

Date: August 15, 2021

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; Matthew 5:21-24

Sermon Series: Communion

Sermon Title: *Christ Redeems*

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A couple of weeks ago, I ordered rocks from one of my favorite on-line web suppliers. I usually order Sunday School crafts and supplies from them but I ordered bags of rocks—and each of you should have found one on your chair. So keep that handy—we will be talking some about that later.

One of the things many of us learned last year while we weren't meeting in person was how to Zoom. We learned what rooms in our fellow church members homes looked like. We got to know each other in different ways. I've been at Redland a little over 6 years now and so I am still getting to know people. Zoom calls helped a lot for me because it had our names at the bottom of our little box screen.

So, while that was one of the good things, I think we can all find a much longer list of things we are not really happy about in the last year and half now. And top of my list is how many ways there are now for us to disagree about things we never used to even think about—indoor dining, masks, virtual school, working from home, vaccine mandates. And as time has passed, we get entrenched in our particular preferences and beliefs about these things. And sometimes we find ourselves disagreeing with one another—often quite strongly. Yes—I think we are all familiar to that experience

So, while the Covid Pandemic may be a new challenge for us, the disruption to unity among believers is centuries old. As we look at our text this morning, Paul is teaching about Communion and he is taking the opportunity to correct some of the things the Corinthians have allowed to sneak into their worship. We are going to be looking in 1 Corinthians 11 beginning in verse 17 through 34. As you turn in your Bibles or Bible App, please stand if you are able as we hear from the word of God.

1 Corinthians 11: 17-34

¹⁷ In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. ²⁰ So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹ for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. ²² Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. ³⁴ Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

From Acts 2, we know the early Jerusalem believers ate common meals together as a part of their regular worship—this is where the Lord’s supper was first celebrated after Jesus’ crucifixion. It was different than the pagan celebrations that were the custom in temples that worshipped idols. Large banquet rooms were often attached to the pagan temples and festivities would happen after meat was sacrificed to an idol. It was an important part of the pagan religious celebrations.

The early Christians in Corinth had adapted the Christian worship to their familiar pagan traditions they had before they came to follow Christ. These Agape or Love feasts happened in addition to the Lord’s Supper. Think Church Picnic or Dinner on the Grounds but with some flair apparently. One of the commentaries I read as I prepared for this, suggested that in the churches, there was a fellowship hall for the wealthier believers but the lower socioeconomic class of believers had to eat in the outdoor atrium or foyer.

Paul started the book of 1 Corinthians with the strong admonition that there should be no divisions: ***“¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.”*** But as he continues his letter in chapter 11, he finds not only a spirit of disunity but cliquish, junior high actions and behavior.

In verse 19, Paul refers to these divisions as ***“differences.”*** Paul uses this same Greek word in Galatians 5 for dissension when he is talking about the acts of the flesh when compared to the fruits of the spirit: ***“¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like....***

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. ²⁶ Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.”

These differences are allowed by God to show us who is walking in the Spirit. Those causing division do not walk in the Spirit. In Titus, Paul gives us clear direction about how serious it is when someone in the fellowship values division and arguments over unity: ***“⁶ But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. ¹⁰ Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. ¹¹ You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.”***

Pastor Mark spoke about this some last week—it does not mean we should not be passionate about core beliefs but we should strive to not always be the one to stir up controversy about lesser issues and then not let it go. We should strive to be peacemakers—to be known for our gentleness and kindness. Disagreements that do not carry to the weight of core convictions are to be avoided.

In verse 21 & 22, Paul is telling the believers that their behavior is inappropriate in the public setting of worship. They should be honoring Jesus’ body as a sacrifice for our sin as well as a symbol of unity among the body of believers.

Paul then takes us back to the scene of the Upper Room where Jesus is sharing a Passover meal with his apostles—this passage in I Corinthians is the earliest known written version of the Last Supper. The Gospels were written almost 10 years later.

The bread represents his body in verse 24 and is for the forgiveness of our sins. In verse 25, the cup represents the new covenant that Jesus made with us to replace the one in Exodus 24:3-4b; 7-8 ***“³ When Moses went and told the people all the LORD’s words and laws, they responded with one voice, “Everything the LORD has said we will do.” ⁴ Moses then wrote down everything the LORD had said... ⁷ Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, “We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey.”***

⁸ ***Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.”***

The new covenant is prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-34:

³¹ ***“The days are coming,” declares the LORD,***

***“when I will make a new covenant
with the people of Israel
and with the people of Judah.***

³² ***It will not be like the covenant***

***I made with their ancestors
when I took them by the hand
to lead them out of Egypt,
because they broke my covenant,
though I was a husband to them,”***
declares the LORD.

