

Rappahannock Christian Church – 10/23/11

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Communion Meditation

Today is Heritage Sunday in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). We are a "Restoration Movement." The founders of this movement looked at the beliefs and practices of the Church around them and didn't like what they saw. Churches were not loving, but hostile, toward other churches. Their practices often bore little resemblance to the simple teachings and practices of Jesus and the Apostles. So they called the whole church to *restore* their beliefs and practices to those taught in the New Testament. One thing they concluded was that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated every week.

To arrive at this conclusion, one need only accept two propositions. The first is that the New Testament writers sometimes refer to the celebration of the Lord's Supper as "breaking bread." For instance, Acts 2:42 records how exciting life was in the early church by saying, "They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the *breaking of bread* and to prayer." Another is in I Corinthians 10:16 where the Apostle Paul says, "Is not the *bread which we break* participation in the body of Christ?" The second proposition that leads us to the celebration of the Lord's Supper every week is simply the fact that the early church did this. We hear of this in Acts 20:7, "*On the first day of the week we came together to break bread...*"

There are those who disagree with the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper every week, but it is this biblical evidence that is the basis of our weekly practice of gathering around the Table of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – 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.

A Death in Moab

Today's Scripture is the last chapter in the Old Testament book of Deuteronomy:

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 - Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan, all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and

Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it."

And Moses the servant of the LORD died there in Moab, as the LORD had said. He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses.

Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

Unlike Muammar Gaddafi, the Libyan dictator whose death we have been hearing a lot about this week, Moses was a beloved and admired man among the people he led, the people of Israel. Moses was one of the most important figures in their history. At his death the people grieved. They wrote of him in glowing terms. But why? What made Moses a "great" man? There are some lessons in this for us to hear and heed.

I do not believe that Moses was great because he was a clever strategist. King David is remembered as a very able military commander who won battles by his cunning strategies. Moses, though, was NOT able to deliver the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt because he was a brilliant negotiator! In fact, quite the contrary is true. Moses, especially early in his life, was ILL-suited to be the man God would choose.

As a young man, don't you remember how he saw a Hebrew slave being mistreated? He went over and killed the Egyptian official! Hid his body in the sand! He thought he had gotten away with his crime, but found out that he had been seen, and had to flee the country, traveling to Midian where he settled down, married and took up a life as a herdsman. Then when God called Moses, he made excuse after excuse why he could not be the one God meant to call. "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" he objected. "Suppose I go to them and tell them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me,' and they ask what your name is? I don't even know your name!" "What if I tell them your name, and that you have sent me, and they don't believe me?" "You know, I am not very eloquent. In fact, I'm rather slow of speech. I'm a poor choice." Then after God has answered all these objections Moses still begs, "Please send someone else!"

Later, during the time when Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, the people were thirsty, so God told Moses to speak to a rock, and God would cause water to gush forth to save the people. Instead, Moses took his staff and, with his brother Aaron beside him, said to the people "Must we bring water out of this rock for you?!" and he struck the

rock with his staff. God still did what he intended to do, he provided water from the rock for the people to drink, but God was so angry with Moses for his disobedience, that he would not allow Moses to lead the people into the Promised Land.

Why, then, is Moses revered, respected and admired?

The answer, I believe, is simply that God chose him. God worked many amazing miracles through him. Through Moses God's Law was revealed to Israel. Moses spoke to God "face to face." Moses was a link, someone who went between God and the people. He was a mediator. Through Moses God established a special relationship with the people of Israel, and shaped them into a unique people. All of this does not happen every day! It was amazing and wonderful, and Moses was the person at the center of it!

And yet, we have to admit that all of it was really God's doing. It wasn't Moses! This may sound harsh, but God could have chosen anyone! Indeed, what happens immediately after Moses' death? Another leader is chosen -- Joshua! He becomes God's instrument, he is the one through whom God begins to work his miracles and show his power.

There is a principle at work here that we should notice: It is God through whom all blessings flow.

What does Jesus say about those who would be "great?" "The greatest among you must be the least, and the servant of all." What does the Apostle Paul say? "When I am weak, then I am strong." When we stop trying to be clever and great, then God can use us as He wills!

Now, of course Moses was a good person and a good leader. I don't want to go too far here. It seems to me that Moses had two very important characteristics that made him useful to God. The first is that he loved God's people very much. He cared about them and put up with a lot of grief and complaints as he led them along. The second is that he did not think too much of himself. He was willing to do things God's way, even when that way didn't seem to make much sense at the time. He believed God. He believed that God's instructions and commandments were to be obeyed and that that would open the door. God was knocking, wanting entrance, wanting the surrender and obedience of at least one person through whom he could bring salvation to the people. Moses was that person.

This is a challenge to us as well! God still seeks people to serve him, people who are willing to surrender and to be used for God's purposes. This is a hard thing to accept! It is not always easy to do!

Let me end by reading the words of Paul in Philippians 2:5-13. Here, Paul expresses this principle so eloquently:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Who, being in very nature God,
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,
but made himself nothing,
taking the very nature of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
and became obedient to death—
even death on a cross!

Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

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