



Sacraments: Signs & Seals Pt. 2...

Luke 22: 14-20 & 1 Corinthians 11:17-32

^{ESV} **Luke 22:14**...And when the hour came, he reclined at table, and the apostles with him. ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood."

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 11:17**...But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper,

saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another-- ³⁴ if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home--so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

I own a small farm in East Texas. To be specific, I own a four acre tract of land that used to be a part of the sixteen acres my dad owned. When my dad died his sixteen acres was subdivided into four parts and split between me and my siblings.

My dad got his sixteen acres when his dad died. It was a fourth of dad's original sixteen acres. The property has been in the Browning family for about 120 years. Now there used to be a house on my piece of property and about a hundred yards from the house, there used to be an enormous blackberry vine. Actually, it was many vines that had grown together into one huge circle. It was about ten feet high and about thirty feet in diameter. Each year in July, it exploded into tens of thousands of ripe blackberries. I always used to make it a point to be there when that happened.

Now, I like blackberries. I like them right off the vine. I also like them in cobblers. But the main reason I picked blackberries off that particular vine was because my dad planted it.

He set it out when he first retired and moved back to the farm. When he first set it out, it was a scrawny thing. Really, it was not much more than a twig. But my dad pampered it. He fertilized it and he helped it grow from a twig to a giant mound of vines. Each year when his blackberries started to ripen, he would call me. The next weekend I would drive down and we would pick blackberries. As long as we could, we picked them together. Even when he was no longer able, he would still watch me pick them from his truck.

Now, my dad died some seventeen years back but for the first ten years or so after he died I picked blackberries every summer just like he was still there. I think that's because, in my mind, he was still there.

Whenever I picked blackberries off that particular vine, I could see his face. I could see his bright blue eyes. I could hear his deep East Texas drawl. He was there in my memory and I could see him standing next to me picking berries just as surely as if he was there in the flesh. There was also a sense in which he was there in the blackberries too. He was there in the thorns and in the prickly heat of a July day. He was there even in the purple stains on my fingers. And when I thought about him that way I recognized the benefits of having known him and especially of having been his son.

Now the sacrament of the Lord's Supper is something like that. It is like that but ten thousand times more real, ten thousand times more profound. You see

sacraments are holy signs and seals for us to see. They are signs, of course, to everyone but they are seals to us that are elect in that they seal the truth and reality of our covenant relationship to God.

God gave them to us to make us more clearly understand the promise of the gospel and He uses them to give His children certain spiritual benefits. Of course, that is nothing new. God has always used signs or symbols to demonstrate the reality of His kindness to His people.

In the Old Testament, circumcision was used as a sign of a person's entrance into the Covenant people of God. It didn't matter if a person was an adult convert or the infant child of Covenant believers. When a person was circumcised, they became a member of the visible people of God. As Presbyterians, we believe that in the New Testament, the sacrament of baptism replaced circumcision and that it signifies the same thing.

But in the Old Testament, God had another covenantal sign. It was the sign of the Passover.

^{ESV} **Exodus 12:13**...The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.

^{ESV} **Exodus 12:23**...For the LORD will pass through to strike the Egyptians, and when he sees the blood on the lintel and on the two doorposts, the LORD will pass over the door and will not allow the destroyer to enter your houses to strike you.

Now to be perfectly honest the sign here is directed up toward God...He sees the blood and remembers His great covenantal promise and passes over them in mercy. But God also used the Passover Feast as a sign to His people. It was a sign to help them remember that God had delivered them and it was a sign of God's continual fellowship and kindness. When the Old Testament saints ate the Passover they remembered the way He destroyed their enemies and delivered them when they could not deliver themselves. But they also remembered the wonderful way God provided for them in the wilderness, when He nourished them with manna and water from the rock. The Israelites used Passover as a time to remember all that God has accomplished and God used it as a time to give them even more.

^{ESV} **Exodus 13:4**...Today, in the month of Abib, you are going out. ⁵ And when the LORD brings you into the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, which he swore to your fathers to give you, a land flowing with milk and honey, you shall keep this service in this month. ⁶ Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, and on the seventh day there shall be a feast to the LORD. ⁷ Unleavened bread shall be eaten for seven days; no leavened bread shall be seen with you, and no leaven shall be seen with you in all your territory. ⁸ You shall tell your son on that day, 'It is because of what the LORD did for me when I came out of Egypt.' ⁹ And it shall be to you as a sign on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the LORD may be in your mouth. For with a strong hand the LORD has brought you out of Egypt.

We believe that in the New Testament, the sacrament of the Lord's Supper replaced the Old Testament Passover meal and that it too is a remembrance of God's deliverance. But it is not just a deliverance from an evil oppressor like Pharaoh; it is a deliverance from the penalty of our sin. It is also a time for us to renew our relationship with God and it is a time in which God gives genuine benefits to His children.

We believe that is true because what the Bible teaches in 1 Corinthians 5:7.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 5:7**...Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

We believe, in particular, that the idea being taught is the idea of covenant renewal.

