

09.01.24 ~ Pentecost 15 + Communion

“The Ordinances of Worship”

The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 22:22-31 ^{NIV}

- ²² I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.
- ²³ You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!
- ²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.
- ²⁵ From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.
- ²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the Lord will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!
- ²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,
- ²⁸ for dominion belongs to the Lord
and he rules over the nations.
- ²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.
- ³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.
- ³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!

Leader: These are Words of Reassurance.

All: Thanks be to God!

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 ^{GNT}

The Lord's Supper

¹⁷ In the following instructions, however, I do not praise you, because your meetings for worship actually do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I have been told that there are opposing groups in your meetings; and this I believe is partly true. (¹⁹ No doubt there must be divisions among you so that the ones who are in the right may be clearly seen.) ²⁰ When you meet together as a group, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. ²¹ For as you eat, you each go ahead with your own meal, so that some are hungry while others get drunk. ²² Don't you have your own homes in

which to eat and drink? Or would you rather despise the church of God and put to shame the people who are in need? What do you expect me to say to you about this? Shall I praise you? Of course I don't!

²³ For I received from the Lord the teaching that I passed on to you: that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread, ²⁴ gave thanks to God, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after the supper he took the cup and said, "This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me."

²⁶ This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ²⁷ It follows that if one of you eats the Lord's bread or drinks from his cup in a way that dishonors him, you are guilty of sin against the Lord's body and blood. ²⁸ So then, you should each examine yourself first, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For if you do not recognize the meaning of the Lord's body when you eat the bread and drink from the cup, you bring judgment on yourself as you eat and drink. ³⁰ That is why many of you are sick and weak, and several have died. ³¹ If we would examine ourselves first, we would not come under God's judgment. ³² But we are judged and punished by the Lord, so that we shall not be condemned together with the world.

³³ So then, my friends, when you gather together to eat the Lord's Supper, wait for one another. ³⁴ And if any of you are hungry, you should eat at home, so that you will not come under God's judgment as you meet together. As for the other matters, I will settle them when I come.

Leader: These are the Apostle Paul's warnings.

All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, our creator, healer, guide, leader, and strength, we thank you for this morning's study and worship together. We offer thanks for the many blessings of the week, even if illness or unexpected events delayed our plans. Help us to remember that it is through you that we find healing, grace, and peace. Through you, your love, and sacrifice on the cross, we find our salvation, spirit, and truth. Through our worship, we draw closer to you; through our prayer, you hear our needs, through your inspired Scripture, we hear your voice and direction, and through these elements and ordinances, we remember Jesus. Please renew us and refuel us for the coming week. Instruct us as we study and partake of the Lord's Supper. In Jesus' name. Amen.

—

Today, we'll continue with our worship theme, finding beauty through the two ordinances of Baptist faith--baptism and communion. From last week's sermon, remember there are four (4) values that must be present in all worship settings: 1. Attention to Scripture; 2. Devotion and

openness to the Spirit; 3. Concern for the community; and 4. A focus on eschatology. Both ordinances demonstrate all four values and are appropriate in a communal worship setting.

The first is Baptism upon conversion, and the second is Communion. Baptism demonstrates publicly one's profession of faith: repentance from sin, which brings about a change in one's life, a transformation of one's belief. We remember Jesus' own baptism in the river Jordan. Although Jesus was without sin, John the Baptist immersed him, and God blessed him to begin his salvational, teaching ministry. We repeat this ritual, figuratively washing away our sins, accepting Christ as our Savior, and rising out of the water with a new commitment to follow Jesus.

After we are baptized, we participate in communion, the Eucharist (which is Greek for "thanksgiving"), or The Lord's Supper (commemorating Jesus' last meal with his disciples from Matthew 26 and Luke 22). These are all names for a ritual memorial meal of bread or wafer and wine or juice. It is practiced in community on a regular basis or on special occasions like Christmas Eve, Good Friday, and occasionally in weddings. Similar to baptism, taking communion is a physical and spiritual experience; we confess and recommit ourselves to the Lord, to those who are present, and to ourselves in the company of God through the Holy Spirit. The elements (*as you know*) symbolize the body and blood of Jesus Christ crucified and risen. It is both reminiscent of the Passover in Israel and the Last Supper Passover meal of Christ and his disciples, while also being a prophetic symbol of the meal that Jesus will share with His believers when He comes again.