³³ ***“This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel
after that time,” declares the LORD.***

***“I will put my law in their minds
and write it on their hearts.***

***I will be their God,
and they will be my people.***

³⁴ ***No longer will they teach their neighbor,***

***or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’
because they will all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest,”***
declares the LORD.

***“For I will forgive their wickedness
and will remember their sins no more.”***

The final part of the Upper Room scene in verse 26 is meant to be a visible way of telling others about Jesus’ journey to the cross and his death on it for us. It also serves as a reminder that we share in the telling of that story until he returns.

Beginning in verse 27, Paul is ready to provide a teachable moment for the Corinthian church. If believers participate in the Lord’s Supper in an UNWORTHY manner, it is the same as disrespecting the crucified and resurrected Jesus as well as our relationship with fellow believers.

Paul challenges us to examine ourselves prior to our participation in the Lord’s Supper. This examination is meant to be about our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationships with each other. Paul wants us to have the opportunity to be reconciled and confess our sins to God and to each other when we have sinned against them.

Jesus also gave similar guidance in Matthew 5:21-24 about examining ourselves. Let’s look at this passage to compare.

Matthew 5:21-24

²¹ ***“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’*** ²² ***But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.***

In this segment of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is explaining how people misunderstand the law with what the true meaning of the law is. Jesus says earlier in verse 17 that he hasn’t come to abolish the law but to fulfill it. He is challenging our human nature to say, *“Well, I’m not a murderer.”*—But the anger we can have against another person is just as sinful as murder—it brings the same spiritual judgement—if not the same legal consequence.

In other parts of scripture, we see Jesus expressing righteous anger at injustice but that is not what Jesus is talking about here. He is talking about the anger that erupts from personal annoyances, frustrations, envy and jealousy. We are called to recognize that for the sin that is at the root of it.

We continue reading:

²³ “Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, ²⁴ leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

Here Jesus turns it around on us. He has just been talking to us about our hateful attitudes. But he knows how easy it is to rationalize those attitudes and the resulting behaviors—the silent treatments, the exclusions, the slandering of others. And once we have rationalized our poor behavior, we often forget about it—never confessing it.

But how quickly we remember the slights, the hurts, the wounds we have received from someone else. We might forgive but we are almost always able to remember. And so we are called to forgive 7 times 70 because we can't easily forget. Holding on to unforgiveness is a sin. So, while we are thinking about those slights, Jesus commands us to remember what we have done against our brother or sister and go and make it right. Because as a follower of Jesus, we should be as concerned about when we have sinned against someone else as we are when someone has sinned against us.

This examination process is hard—it points out our shortcomings—not to disqualify us from fellowship—Our fellowship is qualified by our relationship with Christ. But as a participant in the body or community of Christ, we can't allow a disagreement or disunity to burden our unity—our sweet fellowship. It betrays Christ's call on our unity and betrays the value he finds in each of us.

But for all of us—sometimes the hurts that have been done to us seem too awful to forgive. Some of you know some of my story. I have been here at Redland for over 6 years now. But in November 2012, my world was shaken.

Earlier that year, my sweet grandmother passed away after being ill for a while. She had 2 children, my mom and her younger brother Keith. Keith was almost 16 years younger than my mom and so he was more like an older cousin to my sister, brother and me. A few months after my grandmother died, Keith lost his job but he seemed to be doing ok.

That Thanksgiving, he celebrated with my Mom, my sister and her husband. He left on Friday and my sister and her husband left my Mom's house on Saturday morning. Sometime on Saturday afternoon, my uncle returned—killed my mother and then committed suicide. In his 38 page manifesto that he had FedExed to my brother, he explained that he wanted his whole family (his mother, father and my Mom) to be in heaven together.

On Monday, when my Mom did not show up to work, her co-workers went to her house and called the police because of a suspicious note my uncle had left on the front door. From there, the police and the Texas Rangers got involved and I was notified here in Maryland.

It was awful and hard and as I wrote this sermon, I kept having to take breaks as I thought about sharing this with you. But I wanted to share with you—my church family—the things I have learned as I walked through that valley of the shadow of death.

First, I was so angry, I sometimes couldn't breathe or think straight. I was angry at my uncle. I was angry at my grandmother and grandfather. I was angry that God had allowed it to happen—I couldn't understand it—and there are parts of it that I will never understand.

Second, I learned God was willing to walk with me through the hurtful times—he was patient as I grieved. Sometimes I was in so much shock, all I could do was sleep. He directed me to a great Christian counselor who helped me process all

the yuck—and it was not easy. And there are not easy answers. But I was changed by that loss. And my faith has grown.

Third, I know now that there is not anything that can happen to me that God will not be there with me. We experienced a thousand small graces from God those early days and weeks. God is so much more faithful than I could ever be. And he has helped me see a little how to understand what can't be easily explained.