In the Old Testament, the idea of covenant renewal was prominent. You can see it in the life of Abraham as God comes back again and again to renew His promises. He first makes His promise to Abraham in Genesis 15; then He renews His promise in Genesis 17 and in Genesis 22.

You can see the renewal of God's promises to Israel in the Passover, which He appointed as an everlasting ordinance. You can see it in the lives of Israelites as God feeds them every morning with manna and with water from the rock in the wilderness.

You can see it in the ceremony when they first enter the land of promise and especially in that same ceremony when they go back to the same place.

^{ESV} **Joshua 5:8**...When the circumcising of the whole nation was finished, they remained in their places in the camp until they were healed. ⁹ And the LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away the reproach of Egypt from you." And so the name of that place is called Gilgal to this day. ¹⁰ While the people of Israel were encamped at Gilgal, they kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the month in the evening on the plains of Jericho.

^{ESV} **1 Samuel 11:14**...Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingdom." ¹⁵ So all the people went to Gilgal, and there they made Saul king before the LORD in Gilgal. There they sacrificed peace offerings before the LORD, and there Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly.

What you have here is God's people going back to the place where they first renewed the covenant when they came into the land and renewing it all over again. What you have is God's people remembering what they remembered.

You can see the same sort of thing in the times and places where God does something marvelous and then reminds His people that He is doing so because of the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

You can see it in the countless offerings made for sin and in the feasts that followed the offerings.

And then there is the word that is repeated over and over again that emphasizes God's faithful love. It is the Hebrew word *hesed* and it means loyal love. It is used over and over again to speak of God covenantal faithfulness.

^{NIV} **Lamentations 3:22**...Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

Now in particular, you see that word *hesed* in the Psalms. It is used at least a 128 times in the overall Psalms and twenty-eight times in one Psalm alone. If you want to do a great Bible study get a concordance and just look up the word lovingkindness or steadfast love. You will be amazed at how many times it is repeated. For example let's look at Psalm 136.

^{NIV} **Psalm 136:1**...Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good. His love endures forever.

² Give thanks to the God of gods. His love endures forever.

³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords: His love endures forever.

⁴ to him who alone does great wonders, His love endures forever.

⁵ who by his understanding made the heavens, His love endures forever.

⁶ who spread out the earth upon the waters, His love endures forever.

⁷ who made the great lights-- His love endures forever.

⁸ the sun to govern the day, His love endures forever.

⁹ the moon and stars to govern the night; His love endures forever.

¹⁰ to him who struck down the firstborn of Egypt His love endures forever.

¹¹ and brought Israel out from among them His love endures forever.

¹² with a mighty hand and outstretched arm; His love endures forever.

¹³ to him who divided the Red Sea asunder His love endures forever.

¹⁴ and brought Israel through the midst of it, His love endures forever.

¹⁵ but swept Pharaoh and his army into the Red Sea; His love endures forever.

¹⁶ to him who led his people through the desert, His love endures forever.

¹⁷ who struck down great kings, His love endures forever.

¹⁸ and killed mighty kings-- His love endures forever.

¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites His love endures forever.

²⁰ and Og king of Bashan-- His love endures forever.

²¹ and gave their land as an inheritance, His love endures forever.

²² an inheritance to his servant Israel; His love endures forever.

²³ to the One who remembered us in our low estate His love endures forever.

²⁴ and freed us from our enemies, His love endures forever.

²⁵ and who gives food to every creature. His love endures forever.

²⁶ Give thanks to the God of heaven. His love endures forever.

Now that loyal covenantal love is demonstrated no place else like it is in the Lord's Supper...the meal of covenantal renewal Christ instituted on the last night of His life after He and His disciples shared a Passover meal. And you can there, I think, as nowhere else the transitional movement from the sign of covenantal renewal in promise to the sin of covenantal renewal in fulfillment.

^{ESV} **Luke 22:16**...For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." ¹⁹ 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." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

The first thing that you should know is that the Lord's Supper is a sign or a picture of Christ's death. When we see the broken bread and the wine, we remember that our sin led to Christ's death. Of course, that causes every Christian to grieve for their sin. But at the same time, it also gives us a deep sense joy. That is true because His body was not only broken because of us, it was also broken for us. Christ's death paid the penalty for our sins and in doing so it reconciled us to God. We are no longer His enemies. Now, we are His own dear children.

^{ESV} **Romans 5:10**...For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. ¹¹ More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Since we are His beloved children, God now fellowships or communes with us in the bread and wine. Think of that. God actually meets with us in Communion. In some wonderful way, God is able to draw us into His presence and He fellowships with us as we receive the bread and wine in faith.

