

Last week, Cooper preached a magnificent sermon on the Passover. That passage hurt to give away, I gotta be honest, but he nailed it. And he taught a bit on communion. And today is communion Sunday. So I thought it'd be good to reflect a bit more on communion. I want to raise your view of the Lord's Supper. The eucharist, which just means thanksgiving. Or the sacrament. Many Protestants freak out about the word sacrament, but historically many Protestants use the term, including Baptists, but now the majority prefer "ordinance," which is good and right.¹ Jesus *ordained* the Lord's Supper and baptism. Ordinance is a good term, but it does emphasize *our* response to what God has done for us in Christ. Ordinance emphasizes human activity whereas sacrament emphasizes divine activity. I think we tend to be weak on that part. Tim Chester says, "Baptism and Communion are not something we do for God; they are something he does for us."²

Augustine called the sacraments "visible words." God attaches a word of promise to a particular created, material thing.³ Today, we live in a disenchanted age of Enlightenment rationalism.⁴ We are functional naturalists not supernaturalists, but all through Scripture, God uses material things to stoop to our weakness and meet us where we are: rainbows, stars, sand, water, fire, smoke, bread, wine, and meals. Thomas Howard writes, "It is in the physical world that the intangible meets us. A kiss seals a courtship. The sexual act seals a marriage. A ring betokens the marriage. A diploma crowns years of schooling. A doctoral robe bespeaks intellectual achievement. A uniform and stripes announce a recruit's training. A crown girds the brow that rules England. This symbolism bespeaks the sort of creature we are. To excise all of this from piety and worship is to suggest that the gospel beckons us away from our humanity into a disembodied realm. It is to turn the Incarnation into a mere doctrine."⁵

There is mystery in how God operates, which is why Calvin (who was no Roman Catholic) – after much explanation of the sacrament – says he'd rather experience rather than explain the presence of Christ in Communion.⁶ Calvin defined a sacrament as "an outward sign by which the Lord seals to our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith; and we, in turn, attest our piety toward him in the presence of the Lord and of his angels and before men."⁷

To use other traditional language, communion is a *means of grace*. The bread and cup are means by which God imparts grace to those in Christ. They portray and confirm the realities of the gospel.⁸ They are signs and seals. They mean nothing apart from faith but accompanied by saving faith they strengthen and confirm our faith, hope, love, and joy. They nourish spiritually.

¹ See Michael Haykin, *Amdist Us Our Beloved Stands* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2022).

² Chester, *Truth You Can Touch*, 50.

³ Vander Zee, *Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper*, 23.

⁴ Chester writes, "Communion offers the possibility of re-enchanting our world – a moment of transcendence, a meeting of heaven and earth, a glimpse beyond the immanent frame that would otherwise enclose our view of the world. God's immanence in the world through the Spirit in Communion points us beyond this material world to the transcendence of God." *Truth You Can Touch*, 164.

⁵ Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is Not Enough* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1984), 36.

⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.32.

⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.14.1.

⁸ Emmert, *The Water and the Blood*, 55.

In the ordinances, we do things that do things.⁹ God works through his Spirit and through appointed means to impart grace, assurance, and hope.¹⁰ The grace he gives through the ordinances is not *saving* grace – that comes through Christ and the Spirit alone through faith alone. But, God does give *strengthening* grace, much like the grace he gives through the preaching of the Word, the singing of hymns, and the praying of God-centered prayers.¹¹ God acts through the liturgy and we receive his action.¹² The older theologians would say it is not a converting ordinance but a sanctifying ordinance.

Reformed theologian Sinclair Ferguson writes “we do not get a different or a better Christ in the sacraments than we do in the Word But we may get the same Christ better, with a firmer grasp of his grace through seeing, touching, feeling, and tasting as well as hearing.”¹³ We see the firmness of his grasp on us and thereby get a firmer grasp on him.¹⁴

Ok, the Lord’s Supper is important to our walk with Christ. What is it? Bobby Jamieson defines the Lord’s Supper as “a church’s act of communion with Christ and each other and of commemorating Christ’s death by partaking of bread and wine, and a believer’s act of receiving Christ’s benefits and renewing his or her commitment to Christ and his people, thereby making the church one body and marking it off from the world.”¹⁵ / So, let’s consider four realities of the Lord’s Supper: memory, communion, communal, anticipation. Or better, look back, look up, look around, and look forward. / **Luke 22:14-20** [828]

I. We look back in faith: Memory. Jesus said do this in remembrance of me. We look back and remember what he did on the cross primarily. We look back to the finished work of Christ. So we sing, “it was finished on that cross.” Jesus paid it all. My sin, not in part but the whole. Full atonement can it be? Jesus, as he hung on that sacred tree, claimed “it is finished.” This is what makes Christianity distinct from every other religion. We don’t finish the work. We trust in Christ and our sins are forgiven. We are counted righteous in him. What makes Protestant Christianity unique? In a word, grace. We don’t look in, but we look back to him and what he did at Calvary.