Whether you are facing an insult from a trusted friend, a betrayal of your marriage vows, a loss of a job that seems unfair, a death of a friend from Covid, God wants to be there for you. A couple of weeks ago, as I was preparing to preach today, I came across an article on a blog, the Denison Forum, that I have read periodically.

Why does a good God allow bad things? *By Jim Denison Denisonforum.org*

Christians are especially susceptible to this issue about evil because we believe three apparently contradictory facts to be equally true:

- God is all-loving.
- God is all-powerful.
- Evil exists.

There are several **Popular but wrong approaches**.

The easiest way to “solve” the problem of evil and suffering is to deny or minimize one of its three conditions. One other wrong “solution” is to deny the existence of God altogether.

There are also **Historical biblical approaches** that are helpful because the problem of evil is as old as the Garden of Eden and the Flood of Noah.

1. The spiritual warfare model Satan is very real.

- Paul was clear: ***“Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms”*** (Ephesians 6:12).
- However, not all suffering is the direct result of Satan’s work. We live in a fallen world in which natural disasters and disease are inevitable.
- Satan would like us to attribute all evil to him, giving him too much power, or blame nothing on him, pretending he doesn’t exist.

2. The free-will theodicy Augustine (AD 354–430)

- God created all that is. All that he created is good.
- God created humanity with freedom of will.
- We used this freedom to choose evil.
- All people are now sinners (Romans 3:23). Our sin has resulted in a fallen world (Genesis 3:17; Romans 8:22).

3. The soul-building model Irenaeus (ca. AD 120-ca. 200)

- God created us to develop into a perfect relationship with himself.
- Evil is thus necessary as a means of our spiritual development (“soul-building”). The Bible does teach that:
 - Suffering can lead to good (2 Corinthians 4:17; Hebrews 12:11).
 - Suffering can lead us to repentance.
 - Suffering can refine us (1 Peter 1:7; 4:19).
 - Pain enables us to witness to our faith in God despite the hurt.
- God promises to use even difficult experiences for our good, to make us more like Jesus (Romans 8:28-29).

4. The eschatological or future hope model

- This approach asserts that evil will be resolved in the future, making present suffering endurable and worthwhile.

- Jesus promised that life leads to life eternal in glory (John 14:1-6).
- We do not comprehend the purpose of suffering now, but we will one day (1 Corinthians 13:12). All our questions will be answered. All the reasons why God has permitted suffering in our lives will be clarified.
- Our present faithfulness will be redeemed with future reward in glory (Revelation 2:10).

5. The existential model

- God suffers as we suffer and gives us strength to withstand and even redeem our pain (2 Corinthians 4:1-16).
- God walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4).
- He weeps as we weep (John 11:35).
- Jesus experienced every temptation and pain we feel (Hebrews 4:15).
- This approach offers no real explanation for the existence of suffering. But it does provide the practical assurance that our Father walks with his children through the hardest places of life and will never allow us to face more than he will give us the strength to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13).

6. The redemption model

- Only one attribute of God is repeated three times: he is **“holy, holy, holy”** (Isaiah 6:3; Revelation 4:8). We might say that God is **“holy, holier, holiest”** to reach the superlative level.
- If God is the **“holiest”** being that exists, he must be perfect in every way. If he is perfect, he can never make a mistake.
- Therefore, God’s omniscience, omnipotence, and love require him to redeem for greater good all he allows or causes.
- We may not see this redemption fully until we are in heaven, for **“now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face”** (1 Corinthians 13:12). However, sometimes we can see God’s redemption at work in our present day.

Practical principles

When the hurricane strikes, or your reputation is smeared by a co-worker, or a pandemic happens, or a spouse is unfaithful, or a child dies, or you are struggling with mental illness, or someone you love walks away from faith, how can these models or approaches help us in practical ways?

First, utilize the *free-will* approach to examine the origin of suffering.

- Is there sin to admit? Is this pain in some way the result of your own misused freedom?
- Confess specifically and genuinely whatever the Holy Spirit reveals to you. Claim his forgiving grace (1 John 1:9).
- Make restitution to others when doing so is to their good (Luke 19:8).
- Do not assume that suffering is always your fault. Joseph, Job, and Jesus are clear evidence to the contrary.

Second, use the *soul-building* model to ask: What can I learn from this situation?

- How can you grow closer to God through this pain?
- Strive to be open to every source from which this spiritual growth can come:
 - ask friends for counsel,
 - seek the Spirit in prayer and Scripture,
 - worship God even (especially) when it’s hard. Stay close enough to Jesus to hear his voice and feel his transforming touch.

Third, use the *future hope* approach to ask: How can God redeem this present suffering for future good?

- How can he use your witness to touch the lives of people you may not even know?
- How will he reward your present faithfulness in the future and in glory?

Fourth, utilize the *existential* model to trust God’s help in the midst of your pain.