Although we have Scriptural references to the meal, it was based on tradition. As documented, the authority came from Jesus' last meal, was cited by the apostle Paul, and in the second Christian generation was affirmed by the written gospels. Table fellowship is scripturally supported, but the detailed liturgies and methods were based upon tradition of the early church. It was for many centuries a sacramental act, something that was "done." Not until the Latin Middle Ages did the Eucharist become something that was "said." You may find reading more about Christian and Church history helpful. We Baptists focus on the time after the Reformation, but these rituals date back to Jesus and the first churches in the book of Acts.

From last week, you may recall that place and ritual are parts of worship but not the most important part; it is the state of our spirit and minds that are most important as we come into God's presence for worship. So, our worship service prepares us to receive communion appropriately; we pray, meditate, sing praises, read Scripture, pray some more, give offerings, read more of God's word, hear exposition of Scripture, pray again, and then we are ready. We may not physically kneel or bow to receive the elements, but we do kneel in spirit and submission as we go through the service: we **lament** our sinful lives (both omission and commission), we **confess** our sins seeking, remembering, and receiving the forgiveness shared by the crucifixion and resurrection, and then **re-commit** ourselves to Christ and the Kingdom work being a disciple requires.

The psalmist in today's reading was surrounded by his enemies, and he lamented his suffering, pleading with God to deliver him. Then he

praises God for that deliverance. No specific incident matches up, but the general conflict in David's life does; isn't that like our lives? We go along with our daily prayers, and then it's Communion Sunday, realizing we must prepare to be in God's presence and may not feel "holy enough!" These flash prayers for forgiveness are not accurate theology; rather, we are to lament, confess, adore, praise, and give thanks every day in our private worship settings. We never know when we will meet Jesus, face to face! Recent generations have lost these weekly and monthly practices; we must reclaim them.

We live in a time similar to the Corinthians; Corinth was a metropolitan city on the water, which meant wealth, prestige, and commercial enterprises. Paul had heard that since he left, the church had begun to have Private Suppers, excluding slaves and the poor. The wealthier guests would bring food and drink only for themselves, overeat upon arrival, becoming drunk and disorderly; whereas the poor arrived to find empty tables, hoping for scraps of nourishment, but finding only the light symbolic Lord's Supper, which would leave them hungry. It was served after the big meal (which they had missed) and before worship. Even so, they praised and worshipped Jesus, their Savior. Although this communion was also called *Agapé* (Greek for love), there was no love for the poor. Paul was furious for this lack of compassion and distortion of the Eucharist, after all he had taught them!

This could apply to us too from an evangelistic position. Are we offering communion to all who seek it? Are we offering Jesus' saving grace to all who need it? Is a more emotional approach to worship working in this world as it seems to be in mega-churches? Or is

emotionalized conversion a cheap grace? Tradition does not have to be an obsolete word in church life. Many young people crave table fellowship and deep, meaningful ancient rituals. But they have to be exposed first; we must invite them in. The people most like us and our social circles already love Jesus, and likely know him, and have a church home. The ones who desperately need his love and saving grace are not like us but need our compassion, invitation, and acceptance. Think deeply about these things: how can we invite others to the table? What other worship changes can, or should we make to be more welcoming? This is not criticism; we have a sweet authentic spirit here but let us be bolder in our invitation. And let us answer last week's question: Is our worship transformative? Is our communion practice deep enough to transform? Help us create a renewed legacy that invigorates and re-assures the doubters. Will you keep an open mind and a heart of prayer as we do so? Thank you, and Amen! ||

Let us pray. Dear Lord, we thank you today for these reminders that our comfortable worship could be more transformative to others. Guide our thoughts and creativity to draw others and ourselves closer to you as we meet in community together. Help us to find beauty in our worship and rituals, so that your love dominates our decisions. Bless the elements of communion today, as we seek your forgiveness and grace. May your Spirit empower us to lead others to you. Jesus, it is in your name we pray, **Amen.**