The finished work of Christ is what gives us hope, confidence, assurance. We look back and remember and remind ourselves that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. I got 99 problems but Rom 8:1. Regardless of how bad your week was, regardless of how bad you blew it, as we gather and take the bread and cup, we remember who we are in Christ.

We need that regular reminder. That’s why in Acts and in the early church they took it weekly. Acts 20:7 tells us the purpose for their weekly gathering: “On the first day of the week, when we were gathered together to break bread.” They assembled for the sake of the supper. Describing the practice of the early church, Oscar

⁹ Andrew Wilson, *Spirit and Sacrament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 65.

¹⁰ John Mark Hicks, *Enter the Water, Come to the Table* (Abilene, TX: Abilene Christian University Press, 2014), 12.

¹¹ Barcellos, *The Lord’s Supper As A Means of Grace*, 53.

¹² Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Formed Liturgy,” in *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition*, ed. Donald McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 290-291. Jonathan Cruse as well: “More important than any other distinctive of Reformed worship is that we come primarily not to serve but to be served by God the Father, in His Son, through the power of the Spirit working through His word.” *What Happens When We Worship* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020), x.

¹³ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 223.

¹⁴ Ferguson, “Calvin on the Lord’s Supper,”

¹⁵ Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding the Lord’s Supper* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 25.

Cullman writes, “The Lord’s Supper is thus the basis and goal of every gathering.”¹⁶ Later he writes, “The *Lord’s Supper* is the natural climax towards which the service thus understood moves.”¹⁷ The 1st Century Christian Manual *The Didache* assumes weekly communion: “But on the Lord’s day, after that ye have assembled together, break bread and give thanks, having in addition confessed your sins, that your sacrifice may be pure” (14:1). Calvin agreed: “No meeting of the church should take place without the Word, prayers, partaking of the Supper, and almsgiving.”¹⁸ We’re a forgetful people and we need that reminder. In communion we look back and remember the cross of Christ.

We look back even further than the cross. This is what Cooper preached last week. Jesus intentionally introduced this last supper at the time of Passover. As we saw last week, this was the celebration commemorating God’s great act of deliverance of his people. Exodus 12. The death of every firstborn, except for those who had faith in God’s promise. If they slaughtered an unblemished lamb and applied the blood, judgment would pass over his people. Something in every house died: a lamb or the firstborn. Substitution: salvation through judgment. At this last supper, there is no lamb because Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. You know that contemporary song, “thank you Jesus for the blood applied.” We remember that we are covered by the blood. We look back to and remember the Passover and the Exodus.

We look back to and remember the promise of the NC. Jesus says the cup is the new covenant in my blood. (Jer 31:31-34). The two gifts of the new covenant are inward transformation and full and final forgiveness of sins. Ezekiel calls it a new heart. Jeremiah calls it the law written on the heart. / G

We look back to promises made and promises kept. We remember the glory of pardon for the past and power for the future. “Remembering” in Scripture isn’t just thinking of the past but bringing the past into the present, and allowing the past to actively shape the present.”¹⁹ In Scripture, remembering changes those involved.²⁰ We look back and:

II. Look up: Communion We look to Christ. 1 Cor 10:16 says, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” That word for participation is fellowship. 1 Cor 1:9 says, “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” Speaking of idolatry in 1 Cor 10:18, Paul writes, “are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?” If you eat the sacrifices you are influenced by what the altar represents and conveys. By eating you would participate in the idolatrous sacrifice.²¹

So also, in the Lord’s Supper, we partake of Christ, we commune with him, we share or participate in who He is and what he has done.²² Kevin Emmert says Holy Communion is the “primary means whereby God lovingly draws us into greater fellowship with himself and thus increasingly conforms us to the image of his Son, the

¹⁶ Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 29.

¹⁷ Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (London: SCM Press, 1953), 34.

¹⁸ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.17.46.

¹⁹ Emmert, *The Water and the Blood*, 105.

²⁰ Chester, *Truth You Can Touch*, 111.

²¹ Barcellos, *The Lord’s Supper As A Means of Grace*, 51.

²² Jonathan Landry Cruse, *What Happens When We Worship* (), 133.

one in whom we have been granted sonship.”²³ We *experience* the benefits of his death for us. The bread and cup are visible and physical forms of the promises of God. In communion we feed on Christ by faith and he nourishes us. / **John 6:47-56**

Listen to Heidelberg Catechism Question 75 “As surely as I receive from the hand of the minister and taste with the mouth the bread and the cup of the Lord, given me as sure signs of Christ’s body and blood, so surely does he himself nourish and refresh my soul to eternal life with his crucified body and shed blood.”