- Know that he loves you, no matter how the world assesses or treats you. Nothing can take you from his hand (John 10:28).
- He will enable you to withstand this trial until the day he takes you home to glory.

Last, use the *redemption* model to believe that God is redeeming your suffering for his glory and your good.

- We may not see that redemption today, but we will in eternity.

By Jim Denison Denisonforum.org

Several weeks ago, I watched a story on the evening news about 2 new college graduates in Florida. I was awed at hearing their story and so I searched for more info on-line and there were several references—one on a Christian blog I follow, the Denison Forum:

“For two young graduates in Florida, receiving a college degree is a precious reminder of God’s goodness.

“Joy Bashara remembers clearly the moment she came face to face with terror and made a deal with God: “If you let me live Lord, I am yours for life. Just don’t let these people take me away.” She was one of 176 teenaged women kidnapped from a boarding school in Chibok, Nigeria by Boko Haram in 2014. The girls were taken in the middle of the night and forced into the back of trucks.

“When a car in the Boko Haram caravan got stuck in a pothole, Joy and another young girl named Lydia Pogu, felt God leading them to jump out of the trucks and run for freedom.

“Boko Haram known for rampaging villages and kidnapping children. Lydia said she and other girls wanted to continue their educations after their escape, but were told it was too dangerous. Then opportunities opened for Lydia and Joy to continue their high school education in America. The two girls received scholarships to attend a Florida university, where one earned a degree in social work and the other a degree in legal studies.

“Lydia has hopes of becoming a human rights lawyer, “because after what happened to me, I felt there was nobody that brought justice for the Chibok girls.” Bishara wants to start a community support agency in Chibok to “take in those who have been injured in a violent relationship, have been attacked by the Boko Haram, lost their property, lost their food,” she says.

“Their story illustrates the redemptive nature of a loving God, even in the midst of evil. We have a hard time understanding why innocent people suffer at the hands of terrorists, or why good people die in catastrophic disasters, or from cancer. Or why pandemics happen.

The simple answer is we live in a fallen world and have since the Garden of Eden. God redeems all he allows. God redeems in the future the suffering we experience in the present. Jim Denison, the CVO of Denison Forum

“God did not cause the sufferings for Joy, Lydia, or any others who go through hard times. But, he redeems the hurt. He redeems the hard times. When Joy and Lydia help others in Nigeria, or a person who has gone through a catastrophe reaches out to others going through similar crises, they reflect the character of God. . .their hearts are broken by what they see just as God’s heart is broken.”

from [Young women find purpose after escaping terror: How God redeems all he allows](http://denisonforum.org/columns/global/young-women-find-purpose-after-escaping-terror-how-god-redeems-all-he-allows/)
denisonforum.org/columns/global/young-women-find-purpose-after-escaping-terror-how-god-redeems-all-he-allows/

Rocks

So the rocks on everyone’s chair—they are meant to be a physical reminder of the spiritual burdens we carry with us—things we should be allowing Christ to carry for us because of his death on the cross—things he has already redeemed for us—that’s why I wanted the small stones with the cross—because Jesus’ death and resurrection is the answer for our heartaches, for our relationship struggles, for our lack of forgiveness towards others and ourselves. Paul challenges us to examine ourselves before we come to the Lord’s table. The way or manner we approach should be worthy.

Paul knows that we are not worthy because of our sinful nature. Jesus makes us worthy and if we don't take the opportunity to examine our hearts and confess our sins, we are ignoring the benefit of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. Paul reminds us to examine ourselves because he knows that it is much easier for us to examine others. Most of us are experts at rationalizing our shortcomings to the point where we can forget things we have said and done to others.

Jesus reminds us of this fact in Matthew 5. He says before we bring our gift to the altar and remember that our brother or sister has something against us—some sin we have done towards them—we are to go first to them before we bring our gift.

For some of us, as we examine our hearts, we know we have to begin to forgive others as Jesus taught us in Matthew 18. Forgiven people forgive others. Even the hard things because Christ redeems.

For some of us, we have to confess our sin that we have done to someone else—and to God and we have to go to that person and ask for their forgiveness.

The rock is to remind you later what you are committing to do now as you examine yourself. Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation, but forgiveness is a burden we can bring to the cross.

As we approach this time of Communion—a shared meal with those we are in Christian community, it is important to remember as Mark shared with us last week, unity was highly valued by Jesus for his believers. It would be disingenuous to come to the Lord's table apart from the love of Jesus AND our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So not only is this time about self-examination and confession, it is a time of Thanksgiving—Jesus gave thanks for the bread and the wine just hours before he was betrayed and arrested before he was crucified and wants us to participate in joyful anticipation of being with him in heaven soon.

So, with all this in mind---as we share this meal---I invite all Christians to join us---even if you are not a member of this church---because of course if you are His---this is yours.