

We are in a season of tradition and rituals. It started a week-and-a-half ago with the annual purge of America's turkey population, we see evidence of it on this platform and throughout the church, hear it in the songs we sing this time of year, and my guess is many of you will do something over the next three weeks that you do every year. We do this because we know traditions are good. They bring us together, they help us remember and celebrate good things from the past, and they give inspiration and hope for the coming year. That's true for the holidays, and that's true for the practice of our faith.

This morning we are jumping ahead in the Gospel of Luke, and though we remain in our Succession series, we do so in this Advent season of expectation and preparation. But this year, as we celebrate the first days of our Savior, we remember his last. As we celebrate his birth, we remember why he was born in the first place. Like that incredible Christmas carol *What Child is This?* says: "This, this is Christ the King, whom shepherds guard and angels sing" AND "Nails, spears, shall pierce him through, the cross he bore for me and you."

And we begin in an upper room where Jesus is going to institute a tradition, what we call an ordinance, to his Church. Now, evangelicals aren't crazy about rituals, and Bible church folks in particular want it as flexible and freewheeling as possible. After growing up Catholic, I still remember walking into Fellowship for just the second time and seeing a dude eating a giant bowl of oatmeal. I thought, "That's different." But Jesus would never ask us to do something that's not for his glory and our benefit. His command will show us that **[SLIDE] a community who regularly remembers what Christ has done, and anticipates what Christ will do, lives centered on his Gospel today.** And if you want more celebration in your life, or a greater sense of belonging, or a life filled with more hope, that's what Jesus gives us.

**[Luke 22:14-23] <sup>14</sup> And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. <sup>15</sup> And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. <sup>16</sup> For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." <sup>17</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. <sup>18</sup> For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." <sup>19</sup> And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." <sup>20</sup> And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood. <sup>21</sup> But behold, the hand of him who betrays me is with me on the table. <sup>22</sup> For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!" <sup>23</sup> And they began to question one another, which of them it could be who was going to do this.**

Jesus gathers the Twelve to celebrate the Passover and be with his closest friends one last time before going to the cross. He connects one great work of salvation with the dawning of another. The Jews being freed from the bondage of Egypt to the Promised Land through the blood of a lamb pictures this new work of salvation that frees us from the bondage of sin and death into the Kingdom of God by the blood of Jesus, the Lamb of God. He will use this shared meal to teach them what he is about to do, what it will accomplish for them, and how they are supposed to commemorate it going forward. For 2,000 years, the Church has celebrated the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the ordinance of communion, resulting in celebration, belonging, and hope.

**Celebration:** One of our Thanksgiving traditions is to have everyone write down what they are thankful for on a slip of paper, put it in a bowl, then pass the bowl around. Each person draws a slip of paper, reads whatever is on it, and then tries guess who wrote it. It's pretty easy to figure out what Pressler boys wrote since most of theirs have to do with food. But this is a rich and meaningful time of looking back, remembering, and celebrating **together** the blessings in our lives. That's what Jesus calls us to here.

The Lord's Supper is centered on remembering what Jesus has done for us. The broken bread represents his broken body, and the wine represents his poured out blood. You may ask why this is cause for celebration, and the answer is what it achieves, which is our salvation. The sacrifice Jesus is about to make ushers in the New Covenant, a long-awaited and prophesied work of salvation for man and a prerequisite for the consummation of God's Kingdom.

[Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 26:26-28] <sup>31</sup> “Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. <sup>34</sup> And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”... <sup>26</sup> And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. <sup>27</sup> And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. <sup>28</sup> You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Jesus' sacrifice will be the source of the forgiveness of sins, a renewed relationship between God and man, and the indwelling and regeneration of the Holy Spirit who enables us to live our lives for God. This is why we celebrate. We celebrate because we remember God loves us so much that he sent his only Son, that Jesus loves us so much that he paid the price we deserved and rose again, that we don't have to live perfectly or make up for our own sin to be accepted by God because Jesus did it for us, and we no longer have to go to the temple in Jerusalem to be near God's presence because his presence permanently abides in and with us through his Spirit. **If you have trusted in Christ, you have been forgiven, you have been made new, and God's Spirit lives within you. And Jesus made it all possible.** That's what the Lord's Supper celebrates.

