

Rappahannock Christian Church – 5/15/11

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Communion Meditation

I want to do something this morning that I do at this Table from time to time. The passage we'll examine here fits in with the message I'll be bringing you in a moment, as well.

The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is known as a Restoration Movement church. Our founders sent forth a call, a plea, to restore the church to its New Testament roots. One of the things that they determined as they set about to do this was that the practice of the Early Church was to celebrate communion every Sunday. Here's how they arrived at that conclusion.

The first thing we have to notice is that sometimes the New Testament phrase "break bread" can mean to eat a meal together, but at other times it becomes a technical term meaning to celebrate the Lord's Supper. One such instance is believed to be Acts 2, where Luke describes the corporate life of the Jerusalem church. He says that they "devoted themselves to the Apostles teaching, to the fellowship, to the **breaking of bread** and to prayer." In this context, where Luke is speaking about what the whole church customarily did when they met together, the "breaking of bread" meant the celebration of the Lord's Supper. It doesn't mean they were eating a snack together! Paul uses the same phrase in his letter to the Corinthians; "Is not the **bread that we break** a participation in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor. 10:16).

All we need to do now is look at Acts 20. There, Luke tells us that, "On the first day of the week we came together to **break bread**." When you put two and two together the conclusion you draw is that the early church met together for worship on the first day of the week (Sunday), and that, when they did, they celebrated the Lord's Supper. This is why Disciples of Christ churches adopted the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

Of course, the important thing is not really how often one celebrates communion or the nature of the elements or the exact words that are said. What's important is the impact that this worship celebration has on us each week.

Lay aside whatever distractions may get in the way and do what Jesus intended you to do: remember him! Remember his body and blood given for you. Give God thanks out of the gratitude of your heart.

Let me read these words from the Gospel of Saint Matthew for you:

Matthew 26:26-29 – Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Living Together

This morning's Scripture comes from Acts chapter two. We already read one of these verses. This is Luke's very general and brief summary of what the first days of the Church were like. It's almost like he's saying to us, "Oh, how good it was!" Listen:

Acts 2:42-47 – They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders

and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Okay, I admit that the sermon title today, "Living Together," might sound like I'm going to be talking about sexual immorality, but -sorry! - that's not it. What I have in mind is to look at what it was like for the Christians "living together" in the early church.

In this Scripture Luke makes it sound like all was joy and roses. But we know that this was not exactly the case. Reading on, he tells us about some grave difficulties they had to overcome. But he says that, in the very earliest days, the church was healthy, glowing, attractive. They enjoyed their life together and many were being added to their number every day!

I was reading this and I was thinking of it especially in the context of the Rappahannock Christian Church "Journey into the Future" that we have been traveling on for the past year or more. I think that one of the very useful things we can do with this passage is to look at it carefully for the marks of a healthy church.

- We see that **they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teachings."** The apostles were the ones who had been with Christ. It was they who told His story. The Early Christians "devoted themselves" to learning about Jesus.
- **They spent time in fellowship together.** They came together a lot. This was not like other friendships and associations. There was a special bond amongst the Christians. They had become "new creations" (as the Apostle Paul puts it) and they longed for fellowship with other of Jesus' "new creations."
- **They "broke bread" together.** They came together for the Lord's Supper and worship.
- **They gathered together in prayer.** Again they came together often in worship and supplication to the Lord. The Early Church was a praying church!

These are the things that were important to the early Christians, the things they felt urgent about. For them it wasn't "Oh, I try to be in church whenever I can." Rather it was, "I MUST be with other believers! I HAVE TO! I WANT TO!"

There are also other signs that this was a healthy faith community, things that would have been visible to outsiders:

- Signs and wonders were being done by the Apostles. There were healings and miracles. (Some of these things may still happen from time to time today. Some of these wonders and miracles were undoubtedly specially given by God to the earliest church to help the church get started and to grow.)
- The believers sold their property and donated everything they owned to the fledgling church and lived communally. This lasted only for a short time. But it certainly would have aroused curiosity and interest!

The results of this were that they had the favor of all the people and people were being saved every day.

Can you imagine that? Christians being held in favor! People being saved every day! Wouldn't it be great? Wouldn't you want to be part of such a community, and take part in such a mission?

So what about today? This is where the rubber meets the road. The question is -- How can we apply these lessons to our Journey here at Rappahannock Christian Church?

Well, I think that as we compare the situation of the Early Church with ours today we will find that some things are the same and some are different.

One thing that is radically different is that a church like ours is not new. The Early Christians, by their very existence, because they were the “new people on the block” caused a stir. People were curious about them. This is very, very different from our situation today. In fact, oftentimes today people have an idea of what they think the church is like and what they think it is about. This impression has not been put into their heads by their godly grandmothers! It's been put there by the media -- news broadcasts, television shows, movies. And, sadly, the church's image in the media is often not cast in a very favorable light! On the contrary, the church is often the object of ridicule, anger and mistrust. So in these ways we face a very different situation with different problems to solve.

There are things that we hold in common with these early believers, however. I believe that our purpose is the same. The Church exists today -- as it did back then -- to let the world know that Christ died for sins. We invite people to experience God's grace. We have to impress people in a favorable way so that the Gospel of Christ can be heard and accepted.

How on earth do we do this???

This may seem harsh, but folks, how we make that favorable impression is NOT by anything that we do inside these four walls! Non-believers aren't here. They can't see this beautiful sanctuary. They are not here to see how happy and enthusiastic we are in our worship, or how diligently we pray and seek God's will from His Word.

Any favorable impression that we make has to be formed outside of these walls.

As individuals we can impress people by how we treat others and by how we react to the hurts and disappointments of life. When our attitudes and actions and words are motivated by love, and when they are Christ-like, people will notice. That is our witness!

There are also ways in which we, as a church body, can make a favorable impression in the world. We do this when -- as we did last Friday night -- we bring a time of joy and fellowship and prayer and singing to the seniors over at the Orchard in Warsaw. Or, when we participate in ministries in the community like Operation Inasmuch.

I am old fashioned enough to think that the example of the Apostles and the Early Christians should be taken seriously by us. Do we want the Church to be the one that Jesus and the Apostles wanted it to be? Well, those Early Christians wanted more than anything else to devote themselves to the Apostles' teachings. They wanted to enjoy fellowship together and to remember Christ at the Lord's Table. These things were not only important. They were *urgent* matters for the early Christians. They NEEDED to be doing them!

Is it obvious that Christ is the driving force in our lives? I pray that God gives each of us such urgent desires for worship and service! I pray that God blesses us with opportunities to serve Him and to bring His message of love to many!

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. ~ Psalm 19:14