

Sunday Oct. 25, 2020

Lesson 8: One with Christ and One Another

Scripture: Luke 22: 14-20

Context:

Our scripture lesson today comes from the Gospel of Luke and focuses on the words of institution for Holy Communion. As we read, we will see the words used in the liturgy for when we come to God's table to receive the elements for Holy Communion. Our lesson today will unpack the focus of Jesus's words and how the sacrament of Communion is an indispensable means of grace to bless us on multiple levels.

The setting is the Passover when pilgrims gather together to recount the story of Moses and the flight of the Israelite people from the land of Egypt. The event is sacred and if possible, people make their way to Jerusalem to celebrate. At this point, Jesus has already entered into the city of Jerusalem fulfilling the lines of a prophecy and has begun to prepare himself for the Passion.

This particular passage is important as the apostle Paul will recall Jesus's words when he is addressing congregations about the Lord's Supper. The Gospel of Luke especially stands out as Jesus goes beyond the giving the bread and cup of wine as he does in the Gospel of Mark. In earlier manuscripts of this passage, Jesus gives his disciples the cup, and then the bread, and then the cup again.¹ He makes it a ritual, something to be repeated.

The power of the verses lies in the words of Jesus. In verse nineteen, he speaks of his body "which is given for you" and in verse 20 he calls the second cup "the new covenant by my blood."² This is the only place in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus claims his death is a sacrifice to bring salvation; whereas Mark and Matthew make these claims repeatedly.³ Luke focuses on other parts of Jesus's message and yet he never makes the claim to be sacrificially giving his body for others.

There are some ancient manuscripts not referencing this portion of the passage.⁴ Yet the words are there in others and reveal something significant for the Christian community. God is giving God's self to humanity. Something transcendent occurs as the bread and cup are given.

The words of Jesus give the disciples something to cling to as they face the trials to come their way. They are given his body and his blood, initiating a new covenant for them to live life anew. This new covenant is a gift and one, to enrich and nourish them as they spread the gospel.

¹Bart D. Ehrman, ed. *The New Testament: A Historical Introduction to the Early Christian Writings*, (Oxford: University Press, 2008), 137.

² Ibid., 137.

³ Ibid., 137.

⁴ Ibid., 137.

Application

The sacrament of Holy Communion is one of the two sacraments we have in the United Methodist Church. The other is the sacrament of baptism, which occurs once. Yet Holy Communion is a sacrament we continue to receive over and over again throughout our lifetime. It is a gift, a means of grace not only transforming us, as we are also induced to awe and thanksgiving. This is Christ's body and blood given for us and we are to remember him every time we receive it. We are given a place at the table of the Lord and heaven comes to meet us in the temporal transforming the of place we gather.

Perhaps one of the hardest aspects of Covid 19 for me was the dilemma over how to receive the sacraments, especially Holy Communion. It was fine and dandy to arrange the time and place for those who would be baptized and later sync a recording of the event into a worship video so that people could join in the liturgy and make the covenant to support them in the faith. You invited members of the family, close friends, and a lay leader and you had the under twelve quota. Not a problem.

Yet Holy Communion is different. This is the gathering of the people of God all together to receive Christ's body and blood. To deny someone the opportunity to come because of social distancing or to keep number quotas flies in the very face of words we find in the Gospel of Luke.

Jesus makes it clear the giving of his body and blood is a sacred experience where all are gathered around the table. He instructs the disciples how to share and experience it together. They are gathered as a people, able to see each other's faces and hear Jesus say: "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me," and "This cup is the new covenant by my blood, which is poured out for you." Something happens as they receive it together and hear those words spoken.

The sacrament of Holy Communion is a gift as it individually empowers us to go out into the world and is a communal gift as we realize there are others beside us who are on the mission as well. As messed up as we are as humans, God takes us and molds us into a new image. In the receiving of Holy Communion, we are transformed into Christ's hands and feet.

We know the disciples messed up and would mess up that very night they received this gift. They would abandon him in the garden and Peter would deny him. In the early days after the death, they would huddle behind closed doors, afraid to go out. And yet God was going to use all of them individually and collectively to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The same goes for us as we come to the table and receive a means of grace. God takes us and transforms us as we receive the elements. We remember the covenant and the calling God has placed on our lives. We are equipped to serve the world and to go where God sends us.

One of the ways I responded to receiving Holy Communion during Covid 19 was making sure it took center stage when we moved to outdoor worship in the Pecan Grove. After two months of not receiving Holy Communion, we set up a table in front of the platform with a table holding the individualized packets of bread and juice. As we heard the liturgy and individual representative of a family unit came up to receive the packets, we partook in this means of grace. It was not the way we were used to and yet it didn't matter. We were together as a family of God and receiving the body and blood of Christ.

We were transformed individually and collectively. God was at work in us and would be, whatever was to come our way.

Do you have a story of where Holy Communion was received and you felt the Holy Spirit strong at work? Why do you think it is important for us to receive Holy Communion? Why is receiving Holy Communion an individual and communal means of grace? How do you think Holy Communion can bring healing and wholeness to a community of faith?

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