Sermon- Eating Jesus, the Sacred Meal of the church

Scripture: **John 6:47-58 November 5, 2017**

Last Sunday I talked about one of the four pillars of the church. Do you remember which one I talked about? I talked about the pillar of Fellowship which includes eating meals together, caring deeply about each other and being family to each other. Today I am going to talk about another pillar and one that I have not addressed before, the celebration of the sacrament of the Lord’s supper. There is quite a range in how often different denominations celebrate the Lord’s supper. The catholic church and even some protestant denominations would celebrate the Lord’s supper every worship service. Some do it an infrequently as twice a year, but the average for American churches is once a month. Now my focus today is not going to be finding the magic number of how many times is theologically correct. My focus will be on explaining what exactly is the Lord’s supper and why we should be celebrating it in the church.

To unpack the various aspects of the Lord’s supper we will have to approach it from different angles and to do that we will have to use different texts. I would like to begin with the last supper where Jesus officially institutes this very special meal. If you look at the way Apostle Matthew describes it, in chapter 26, verse 26-30 we read *While they were eating, Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, “Take, eat; this is my body.” 27 Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; 28 for this is my blood of the[*[*b*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mt.+26%3A17-30&version=NRSV#fen-NRSV-24080b)*] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. 29 I tell you, I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.”30 When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

So at his last supper with his disciples, Jesus takes the common elements that would have been at the meal anyway, the bread and wine and he does something very special with it. He breaks the bread and gives it to his disciples, something fairly normal up to this point but then he does something very unexpected. As he hands the bread, He changes its meaning. He says, “this is my body”. Then he takes the cup of wine and passes that to his disciples, again something that was normal in that culture but once again as he passes the cup he redefines its meaning. He tells his disciples, “this cup now represents my blood that has been poured out for many people for the forgiveness of sins”. You have to imagine how stunned and confusing and uncomfortable this act would have made his disciples. They would have been saying to Jesus in their mind, “what, you want me to eat this now Jesus and feel good about it? Can we drink this wine and enjoy it?” But at that moment to refuse Jesus would have been an insult, but to receive would have been incredibly awkward. Of course they don’t fully understand what is going on but out of obedience and respect for their master they receive the bread and wine.

Then the next day Jesus is arrested, dragged to the temple court, then to Herod’s place, then to Pontius Pilot and finally crucified in the most brutal manner. None of his disciples were prepared for what happened. They were scared and they ran away. And you can be sure of another thing. The last supper they had with Jesus was far from their memory at this point. Then on the third day another unexpected thing happens. News comes to the disciples that Jesus’ burial tomb was empty. They hear rumors from some women that Jesus Christ had actually come back to life. In fact they are even told that word is that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee and that He would meet them there. Now it is not like the disciples had anything else that was urgent on their mind and so even though they would not have believed all this talk, they decide to walk to Galilee. Along the way they stop for the night at a place called Emmaus. While they were at Emmaus they are joined by a visitor who a couple of the disciples invited in. At meal time this visitor then breaks bread and blesses it and hands it over to them and suddenly their eyes were opened, they realize that the visitor with them is Jesus Himself and suddenly, what Jesus did at the Last Supper and what he did on the cross and what he is doing right now all begin to connect in their minds.

But even this is not the whole story. There are still some more dots to connect. It is time now to go back in time to when Jesus first hints at the Lord’s supper. And this happens in Jesus teaching ministry where he was on the shore of Galilee teaching people for days at a stretch and suddenly Jesus turns to his disciples and asks them to feed the 5000 people standing in front of them, remember that time?. Of course you know what happened, Jesus pulls of a miraculous sign by feeding all these people with 5 loves of bread and two fish. As a result, people go crazy for Jesus and want to make him their king right there. They think, wow if Jesus is King, there will not be a food problem any more. But Jesus was not in the least bit enamored by all that attention. What Jesus really wanted the people to be doing is asking, what does it mean that Jesus is able to miraculously provide food for 5000 people. Who is Jesus really? And Jesus explains it like this. He says, and I am summarizing John 6 for you here, he says, remember Moses? So Moses provided the Israelites with manna in the desert. Of course that did not come from Moses but from God himself. Jesus is greater than Moses, in fact Jesus came from Heaven himself and not only that but Jesus came to provide people with a different kind of bread, a spiritual bread. And once you eat this spiritual bread you will never be hungry again. And where do you get this spiritual bread? And this is where it gets difficult. He says he himself is the spiritual bread. That means if your need to get this bread, you have to eat Jesus somehow. Verse 51 of chapter 6 could not be more clear. He says, “I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Anyone who eats this bread will live forever; and this bread which I will offer so the world may live, is my flesh.”

