

Rappahannock Christian Church – 10/3/10

Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

Today is World Communion Sunday. It would be nice to suppose that any of us would be welcome to share the Lord's Supper with any Christians in any church anywhere. You probably know that not everyone is welcome everywhere. This is because traditions have arisen and have been developed over time within churches. The founders of the Disciples of Christ were grieved to see this, and called upon their fellow Christians to throw off tradition and return to the simpler faith and practice of the New Testament itself. Alas! We have not yet succeeded! Tradition still keeps Christians apart!

Still, on World Communion Sunday it is comforting and encouraging to realize that millions of Christians today are gathering around a Table not much different from ours. They will take the Bread and the Cup and remember, as we will, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. We invite all followers of Christ to be welcome, and to share with us in this celebration around the Table of the Lord.

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.

"The Beginning of the End"

Revelation 4:1-11 - After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They

lay their crowns before the throne and say:

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

"Death and Taxes," Benjamin Franklin once said there are not many other certainties in this life.

Not so for God. Not only is God immune from both death and taxes, but God also DOES know the end from beginning and He has made the effort, many times and in various ways, to let us know that the end, when it comes, will be good. This is something Christians should anticipate with hope and joy.

That's not to say that all of the events leading up to the end of time will be pleasant. Revelation is intended, in fact, as a warning - mainly to Christians - that there are hard, painful times ahead. Events are coming which are going to be so bad that many will doubt the very existence of God! But you? You have been given a glimpse of these things beforehand so that you can prepare yourself spiritually. I'm not talking about stockpiling canned goods or telling your government to annihilate its enemies by dropping nuclear bombs on them, thinking that by doing so you can avoid the difficult times or that we can do God's work for Him. No, John's point is to reassure Christians that even in the most difficult of times they can endure and be brave and keep on imitating Christ's love because they know that God will triumph.

Individual Christians may suffer and die along the way. We don't know what God has in store for us personally. But we can know that God will triumph, and that is a great comfort.

Perhaps it is for this reason that John begins and ends his account of what the future holds with a word of reassurance and hope. In chapters 4 and 5 he sees God and the Lord Jesus Christ in heavenly splendor AND at the very end of the book of Revelation (chapters 19-22) John describes his vision of the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven - the eternal dwelling place of God's people.

When we see God in heavenly splendor it tells us that God is in complete control. There isn't anything happening, nor is there anything that is going to happen, that He doesn't know about. None of what is coming will take God by surprise. No one is going to set a trap and destroy Him, nor is there anything coming down the road that God does not allow or cause to happen to us.

This needs to be said. We need -- sometimes we desperately need -- to hear and see and understand this.

Life holds plenty of surprises for us! We do not know what is coming tomorrow or the next day. Sometimes life is harsh, cruel and unfair.

I keep thinking about our dear friends, Karen and Hollis Wolcott, whose teenage daughter, Kirsten, was murdered last year *while on a missionary tour in Asia*. Why did this happen? Why did God allow it to happen? I know you may be able to think of a troubling event in your life, as well.

When something like this happens, we often begin to doubt God's sovereignty. Maybe God ISN'T really in control. Maybe there are powers and forces over which God has no control. Just think of the Christians to whom John is writing! They are being tortured, killed, and persecuted! What must they be wondering about the God they have put their faith in?!

Worse still, we may begin to think that God isn't always good and loving. Maybe God has a cruel, evil, mean streak! Maybe God sometimes uses his power to do bad things! How dismaying that would be!

Revelation shows us a glimpse of some of the most terrifying events that will ever come upon the earth. Wait 'till we read some of them! They're horrible! It might be that *even God's most faithful followers* will see them and be hurt along with everyone else when these things happen! How terrible! What if you are one of those faithful followers? What if the painful events that are coming overtake you or your children or your children's children? What are you going to think about God? How are you going to react?

This is what John, and the Lord, are most concerned about. I really believe that this is the main purpose of the book of Revelation. Yes, the terrors and woes that are coming should serve as a warning to unbelievers. "Stop rejecting God's attempts to draw you to Himself. It will be especially bad for you if terrors overtake you and you have no hope of salvation in the Lord!" But the book isn't written primarily to unbelievers. It is written to warn believers about the awful things that are coming. God does not want His people to despair. God does not want them to doubt or to give up hope. God KNOWS that life is hard and is going to get harder. God has not walked away. God is not weak or uncaring. These events are part of His divine plan.

We are not permitted to know all of God's reasons. We are not going to be able to explain why a particular hardship has befallen us instead of someone else. Trusting doesn't mean knowing everything and understanding it all. It means having faith.

It's like the soldier on the battlefield. Is every soldier invited into the War Room where the overall strategies are discussed and decided? Is every soldier's permission sought before orders go out? Certainly not! The foot soldier is expected to await orders and then to carry out his orders without question. But it is also important for the soldier to have faith that his superiors know what they are doing, that their cause is just and that he is not going to be put in harms way unnecessarily. Faith is vitally important!

It's like that for us when frightening and harmful things happen around us. How can we keep the faith? How can we trust and not doubt? In Revelation God assures us that He knows the future and that His grace is sufficient to meet all of our needs. As the Apostle Paul puts it, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" We need not fear tomorrow!

Benediction

May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. – Hebrews 13:20-21