

Rappahannock Christian Church – 5/1/11  
Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

### **Communion Meditation**

In some ways I'm like Scot Katona (standing here next to me at the communion table), and in other ways I'm not. Some of my experiences are like Nancy Wyatt's (who is also here with me at the table), yet others of them are not. You and I may share some of the same kinds of experiences, while many of our experiences will have been quite different.

- We may be of the same gender – or not.
- We may have attended different churches in the past.
- We may have celebrated the Lord's Supper in differing ways
- Perhaps we have worshiped in different ways.

The church family of Rappahannock Christian Church is a diverse group. This is inevitable whenever of Christians meet together. We have differences -- and that's a good thing. We are one in Christ and God can use us in many different ways precisely *because of* our differences.

Each week we come together at this Table and we remember that we have a bond of oneness in Jesus Christ. We are bound by His death for us and we as are reminded that we become one in gratitude. And unified, we grow together in Him. At this Table I am reminded that He is *your* Savior as well as mine, and I am grateful that He saved *you* too.

So, as we take this Bread and Cup today let's remember that we come to this Table of one mind in our Lord Jesus Christ. Let me read the words of the Apostle Paul from 1 Corinthians for you.

**1 Corinthians 11:23-26** – On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me.” In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it.” For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.

### **“Envious?”**

We actually are returning to John chapter 20 (where we were on Easter morning) for today's Scripture reading. Here we will see the appearance of Christ to the disciples and then, a little later, to the one who has become known to us as "doubting Thomas."

**John 20:19-31** – That Sunday evening the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

One of the twelve disciples, Thomas (nicknamed the Twin), was not with the others when Jesus came. They told him, “We have seen the Lord!”

But he replied, “I won't believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”

Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. “Peace

be with you,” he said. Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don’t be faithless any longer. Believe!”

“My Lord and my God!” Thomas exclaimed.

Then Jesus told him, “You believe because you have seen me. Blessed are those who believe without seeing me.”

The disciples saw Jesus do many other miraculous signs in addition to the ones recorded in this book. But these are written so that you may continue to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing in him you will have life by the power of his name.

Let’s start with you. Have you ever had a memorable experience of God’s power, or an overwhelming feeling of His presence? Is there something that would immediately come to mind when you are asked about your spiritual life?

Christianity claims that each individual can have a personal and intimate experience of God. However, the ways in which we might come to know God are not the same. For some, a relationship with God comes in a sudden moment of realization or decision. For others it is a slower-growing, nurtured kind of faith that wells up in us.

The latter is my experience. I grew up in a Christian home. I saw my own parents live out their faith in their own lives. But even though I made my profession and was baptized at a young age of 9 or 10 years old, it was not really until I went to college that the decision was put to me ... “What are you really going to do with Jesus Christ? Will He be the Lord and Master of your life or not?”

I remember back to those days. There was a fellow who had a truck who used to give my friend and I a ride from the college campus to church sometimes. I remembering him saying to me, “You know Ken, there is one thing I really regret about my life. I blew my youth!” Here was a devout Christian man in his middle years. He was looking back over his younger years and thinking about how his life could have been different and how God could have used him had he decided differently.

In our Scripture today we have the story of “doubting Thomas.” This is such a great story! For one thing, we live in an age of skepticism and doubt, which means that most of us can readily identify with Thomas. As the story goes, he wasn’t there among the other disciples when Jesus first appeared. So the other disciples came to Thomas with what must have seemed to him like an outrageous story – “We have seen Jesus! He is alive!” – And Thomas says, “Yeah right! After how many glasses of wine?! Look, unless I see him with my own eyes and I have put my finger in the nail prints and examine His scars - like you all did - I won’t believe it.”

But then Jesus gives Thomas what he wanted - He came to him and let him see those scars. But along with this Jesus also issues a reprimand: "Stop doubting and believe!"

What may be more important to us is Jesus' statement, "Because you have seen me you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen, but still believe!"

Who are those who have “not seen, but still believe?” Why, that’s YOU and ME! He is talking about the millions people, the generations and generations of Christians who will not have the experience of seeing and touching Him, but who will believe in him all the same.

You see, our experience of Christ is NOT like that of Thomas! How can it be? Nor is YOUR experience exactly the same as MINE.

Of course, WHAT we believe should be the same. We believe that:

- Jesus Christ is the Son of God,
- That He died for our sins and arose again on the third day,
- That He lives to save us now and that we should serve Him with our whole lives.

What we believe is the same, but how we come to it is unique to each of us.

Most people who take an active part in church today had that seed planted in their heart at a very young age. It was likely put there by the actions of godly parents or grandparents or perhaps a teacher or friend. That seed was planted and it had to be watered and nurtured to grow. But others do not have any experience of God or of church until adulthood. It is not until then that they hear the message of Christ's sacrifice and hear God's offer of forgiveness. It penetrates their heart and they receive God's grace. Often people with that kind of experience have exciting, dramatic stories to tell about how they at last found God (or God found them!).

It may sound odd, but sometimes I envy people who have that kind of sensational spiritual story to tell. It's like the story of the Prodigal Son who goes into the far country and engages in "riotous living," squandering his inheritance. Then, suddenly, he wakes up and comes to his senses and experiences the Father's kindness, love, forgiveness and grace. Wow! What a story!

But, the opposite is probably true, too. Those who came late to God realize (like the man I knew when I was a college student) that they missed out on a lot. Time has passed. They have not had the time, as I did in my youth, to learn about the Bible and to see wonderful people serving God with all their heart - so inspiring to recall! So who should be envious of whom?!

Jealousy about such things is kind of silly, really. God is the One who is leading all of us. He is the One who calls us. He designed our path just the way He wanted it to be. We can rejoice together that we have all been found by Christ and in Him we can rejoice and praise God for our salvation.

### **Benediction**

"The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace." – Numbers 6:24-26