We do not really know it in the sense of living as though it were true. On the contrary, we tend to live as though our lives would go on forever."

Did you ever think that when you are driving down the highway at 65 mph that the only thing separating you from oncoming traffic is a stripe of yellow paint? You have no idea what that on-coming driver may do. In a moment you could be dead. I'm not trying to be morbid ... it's reality. ***...What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes,*** James 4:14, (see James 4:13-14). If you think about those words, it's a little disconcerting. Do you really believe you could vanish like a mist? Or do you somehow feel invincible?

In His resurrection, Jesus said "No!" to death by going through it and triumphing over it. In Him we can too.

Saying “Yes” To Salvation

Communion takes us back to the Cross, where Jesus gave all of Himself for all of us. He suffered and died for our salvation. (See 1 Timothy 1:15.)

What is salvation? “Salvation” is from the Latin word “salvare,” meaning to heal. Salvation is the healing of our sin-sick souls. Sin has broken our relationship with our Creator. It causes us to fear God and try to live our lives apart from His will. When our relationship to God is not right, it causes problems in every area of our lives - marriage, career, relationships, finances, etc. It also cuts us off from the Source of life: our Heavenly Father and Creator. This applies to everybody. *If we say that we never sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us, 1 John 1:8.*

Who is salvation for? We don’t usually think about this do we? We assume a universal appeal. And it is true: salvation is for all people; even people who aren’t like you and me – something to keep in mind. *The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance, 2 Peter 3:9.*

But there’s that word: “repentance.” The point is: *salvation in Jesus is offered to all, but salvation comes to those who receive Him. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son, and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day, John 6:40.*

Taking communion is saying, “Yes, I am a sinner and I need Jesus to get right.” Taking communion is saying yes to salvation.

Saying “Yes” To Connection

The connection we have through Communion is three-way.

1. Communion reminds us that we are connected with our Lord. *I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing, John 15:5.* The life of value and meaning that He promises - life in its fullness - is found when we are connected to Him. It’s not an intermittent connection, it’s fulltime, all the time, a living connection.

We must actually connect with Him to receive eternal life. *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die, John 11:25-26.* Believing is putting your money where your mouth is. It means living with Him as though bound to Him like a branch on a vine.

2. Communion reminds us that we are connected with each other through Him. When we take Communion we are not only “communing” with our Lord, we are communing with others, who serve Him as their Lord. It is a reminder of His command to us: *This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you, John 15:12. ...if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin, 1 John 1:7.*

3. Communion reminds us that we are connected to all the saints before and after us. *...since we have so great a cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles...Hebrews 12:1.* We’re part of something much greater than ourselves.

Food For Eternity

As a child I remember going down into the cellar at my grandparents' home. The door was outside the house, and you went down several steps to a room with a very low ceiling. The walls were lined with shelves of home-canned vegetables and meat. There were large tins of flour and other cooking supplies. It was their food to make it through the winter. Even today it's a good idea to have extra food stored in the house for emergencies in case of storms, power outages etc.

Do you ever take heed of "spiritual food?" Most people don't think about it until a crisis arises in their life. And those who do give thought to spiritual food mostly only nibble or snack. Sunday worship really is vital to our spiritual health, especially when we have Communion. **Sunday is a take-out meal: you must take it home and into your life to get any real nourishment.** Don't come here, take a few crumbs, then go home and say, "Geez, that wasn't very satisfying." You gotta chow down on Jesus to get any strength. *I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty, John 6:35.*

The truth is Sunday morning is one part of the spiritual meal. We also commune and connect with Him through the stuff that builds strong lives: that is, the daily disciplines of reading and reflecting on Scripture, and prayer, and meeting together to build one another up in Christ, to be His body in practice. I know some of you do this. But I suspect that others do not. So, here's a challenge: this week open your Bible each day and read from the gospel of Luke chapter 24, until you finish that chapter. (See 1 Corinthians 3:2 & Heb. 5:13).

Each time we come together for Communion He is with us to give us the food that endures to eternal life.

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you, John 6:27.