

TITLE: "Many Moods of Communion"

TEXTS: I Corinthians 11:23-25 (NT p. 173)

²³For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

Introduction – Communion shots

A worship committee was recently planning for the changes that would occur when they went to two services on Sunday morning. One of the concerns was the need for more Communion trays and glass cups. That led to a discussion as to how Communion cups were collected after the service. Each member of the committee mentioned what he or she knew about the collection of the cups. ...One member provided a novel answer in regard to the issue. He said, "We take our's home and use them for shot glasses."

Some people drink to forget. Christians drink the juice of Communion to remember. This morning I will be preaching on the many moods the may be involved when we take Communion and remember the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

1. Remembrance

Remembering the sacrifice of Jesus may evoke two moods. The first is sadness. After all that Jesus went through with the twelve disciples, it must have horrible for Jesus to know that one of his closest and most trusted friends had betrayed him to the authorities.

Thinking about what it was like for Jesus to know that he would be crucified the next day can also make us sad. I dread going to the dentist to have a cavity filled. Imagine knowing you were going to be nailed to a cross the next day.

Partaking of the bread and juice in remembrance of the sacrifice Jesus made on the cross can dredge up a mood of sadness. So, let us pause for a moment and be SAD, remembering the betrayal of Jesus by Judas and remembering the pain, anguish and death Jesus experienced on the cross....

Another mood that also comes with remembrance can be thankfulness; the fact that Jesus was willing to MAKE that tremendous sacrifice makes me profoundly thankful to Jesus. The fact that Jesus was raised from the dead after his death also causes me to be thankful. But the thought that I too will be resurrected and live with the Lord forever and ever, makes me grateful all the more.

Now let us pause to be THANKFUL for Jesus' death on the cross, for Jesus' resurrection and for our own resurrection....

2. Liberation

One of the moods that we do not usually associate with Communion is liberation; the feeling of freedom. In Luke 4:16-21 we read about the beginning of Jesus' ministry:

¹⁶When [Jesus] came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where [this] was written:

¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, ¹⁹to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.” ²⁰And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. ²¹Then he began to say to them, “Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

When I was in college way back in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I came across 3 individuals who changed the way I pictured the world.

One was a Palestinian who had grown up in a refugee camp. In refugee camps, housing is minimal, sanitation is poor and food is irregular. There are no good schools in refugee camps. Jobs are non-existent. In refugee camps, there is no hope that life will ever be better for those there or for their children and grandchildren.

Do you ever wonder where terrorists come from? Many come from refugee camps. How did this guy I went to college with manage to get an education and come to this country for college? Presbyterian missionaries provided schooling and secured him scholarships.

Another person at college was a young woman was from Central America. Her diet growing up was red beans and rice. There were also hot peppers in there because she made it for an international dinner and when I had some it went down about like fresh lava from an erupting volcano. She also had plantains, which look like bananas, but taste pretty much like cardboard, even when fried. Red beans, rice and plantains; That's what she and her family ate, every day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. ...And they were grateful to have it.

Most of the families she knew owned no land and worked, day in and day out, for red beans, rice and plantains. I and 98% of those who attended my school, didn't like the cafeteria food. My theory was that the food was aged in steam tables at least 6 hours prior to being served so that every hint of flavor and every possible nutrient had been leached away by the time it was served. The girl from Central America thought the cafeteria food was WONDERFUL (as long as she could add some hot sauce.)

The third student was African American who came from an inner city ghetto. His dad left home when he was little. His mother was one of the few moms who made him study and do his homework. She also refused to let him play in the dangerous streets. He was the only kid he knew who graduated high school and went on to college. He distrusted me, and everyone else, who was white. He said, "There are no legal jobs in the ghetto, there is no hope in the ghetto and the only people who care at all about you, outside your family, are the street gangs.

These three were very different people, but they all had one thing in common: they were Christians. However, their faith had a different emphasis than mine. They wanted an education so they could go back and help their families, and those like them, to somehow get jobs, or own land, so they could have the hope of working themselves out of poverty and provide a better and more stable life for their families.

The reason we support mission programs like the Kitchen Cupboard, the WEB Program, One Great Hour of Sharing, Heifer International, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, CROP Walk and Blanket Sunday is because Jesus Christ IS concerned for the poor and oppressed people of the world, and we who follow Jesus are also concerned for the poor and oppressed.

What does liberation have to do with Communion? Way back in Israel's history, when God led his people out of their slavery in Egypt, God instructed them to sacrifice a Passover lamb. Therefore, the Passover sacrifice and liberation are connected.

The reason that we, as Christians do not have the Passover is because JESUS was, and is, our Passover lamb who was sacrificed on the cross. Those of us who have no need for deliverance from oppression, we may not be aware of the connection between liberation and Communion, but those ARE oppressed certainly do make the connection between Communion and liberation.

Let us pause for a moment to think about those whose faith involves the hope of liberation, of freedom, from poverty and despair....

3. Heavenly Banquet

The third mood that can come along with Communion is the joy that comes from hope.

In Mark 14, we read this about the Last Supper:

²²While [Jesus and the disciples] were eating, [Jesus] took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."

²³Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. ²⁴He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. ²⁵Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

In heaven we will be sharing meals with Jesus and with others who, throughout the ages, have had faith in Jesus Christ.

That is one of the reasons I really enjoyed the celebration on May 25th. As most of you know, that is date we celebrated our 25 years together as pastor and church family. It was a surprise and I WAS surprised. How so many of you kept that secret from me for 5 months I simply don't know, but you did. When I walked through the door of the Cortland Country Club, and saw so many people saying, "Surprise!" it took my breath away and brought tears to my eyes.

There were gifts and testimonials from those attending and letters from my mother who was unable to attend and from former members who have moved away. I could enjoy it because I know that anything I have accomplished, anyone I have helped, is because, and only because, Jesus Christ lives in me. Knowing that, I was free to just be thankful and enjoy the evening, which I did.

My favorite part of the evening was the dinner. As I ate, I looked around and saw table after table of people enjoying the wonderful food and enjoying the friendship they shared with one another. After I ate, I went around and spoke to folks at each table. When I spoke to The Harvesters, who sang after the dinner, they mentioned that they rarely attend a function where people are so relaxed and so obviously enjoy each other as much as we do.

You could give me no better gift than to be the wonderful church family you are. You can give the Lord no better gift than being the loving, caring, sharing church family you are. And I look forward to heaven where we will have dinners like that where JESUS CHRIST will be the reason for the celebration and we will enjoy fellowship with Christians from many different lands and many different times throughout history.

Conclusion – Then we will see Jesus face to face

In heaven, we will not be sitting on a cloud bored to death because we have to take harp lessons. In heaven, we will all have work to do; work that we will simply LOVE to do because God created us to DO that very work. Some will be writing songs of worship, some will be singing them, some will be building homes and castles and some will be tending the land and growing things and others will be caring for animals and we will have the TIME to do each of our tasks, to do them well and to enjoy the process.

And we will worship together, just as we are worshiping together this morning. And we will eat and drink together, just as we will eat and drink in a few moments. And Jesus will be there, just as he is here as we share Communion together.

There WILL be one difference in heaven, however, and it is BIG difference, because now “we see Jesus as in a glass darkly,” but in heaven, we WILL see our Lord Jesus Christ face to face.

Amen.