Could you do with some more celebration these days? In a year where there hasn't been much to celebrate, this celebration becomes all the more sweet. The Gospel shines brightest when life is at its darkest. That's why the early church celebrated this all the time! When we celebrate like this, God is glorified, the cross and our salvation never grow stale, and our hearts rejoice.

**Belonging:** This passage opens with a touching note about Jesus' desire to be with his friends. V15 is literally “With desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you.” If you ever had to face a great challenge or trial, you know how much you want to be around your people. This is a

moment of fellowship, intimacy, and unity between Jesus and eleven of the Twelve, and it's an indication of what we are to experience and reflect when we celebrate communion together.

**[1 Corinthians 10:16-17] <sup>16</sup> 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? <sup>17</sup> Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.**

Everything about the Lord's Supper declares oneness. We are one with Christ and with one another. Paul uses that wonderful Greek word *koinonia*. It gets translated "participation" but is usually translated "fellowship"; that Spirit-forged family of intimacy and unity that we belong to and that we proclaim when we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Even the same loaf of bread and common cup express oneness. Now, we probably don't want to all drink out of the same cup these days, and may not even want to in non-pandemic times. I remember the looks on people's faces as they'd take the wafer from the priest and then sort of scoot by the common cup with a look of mild disgust. Regardless, this shared meal is a reminder of the shared life we have in Christ. **In this season of isolation, it is a reminder we are not alone.** If you are joining us from home, I know you'd rather be here, but know that we will all be celebrating it together. We are one. That's why we can't neglect coming together regularly to worship the Lord and celebrate communion. **Church is not an event we attend. It is a gathering we are a part of.** Your presence tells someone else they matter, and they belong to something bigger than themselves.

**Hope:** That wonderful Advent theme we could all use an extra dose of these days. We're not talking about wishful thinking but expectant anticipation that God will do what he says he's going to do. In V15 Jesus makes clear he is about to suffer, and there are few things more contradictory than suffering and hope. In fact, he'll be dead on a cross in less than 24 hours and his disciples will be scattered in fear. **But it's in his suffering that hope becomes possible.** Jesus uses a word that suggests all will not be lost: Until. There is something more to come. What he does now makes possible what he will do in eternity, and he's already talked about it.

**[Luke 13:29] <sup>29</sup> And people will come from east and west, and from north and south, and recline at table in the kingdom of God.**

Jesus has been preaching the Kingdom of God since the beginning of his ministry. It invaded creation at his birth, God will achieve victory through a cross and empty tomb, and one day he will return to fully consummate the Kingdom for eternity. And when that happens, Scripture tells Jesus will host all believers at a Great Banquet, where he will once again eat and drink in the Kingdom.

And you know what? **If you are a follower of Jesus, you will be reclining at that table.** That is something we all need to hear this morning. For some of you, 2020 has been the year of your greatest suffering to date, and you limp towards the end of it grasping for something to hope in. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we participate in a picture of what the Twelve did with Jesus and what we all will do with him in the Kingdom of God. **The reason we can trust him to do it then is because he's done it before.** He chose to leave the majesty of heaven and be born as a baby, live a perfect life, die a death he didn't deserve, and rise again in victory. And before

he went back to heaven, he promised he'd come back, make all things right, and take us to himself forever. That's the hope we celebrate when we remember Christ's death until he returns. **Hold fast to that hope because he who promised is faithful.**

So how about I stop talking about it and we celebrate it together!?!? You may have taken communion 1,000 times in your life, but I encourage you to take it anew this morning as a celebration of Christ's saving work for us, for the fellowship we have with him and one another, and for the hope we have this Advent season as we await his second coming.