He meets us as a gracious friend and feeds us with His kindness. As a result, we see the broken body of our Lord as the spiritual food by which He sustains us. We see His shed blood as the spiritual drink by which He gives joy. Just as the

Lord provided manna and water in the wilderness to sustain the Old Testament saints, He provides the body and blood of Christ to sustain us spiritually. We eat the bread and wine in faith and it causes our faith to grow stronger. It's not that we believe that the bread and wine actually turn into the physical body of Christ. But we do believe that God does actually commune with us from heaven and that He does so in the bread and the wine. That is the reason that we often refer to the Lord's Supper as Communion. God meets with us and provides for us in all that Christ has accomplished.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 10:16**...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? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

When He communes with us, He declares His forgiveness. He declares to us that we are no longer His enemies. Not only are we no longer His enemies, we are His beloved children. He proves that by giving us His Holy Spirit and sustaining us day to day. In Communion, Christ is saying, **“Come My child and eat with Me. Enjoy all that I have given you. Taste and see that I am good.”**

Naturally, because we believe we are communing with God, we partake of the elements with deep respect and reverence. That is one of the reasons why the Lord's Supper is a solemn event. It is not a time for frivolity or laughter. Christ's body was broken and Christ's blood was shed because of our sin. When we see the elements, we are reminded that our sin deserved and demanded God's just punishment. So, we recognize the importance of being reverent. In fact, the epistle to the Corinthians makes it clear that God will judge irreverence with regard to Lord's Supper.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 11:29**...For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

That is the reason we do not allow just anyone to participate in the Lord's Supper. That is the reason we "fence the table". Since we believe that only believers should partake of the Lord's Supper, we warn nonbelievers about taking it. We do not think it is possible for an unbeliever to rightly understand and reverence the significance of the Supper and since we don't want them to bring judgment upon themselves we ask them to refrain.

Now there are those in the Presbyterian Church that do believe that the baptized children of faithful Christians should partake in the Lord's Supper...that is, they believe in paedocommunion. They believe that the ancient church gave communion to infants and they believe that it is inconsistent not to do so today. They believe that even very small babies should participate in the Lord's Supper and they mix bread and wine into something of a paste and give it to them whenever they receive communion.

We don't do that here. Our denomination, in fact, doesn't permit any of its churches or ministers to practice paedocommunion. They may hold to the view, but they may not practice the view. Now the reason we don't allow paedocommunion is because we believe that partakers of communion must be able to discern the body of Christ. That is the reason that we don't allow young children to partake of the Supper. We try to make sure that they understand the meaning of the Supper and the gospel that it pictures. When children do make a profession of faith and display a reasonable understanding of what Christ has done for them, we are happy to receive them as communing members. And

we don't insist that they be able to articulate their faith as clearly and precisely as adults. But we insist that they be able to articulate their faith in accordance with their age.

Of course, when we commune with God we have a responsibility to consider all that He has accomplished for us. We also have a responsibility to consider the family of believers in which he has placed us. We are obligated to confess our sins to God and to attempt to make right any wrongs we have done to other believers. We call this renewing our vows. In a sense, it is simply recognizing all that God has done on our behalf and displaying the proper gratitude.

We also believe that God uses our contemplation of Christ's death and our Communion with Him to grow us spiritually. That is why we call Communion a means of grace. When we hear the Word of God preached or when we see either of the sacraments being administered along with the Word, we believe that God uses them to help move us to maturity. When we use these things, God pours out His special kindness toward us by moving us a long in our faith. He feeds us spiritually and causes us to grow in our understanding of the gospel. That is why we take Communion so frequently. Here at Grace Community we take communion every Lord's Day. In that regard, we follow Calvin. He believed communion ought to be taken every time the Word of God is preached. Of course, he was voted down by the Genevan City Council and was never able to have the kind of frequency he desired. But we are like him...we believe we can use all of God's grace and kindness we can get. We believe that God uses it to grow us spiritually so we never get tired of taking it and seeing the gospel that it pictures anymore than we get tired of having our loved ones say they love us.

If you are a believer and would like to participate in the Lord's Supper tell speak to your elder. He will listen to your testimony. If you have any trouble explaining your faith, your elder will be able to provide you with helpful suggestions. Then he will schedule a time for you to go before the other elders and share your faith. It is a little intimidating but it is worth it. It is worth because it protects the souls of the people in this church and it protects the sanctity of the sacrament itself. To participate in the Lord's Supper with other people of God is one of the great joys of being a Christian.

The Lord's Supper...it is sacrament and a sign and seal of God's great covenantal love and faithfulness. It is a memorial of all that Christ did to obtain our salvation. But it is more than that. It is a time and place of covenant renewal in which we renew our covenant with our Great Redeemer God and He feeds us in tender mercy as He renews His covenant with us.

It is like a certain blackberry vine in East Texas. It is like that only it is more...it is a place where God renews His friendship and grace to us. He floods our minds with the reality of Christ's sacrificial atonement and He floods our hearts with genuine love and gratitude and grace. We feels and see the grace of God streaming down our faces and we taste His goodness as he feeds our souls and reminds us that we are His own dear children. It is like that blackberry vine only it is ten thousand times better and it is not just for me and for mine for all those that name the name of Jesus and feed upon Him in their hearts.

Let's pray.