

Rappahannock Christian Church – 3/27/11

Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

I was at a Regional Board meeting in Lynchburg on Friday. One of the persons who got gave a report from the retirement community that we have there, called The Summit. He said that a serious virus had struck The Summit and instead of coming down to eat in a communal dining area, the residents had been instructed to stay in their rooms and food would be brought to them.

How awful to be sequestered, not allowed out of your room, not allowed to associate with neighbors and friends!

This reminded me that what we do here each week -- coming together around the Lord's Table -- is a wonderful privilege. When we come we remember that we have a common bond. We are "One in Spirit and purpose," as Paul says. We are united in a close community, brothers and sisters in Christ. The bread and the cup are tangible reminders that we belong to Christ, and that we belong to one another.

Here are some words of instruction from the Apostle Paul about what we are doing.

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.

"The Rock"

This morning's Scripture reading comes from the Old Testament in Exodus 17. It is a story with which we are probably all familiar from our Sunday School days. This is the story of God providing water from a rock.

Exodus 17:1-7 - The whole Israelite community set out from the Desert of Sin, traveling from place to place as the LORD commanded. They camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink. So they quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink."

Moses replied, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you put the LORD to the test?"

But the people were thirsty for water there, and they grumbled against Moses. They said, "Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst?"

Then Moses cried out to the LORD, "What am I to do with these people? They are almost ready to stone me."

The LORD answered Moses, "Go out in front of the people. Take with you some of the elders of Israel and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. I will stand there before you by the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink." So Moses did this in the sight of the elders of Israel. And he called the place Massah and Meribah because the Israelites quarreled and because they tested the LORD saying, "Is the LORD among us or not?"

The sermon title today, "The Rock," is not about the island prison, Alcatraz. The rock in our Scripture is the rock that the Children of Israel came to in the desert and from which God caused water to pour when Moses struck it. This is an Old Testament story, but Paul talks about it in the New Testament, and he brings us to Christ. This is also the path I would like to take with our message this morning.

The Scripture, as originally told, is the story of a threat. The Children of Israel are wandering in the wilderness. They are in the desert and they have no water. This is a dire circumstance, no

doubt about it. But God has shown that He is able to take care of them. They can trust God, and He will not let them down. But in these circumstances, the people do not react well at all. They grumble and complain against Moses (which is really complaining against God!) and they are ready to stone Moses.

I think this is more than an interesting story. It serves as an object lesson for generations of Jews (and ourselves as well) when we face serious, frightening circumstances in life. The question posed in the story, and the question posed to all those future generations, is this: will the people ever learn to trust God or will they take matters into their own hands, go the way of the world, and choose to rely on powers that they can control?

Look, for example, at the later story of Samuel and how the Children of Israel came to him to demand a king. They didn't trust God. They wanted a king who would have an army with swordsmen who would protect them. In this way they wouldn't have to put their trust and reliance in God.

In the New Testament this story is taken figuratively. It becomes a metaphor for our salvation in Christ. Jesus speaks to the Woman at the Well about "Living Water" that he can supply. We looked at this story in John 5 briefly last week. Jesus says to the woman, "If you will ask, I will give you Living Water, and you will never be thirsty again."

Water is an excellent image of salvation. It is essential! Without it, we die! Look at the disasters we have seen in recent times in Haiti and Japan. Whatever else is done, water must be supplied to people or they will not survive!

What Jesus says to the Woman at the Well is that we are all in danger of spiritual death without God's intervention. The Old Testament story about God supplying the people with water so that they do not die of thirst finds a spiritual meaning in the words of Jesus. The woman comes to the well again and again, returning over and over every day to get more water. Jesus says that the water He will give is different. He says that, "It will become a spring of water, welling up into eternal life." Once a person is a child of God through faith their position is secure and does not need to be established over and over again.

Paul refers to this story, too, in I Corinthians 10, when he says that the people of Israel drank spiritual water from a spiritual rock, and that "that rock was Christ." Paul doesn't just refer to the water, but he reminds us about the rock, too. We can picture Moses raising his staff and striking the rock. It splits open, and the life-giving water flows out. On the cross Jesus was smitten, wasn't he? He endured real pain and suffering. He was "broken" for us. It's the breaking of the Rock for the salvation of the people all over again!!! This is what Christ has done for us.

This is a dramatic object lesson. Just as the Children of Israel were in danger, dying of thirst, so also we are in danger. We are separated from God by sin. Only our Savior God can give us life. Perhaps you have tried to fill the void with things that the world offers, such as money or family or friends or career. Some people even attempt to fill it with addictions into which they can escape, like alcohol and drugs. But in the end we are still in danger. Christ alone can fill us with real peace. Only He can fill our souls and make us alive. No one else can do it. If you have not, by faith, received this gift of Living Water, let this be the day!

Benediction

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. – Psalms 19:14