

I Corinthians 11:23-29, John 3:16
Holy Communion
Sunday September 6th, 2015

This scripture that we have just heard read is the Gospel in miniature as Martin Luther said. It sums up all of God's intentions, all the mission of his Son, and all of our hope for salvation and life eternal.

But we've said this scripture; we've heard this scripture, we've read this scripture so often it seems to lose its meaning, its power to inspire.



Undoubtedly, at most of the football games we will watch this fall; we will see a sign somewhere in the crowd saying John 3:16. So we need to look closely at this scripture and the one from 1 Corinthians 11 about Holy Communion for these words and this Holy Sacrament to re-inspire! For when we do things by rote it can lead to a rut that we need to pull ourselves out of.

Today this is a teaching sermon about Holy Communion and the connections that John 3:16, Holy Communion and even our Baptism share.

To begin with the author and power behind John 3:16 and Holy Communion is God. We get so tied up in Jesus in these scriptures that we fail to see that it is God who is the Major Player here.

It is God who gave his only Son!

It is God who loves the world.

It is God who saves through Jesus.

It is God who ratifies the judgment we bring upon ourselves through disbelief and disobedience.

It is God who grants us new life through belief and a new covenant through the blood of Jesus.

It is God who moves and acts and becomes and teaches and dies and rises because God is love. God loves the World!!!

God's love is incredibly fantastic and wide ranging. He loves people of every race, creed and nation. He loves the vilest most disgusting, repulsive sinner and the greatest saint and everyone in between. He even loves the backslider: you and me!

God loves the world, because God is love! So he gave us a great GIFT; his Son for us to believe in and be saved!

Now the link between Baptism, John 3:16, and Holy Communion is that word "gave". Jesus didn't just come to earth to teach and heal and love people. Jesus came to earth to DIE for our sins. **God GAVE his Son to us for death...the death of Jesus and the death of our sins.**



Study this painting by Daniel Bonnell for a moment. It depicts Jesus' baptism and crucifixion.

The sacrament of Baptism and Holy Communion is directly linked by God's gift of life and by death. In Jesus' baptism, we were present, through our baptism. As Jesus went under the water he died our death because of sin. We died our death to sin with Jesus. In Holy Communion we participate in and remember his death on our behalf. In fact we **"proclaim his death until he comes. We tell about his death until he returns."**

As Jesus came up out of the water to receive the blessing and commission of God and new life; we receive new life in the forgiveness of our sin in the blood of the New Covenant. We receive life and death every time we participate in the Holy Sacrament of Communion. **Our sins die. We live!!**

The link between John 3:16 and 1 Corinthians 11 is in verse 24. In John 3:16 Jesus said, “God so loved the world he GAVE...”

In 1 Cor. 11:24 it says, “He broke bread and said, “This is my body, which is (GIVEN) for you.” We repeat these words verbatim in the consecration of the elements of Holy Communion.

When you RECIEVE Holy Communion and the word is “receive” not “take” for we receive THE GIFT that is given. Those handing you the bread or extending to you the cup to dip in say these words.

The body of Christ, GIVEN for you. And your response is “Amen”.
The blood of Christ, GIVEN for you. And your response is “Amen”.

Though often people say, “The body of Christ broken for you.” I don’t use that phrase anymore for it recognizes the power of sin more than the gift. So I encourage people to say, “The body or blood of Christ GIVEN for you.” For that recognizes God’s gift and power. God gave his Son. We receive the benefits of his death and resurrection: abundant life in this world and eternal life that begins in this world and extends to the world to come.

The next link to look at between Baptism and Holy Communion is in verse 26 “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Every baptism and every time we take Holy Communion we remember and actually proclaim Jesus’ death on our behalf and our new life, our eternal life through him. We remember death, life and life eternal in Jesus Christ.

This meal is an evangelical proclamation of Jesus’ death on our behalf. It proclaims our salvation through his blood that will save us through to his return.

I want to concentrate now on our Corinthian passage for it has much to teach us. In verses 27 to 29 it says in the NRSV “So then,

whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink

without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.”

It is because of these verses that two things often happen before Holy Communion is received. In some traditions some people will NOT receive Holy Communion because they feel they are unworthy. But think about this if you were worthy you would NOT need Holy Communion for it is a time FOR the forgiveness of sins.

When we come to the Communion table we approach it dressed in the filthy rags of our sin and leave it in the white robes of righteousness that are given by God in Jesus Christ.



If we think we can in any way make ourselves worthy of receiving God's forgiveness we have missed the point of Jesus' death on the cross.

Second, we do indeed, in traditional services, have a prayer of confession of sin before Holy Communion. And now let's look at this scripture even closer.

