

## Rappahannock Christian Church – 8/29/10

Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

### Communion Meditation

I want to do something as we come to the Table today that I have done from time to time in the past. It is not our typical communion meditation, but I think it is helpful to revisit sometimes. I want to explain why it is that this practice of coming to this Table is so central to our worship practice.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) came out of what is known as a Restoration Movement. The thought was to “restore” the church to its original New Testament roots and practices. The founders of our denomination wanted to do and believe as closely as they could to the Early Fathers in New Testament times. So they went to the pages of the New Testament to seek out practices of the Early Church. What they found was that in the early days, Christians celebrated the Lord’s Supper at least every week.

Here is some of the evidence they found. (To understand this evidence, you will need to keep in mind that when the New Testament speaks of “breaking bread” it could mean a meal that was eaten together, but most often it denotes the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.) For example, in **Acts 2:42** we read:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the *breaking of bread* and to prayer.

Now, when Luke describes these most important aspects of the early church's life together, the "breaking of bread" probably doesn't mean that they got together for fellowship dinners, do you think? It means that they (regularly, or often) observed the Lord's Supper. Likewise, in **1 Corinthians 10:16** we find:

Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the *bread that we break* a participation in the body of Christ?

And in **Acts 20:7** we are told:

On the first day of the week we came together to *break bread*. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight.

Sounds like on the first day of the week the believers came together and celebrated the Lord’s Supper.

Our founders took on this practice and it has continued to be the tradition of the Disciples of Christ ever since. By the way, we know that the Early Church Fathers took the Lord’s Supper to those who were sick every Sunday, as well.

Our weekly practice of this meaningful celebration is, and can continue to be, important to us. It is an extremely important moment in our worship and is part of our communion as a body of believers. Here we come together and remember Jesus Christ, his sacrifice on our behalf and that we partake in it together. Let me read from Paul:

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26** – For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

## **Into The Woods**

**Jeremiah 2:4-13** – Hear the word of the LORD, O house of Jacob, all you clans of the house of Israel. This is what the LORD says: "What fault did your fathers find in me, that they strayed so far from me? They followed worthless idols and became worthless themselves. They did not ask, 'Where is the LORD, who brought us up out of Egypt and led us through the barren wilderness, through a land of deserts and rifts, a land of drought and darkness, a land where no one travels and no one lives?'

I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land and made my inheritance detestable.

The priests did not ask, 'Where is the LORD ?' Those who deal with the law did not know me; the leaders rebelled against me. The prophets prophesied by Baal, following worthless idols.

"Therefore I bring charges against you again," declares the LORD. "And I will bring charges against your children's children.

Cross over to the coasts of Kittim and look, send to Kedar and observe closely; see if there has ever been anything like this: Has a nation ever changed its gods? (Yet they are not gods at all.) But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols.

Be appalled at this, O heavens, and shudder with great horror," declares the LORD. "My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

The headlines frequently have among them the story of some person, often it is a child, who has gone missing. Volunteers line up in the field or in the woods where the child was last seen and they all march along, just a few yards apart, looking for clues as to what may have happened. This is an image or metaphor for what has happened to the Children of Israel - they have wandered off the path, they have gone astray and are lost.

It continues to amaze me that Jeremiah, living more than 2500 years ago, appears to be facing some of the same issues that people experience now. Of course, things have change. Progress has been made. While we have achieved numerous technical advances, I am not convinced that our spiritual progress has kept pace. People are still people. Each generation makes the same mistakes! I might even suggest that today we LESS attuned to the spiritual dimension of life than people were many generations ago.

The people in Jeremiah's day have strayed off God's path. Jeremiah is a good writer and speaker. He starts his presentation with a rhetorical question (vs. 5) to get his audience's attention. "What fault did your fathers find in me that they strayed so far from me?" You're not supposed to answer. There is no real question being asked. Of course God is not at fault!

Not only so, but, having strayed off the path, our fathers didn't bother to ask, "Where is the Lord?" Either they didn't know they were lost or they didn't care. The priests didn't ask either, and even the prophets, his own colleagues, don't care. They are speaking the message of Baal, the god of the Canaanites, and in his authority. Do you see that road leading through the forest, that path which is God's Way? God's people have strayed off into the woods.

I remember when I was about 11-12 years old, my family went camping every year on a large island up in Maine. The area was filled with long hiking trails that would finally end up at one cove or another on the shoreline of the island. At sometime someone had taken upon himself to mark the trails with white or yellow or blue paint markers on the trees. One day I decided I would go for a hike -- alone. Somehow I didn't pay enough attention at some point along the way, and the first thing I knew I realized that I couldn't see a marker anywhere. I started looking and looking, and the more I looked and walked the more afraid I became. I was just sure I would never find my way back.

I know what it feels like to be lost. I knew I was in trouble, and I didn't like it!

What Jeremiah is saying is, "Beware! I'm warning you! Those other "ways" might seem just fine but they will take you nowhere! They will lead you away from God's path -- and you might not be able to find it again!"

God says, "My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and they have built themselves their own cisterns."

A cistern is a hole in the ground that you plaster and collect run-off water in. The people of Israel are trying to get their own (spiritual, life-giving, living) water. They want to substitute their own ways and principles and plans for God's ways, principles and plans. But God says their cisterns are broken. They can't hold water. Their efforts are fruitless and wasted.

I would suggest that it is still possible for us to be on God's path or to stray from it. We can still dig our own cisterns. There are many substitutes we can put in place of the Living Water. These may be power or pride, money or knowledge, or many of a whole host of things. All of these things are just empty, broken cisterns!

Even believers can substitute things for the way of the Lord. Think about it. Are your goals and ideals still as high as when you came to know the Lord?

The church body as a whole is even vulnerable to this drifting. This is the journey that you and the membership committee have set out on, to try to look piece by piece at how we do things, not to change anything in particular, but to ask ourselves, "Are we still on God's road?"

I visited a church in Village, Virginia while I was on vacation. As I listened to their pastor, I thought “Wow! He is really letting them have it!” They were getting ready for homecoming, which was coming up the next Sunday. (We all know the attention and excitement that accompanied our own homecoming last year.) Well, the pastor said, “Why are we spending so much time on this homecoming when Easter came and went last spring with hardly a nod?”

Wow! What is our focus; and have we strayed from the path?

We don't want to be like the Children of Israel or little Kenny Wilbur straying from the path. You want to be focused on God's way and on the Living Water that can only be supplied by Jesus Christ.

### **Benediction**

Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing, to the only God, our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and for ever. Amen – Jude 1:24-25