Now you can imagine how uncomfortable the people hearing that would have felt. I feel uncomfortable even saying the words, you have to eat the flesh of Jesus Christ because he is the bread of life. If you are anything like me you would like to give Jesus a lesson in communication. If Jesus were here, I would like to take Jesus aside and tell him, Jesus please let me give you some advice about communication. After all I have preached for 10 years so I should know something about communication right? So I would say, something like this, See Jesus, what is your message? Your message is that you are the bread of life, right? You want to tell people that you are the source of eternal life, am I right? And the bottom line is that if they believe you are the bread of life, then they have eternal life, right? So then that is all you need to tell them. Just tell people, no one can offer eternal life but you. When they ask you want they must do, tell them they need to believe in you and your job is done, right? You have made your point. So don’t say anything more. Don’t tell people that they have to eat your flesh and drink your blood because that will put them off and they will not want to have anything to do with you.

Now what do you think? You would Jesus would take my advice? Well, the last time Peter tried to tell Jesus what to do it did not work out so well so I am not actually going to tell Jesus what he should do. But honestly, how many times have you read something that Jesus says and thought to yourself, “I wish Jesus said this differently or was more sensitive”.

Well, here is the deal friends, Jesus did not make a mistake in communication when he tells the people you have to eat my flesh and drink my blood. Actually, Jesus knows exactly what he is doing and why. And this is why Jesus uses such shocking language. When Jesus says you have to eat my flesh, he wants you to connect the bread and wine he is offering to the Passover lamb sacrifice. You see, the Jews eat the Passover meal that included the Passover lamb to celebrate their liberation from bondage in Egypt. What Jesus is saying that he is the true Passover Lamb and his sacrifice was to liberate even you and me from our bondage to sin. And because we are responsible for our sin and Jesus had to sacrifice himself to save us from our sin, by symbolically eating Jesus flesh, we are acknowledging that our sin caused Jesus death on the cross. So if you feel unfortable eating the bread and thinking it is the body of Christ, it is exactly what you are supposed to feel. What else should I feel if my sin caused Jesus to die on the cross? So eating the sacred meal is supposed to make us feel uncomfortable. We are never supposed to eat this sacred meal lightly or be casual about it. (The Jewish people were also commanded to never consumed the blood of the animals they were eating, out of respect for the life of the animal. So having a drink that symbolized the blood of Christ conveys that we are imbibing the life of Christ and that is the only spiritual life that we carry in our bodies. )

But listen, the power of the sacred bread and wine is not in its power to send us on a guilt trip. When the bread and wine touches your lips in may evoke an awareness of your sin and a special awareness of the death that our sin caused, but here is the amazing thing. Just as the cross could not keep Christ dead, so also as the body and blood of our Lord Jesus enters your body it will once again come alive and with it, it will clease you of your sin and give you new spiritual life. This is the true power of the sacred bread and wine. By participating in this sacred meal we are not mourning Christ death or our part in Christ’s death, but we are celebrating our new life in Christ. And part of that new life in Christ includes the joy of sharing this special meal with our brothers and sisters in Christ, the meal whose host is Jesus Christ himself. So this sacred meal is a meal that if entered into with full understanding will bring with it all kinds of emotions from pain and grief to triumph and joy and peace and love. What other meal is there in the world like this.

There is one last thing that needs to be said about this meal. This meal is the meal of the church. The Lord’s supper cannot be celebrated outside the church. For it to be the Lord’s supper, each guest must be a baptized believer in Jesus Christ. And this is a meal that is hosted by Jesus Christ. And because of this, there are strict stipulations about who can participate in communion. Apostle Paul in 1st Cor 26-29 writes this, 26 For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.

**27**So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Cor+11%3A26-29&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28588a)] the body and blood of the Lord. **28**That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. **29**For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ,[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Cor+11%3A26-29&version=NLT#fen-NLT-28590b)] you are eating and drinking God’s judgment upon yourself.

Obviously, we do not want the Lord’s supper to have the reverse effect and bring judgment upon anybody. That is why if you have not been baptized in the name of Christ I would recommend that you take some time to learn about who Christ is and what he has done for you and then make your decision. On the other hand, if you have been baptized, you have to make sure that you come to the table with a clean heart where there is nothing in your heart against a brother or sister in Christ. Having said that, for those of you who are baptized, it is always easy to say that you are not prepared and put off participating in the communion for months. That is not good either because that means that even though you have eternal life in you, you are not willing to cooperate with God in growing your faith.

That is why this sacred meal is an essential part of church. You can have fellowship anywhere. You can hear sermons on radio or TV or the internet. You can also pray by yourself. But you can only participate in the Holy Communion in church. May each of us have the privilege of experiencing eternal life and the spiritual growth that comes with being hosted by Christ himself at His sacred Supper. And may the joy of your eternal life cause you to radiate with a glow that spreads all over this neighborhood and may be even to the ends of the earth. Let us pray.