In Corinthians 11 Paul was addressing a misunderstanding and misuse of Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper. Here's the background. This chapter is the only place in the New Testament that Holy Communion is called the Lord's Supper. In the early church it indeed was a supper or a meal with either the bread being broken before the meal and the cup being shared after the meal, or both bread and cup coming after the meal.

The problem in the Corinth church was they forgot the true meaning of the Lord's Supper. It was being treated more as an excuse for the rich in the church to get together and get stuffed and drunk (yes, drunk) than as a memorial of Jesus' death and what that meant.

The rich would show up at the Lord's Supper with more than enough to eat and drink (thus the intoxication) and the poor would be humiliated by going hungry and thirsty in the face of this gluttony.

It was like the rich in the presence of the poor of the Body of Christ were having Private Communion. This was very divisive to the Body of Christ; so Paul calls them back to truly consider the real meaning of the Lord's Supper.

Our denomination's teaching/doctrine about no private Holy Communion in front of others comes from these very verses. It is why when I serve communion in hospital rooms or Nursing homes I invite everyone present to receive Communion. It is also why we do not serve Holy Communion in wedding services only to the couple. It's all or nothing.

To receive Holy Communion in a worthy manner means: for us to remember Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.

It means as we come to this table of the Lord's we remember and CONFESS our sins. Only sinners eat at this table. AS the words to the old hymn go, "Come, Sinners to This Gospel Feast."

To receive it worthily we must admit our guilt before God and accept God's verdict on our sin.

And once again accept God's divine forgiveness: our white robe of righteousness.

Only guilty sinners come to this table, but when we leave we are forgiven. All our sins are washed away and canceled. We begin a new life.

The Lord's Supper is the time and place we can be seen and accepted for what and who we are. We come, just as the words to the hymn say, "Just as I Am." We need not try to hide anything from God. It is the time and place, as we confess our sins, that we receive the Gospel the good news again and receive new life, abundant life. We rise fresh and clean being baptized once again in Christ's blood that cleanses us from all sin.

Now the last verse we read today can cause lots of fear and confusion. **"For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves."** This is not a demand to believe that the bread actually becomes the body of Christ. No, the bread is still bread.

We do not believe in what is called "Transubstantiation", the bread and wine becoming the actual body and blood of Christ. Nor, do we believe in "Consubstantiation" that the elements though they look like bread and wine are actually the body and blood of Christ.

We believe in the "Real Presence" of Christ. Christ is here through the Holy Spirit.

No, the "body" here in this verse is the Body of Christ, the Church: The Gathered Body of Believers. Remember the context for these verses were the divisions within the church by economic class?

Paul here is calling the Corinthians to unity of understanding and ACTION! When gathered together for the Lord's meal they needed to share and share alike. Maybe here is the scriptural basis for Methodist potlucks.

But seriously, for us, this is where we need to examine our relationships within the Church. We all share from one loaf, which symbolizes Christ's Body the Church. We all share from one cup. But are we doing the things that will make us one in the Lord?

Are we refraining from gossip? Are we refraining from evil speculation? Are we refraining from criticism of others without speaking to them face to face? Do we come to this altar where we remember Christ's forgiveness of us with unforgiving hearts?

Do we need to leave our gift at the altar and be reconciled with someone before we commune with Jesus as he asked in the Sermon on the Mount? As we come asking God to forgive us do we hold grudges and unforgiving hearts against someone else? Do you need to forgive someone today as you have been forgiven, which we will soon pray?

These are ways we examine our hearts as we come to the Lord's Table:

- We recognize Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf.**
- We confess our own sin.**
- We forgive as we have been forgiven.**

I want to close now with how to actually physically receive the elements of bread and non-alcoholic wine today.

First, if we are able to, we come forward to receive. If possible we as Methodists come forward and don't simply pass the elements along. The gift is given by God, but we must "Believe". In the New Testament "believe" always has an active meaning to it. If you believe it will inspire you to action. If you believe in Jesus Christ you will come forward if you physically can to receive.



We receive with open crossed hands. This is a symbol of Jesus' death on the cross for us. We come with open hands turned upright to receive the gift of Jesus' forgiveness and new life.



Our hands are empty, clutching nothing of the world, trusting nothing but Jesus' sacrifice for us on the cross. Nothing can buy God's love in Christ.

We can only receive with open hands as the bread is placed in our open hands.

When we receive the bread, we dip it in the cup.



It is a baptism of sorts where we remember our baptism, our baptism in Jesus' blood that washes away all sin.

We then eat them together and taste and see that the Lord is good and step away to new life.

Come the table of the Lord is ready. Let's consecrate the elements and prepare our hearts.

In Jesus' name. Amen!