Question 168 of the Westminster Larger Catechism states that in the Lord’s Supper, the people “feed upon his body and blood, to their spiritual nourishment and growth in grace; [and] have their union and communion with him confirmed.” Here is how the Second London Baptist Confession puts it: “Worthy receivers, outwardly partaking of the visible elements in this ordinance, do then also inwardly by faith, really and indeed, yet not carnally and corporally, but spiritually receive, and feed upon Christ crucified, and all the benefits of his death; the body and blood of Christ being then not corporally or carnally, but spiritually present to the faith of believers in that ordinance, as the elements themselves are to their outward senses” (30.7).

Communion is where we come to commune with Christ, to experience afresh the fruit of our union with Jesus. When we are weary, doubting, fearful, guilt ridden, aimless, frustrated, proud, anxious, we come to the bread and cup and we receive them as a sign of our union with Christ and a means of our communion with him. As the bread is pushed between our teeth and juice hits the tongue, we are reminded that we are in Him. He is mine and I am his.

You remember those disciples on the road to Emmaus at the end of Luke’s gospel? Jesus shows up but they don’t recognize him. Using the same words from Jesus when he introduces the last supper, Luke writes “When he was at table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him” (24:30-31). And then they return to the other disciples and tell them “how he was known to them in the breaking of bread” the same terminology used all through Luke’s second volume to refer to the Lord’s Supper.

III. Look Around: Communal – Communion is an ordinance of the local church. It is for the church, to be done by the church, and in the church corporately. The Lord’s Supper fosters unity in the body. First Corinthians 10:16-17 says, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” Communion re-members us.

The Lord’s Supper is communion with Christ and union with the local body. The one bread makes us one body. In the 1552 Forty-Two Articles that Thomas Cranmer drafted, which would become the Anglican Church’s Thirty-Nine Articles, Cranmer began the section on the sacraments this way: “Our Lord Jesus Christ has knit together a company of new people with Sacraments.”²⁴

The problem Paul addresses in Corinth is disunity in the body. **1 Cor 11:17-30**. The rich were getting to the gathering sooner and eating all the food and getting drunk on the wine to the point that the poorer members were left with nothing once they arrived after work. That is the context in which First Corinthians 11:28-29

²³ Emmert, *The Water and the Blood*, 109.

²⁴ Chester, *Truth You Can Touch*, 143.

says, “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

To “discern the body” is to see and live out the connection between love for Christ and love for his people.²⁵ It is to discern the local church as a community and partake of communion in a way that bears witness to the unity of the body of Christ that transcends all social barriers.²⁶ In communion, we continually enact our identity in Christ together. This is not a call to private introspection, but public action. To take in an unworthy manner is to take in a divisive manner.²⁷

Whenever a church member consistently unrepentantly chooses sin over Jesus, eventually he must be removed from the membership. The final step of church discipline is called excommunication: ex-communicated – not welcome to the table. That is why 1 Cor 5, a chapter all about removing an unrepentant sinner from the fellowship says don’t even eat with such a one. That is why we “fence the table.” If you are under discipline – not in good standing – you are not welcome to partake. [should encourage – you’re still in] / So, look around. This is a family meal. A broken body for a broken people.

IV. Look Forward: Anticipation²⁸ 1 Cor 11:26: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” In Communion, the future becomes present. We taste the future and confirm our faith in the present. Heaven and earth overlap and intersect through the Spirit.²⁹ The bread and the cup are gifts from God’s future, like grapes from the promised land that the Israelites were able to sample while still in the wilderness.³⁰ They mark our journey from creation to new creation (Isa 25:1-8).

We keep doing this, week in and week out and will do so until the Lord comes.” Communion is both memory and anticipation. It declares our faith in Christ, it nourishes our soul, it fosters unity with the church, fuels hope in the coming Kingdom of Christ.

At the table, as we look back, look up, look around, and look forward, we are reminding ourselves who we are and whose you are. We find and form our identity in the promises of God. Practicing communion is an identity-forming ritual. Again, Ferguson writes, “we do not get a different or a better Christ in the sacraments than we do in the Word But we may get the same Christ better, with a firmer grasp of his grace through seeing, touching, feeling, and tasting as well as hearing.”³¹

²⁵ Bobby Jamieson, *Understanding the Lord’s Supper* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 18.

²⁶ Hicks, *Enter the Water, Come to the Table*, 95.

²⁷ Hicks, *Enter the Water, Come to the Table*, 96.

²⁸ Michael Green, *Thirty Years That Changed the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 179.

²⁹ Chester, *Truth You Can Touch*, 100.

³⁰ N.T. Wright, *God’s Homecoming* (), 252.

³¹ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Whole Christ* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016), 223.

