

Rappahannock Christian Church – 9/25/11

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Communion Meditation

Last Sunday evening we had a Music Event here at the church. Part of that was to take a close look at the role that music plays in the order of our worship service.

We were reminded that one of the earmarks of the Disciples of Christ Churches is that we celebrate the Lord's Supper every week. Few other churches do this. Disciples churches do have differences of practice in regards to the Lord's Supper among themselves, however, in that while we here at RCC celebrate Communion in the middle of our service, there are other Disciples of Christ churches that come to the Lord's Table at the end.

Those who observe the Lord's Supper at the end of the service usually emphasize that our participation in this meal is not just a "celebration." It is not just a matter of being thankful. It is also an opportunity for us to RESPOND to God's grace and to God's call. (So it follows the preaching, the ministry of the Word.) It is a time for us to rededicate ourselves to God's Way.

These ideas -- celebration and rededication -- are really two sides of the same coin. Yes, we "remember" when we come to this Table, and in that way we celebrate our Savior's love and work. But we don't do this just so that we can relax and rest in what Jesus Christ has done for us. No! We "remember" so that we will be compelled to follow His lead! This is a moment of covenant-renewal, if you will. We have this opportunity each week to respond -- to say, "Thank you God! What can I do in your name"? So it is that these Elements are meant not only to remind us, but also to call us.

Let me read you the words that the Apostle Paul wrote to the Church in Corinth.

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.

"As We Forgive"

This morning we are turning for the third time to Matthew 6. We will complete our study of the Lord's Prayer today.

Matthew 6:9-13 - "This, then, is how you should pray:

“Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done

on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

Jesus tried to show us the Way to higher ground. He does not want us to be satisfied where we are. The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) sure is challenging, isn't it?! I believe the Lord's Prayer is, too. The problem is that there is competition for our attention and our devotion. So sometimes it's hard, as we hear the words of the Lord's Prayer, to really hear them as Jesus wanted. Perhaps this is compounded by the fact that with Jesus, actions clearly speak more loudly than words; He wants this prayer to be played out in our lives -- and we know that's not easy!

As we have said, the Lord's Prayer starts by honoring God. We tell God that we want His name to be hallowed and honored. We want Him to be recognized in all the world. This is exactly the right place to start, isn't it?

We also began, last week, discussing the petitions, which make up the second half of the prayer. "Give us today our daily bread" is the first petition. It's a simple plea. Please give us what we need to get by today.

The petitions at the end of the prayer are related, I think, because they have to do with sins. We ask forgiveness for our sins and we ask to be kept from temptation.

"Forgive us our debts" probably means, "Forgive us our sins." When we ask forgiveness of God, we are not talking about having borrowed money from God. We're talking about wrongdoing, sins which we have committed. The request to be forgiven for our sins seems pretty straightforward and simple -- until we hear Jesus add the second part: "As we forgive our debtors." (Or, "...as we forgive those who have wronged us")

Oh no! I hope God isn't listening when I pray THAT prayer! I don't want God to forgive me in the same way -- to the same degree -- that I have forgiven others!!! I want God's forgiveness to be full, complete, lavished on me! What if I have been slow to forgive? What if I've been stingy with my forgiveness and my compassion?!!! I don't want God to act that way toward ME!!!!

Well, I don't think that is necessarily what these words mean. I think that we all know, and Jesus certainly knew and affirmed, that God ISN'T like us, and that his forgiveness and mercy are great -- much greater than we can imagine. Instead, I think that what we are doing here is expressing how sincere we are when we ask for forgiveness. We are promising, if you will, to be just as free with our forgiveness as God is. We WILL NOT be hypocritical, like the Pharisees! We will not say one thing and do another. We will not be like the "Unmerciful Servant" of Jesus' parable. Do you remember that parable? The man begged his master to forgive a huge debt, and the master had pity on him and

released him from the debt. But then what did the servant do? He went out and demanded that his fellow servant pay what he owed. When his fellow servant could not pay, did the one who had been forgiven by the master have mercy? NO! He had the poor guy arrested and thrown in prison to be tortured!!! Well, we are not going to be like that!

Looking at all of this a little more closely, we see this. In the model prayer Jesus gave us, Jesus says that we should, first, admit that we are sinners. This may not sound like much, but the "religious" people of Jesus day didn't feel like they needed to do that. They thought of themselves as "The Righteous." They looked down their noses at all *those sinners*. What Jesus wants his followers to realize is that ALL of us are sinners; all people need to bow before God and ask for his forgiveness. But then, having obtained mercy, we ought to do the right thing by extending kindness and mercy to others. And that's what we promise to do.

Now we come to the "Lead us not into temptation" part. This is a bit of a conundrum, isn't it? Would God *really* do that? Does God lead people into temptation?

Obviously, God *allows* people to be tempted. God *allowed* the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve, right? Is that the same thing as leading someone into temptation? I don't think so. In the New Testament letter of James we read, "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed." (James 1:13-14) So no, God does **not** tempt us!

What, then, can Jesus have meant when he told us to ask God not to lead us into temptation?

I think that in this petition we're actually begging God to keep us pure. We are admitting that we are weak. "I have failed too much. Please God; keep me out of these situations, for I don't want to fail you again. I do not ask this for myself. I want my life to reflect the reality and the power of your presence. I want people to see that you are making a change in my life. I want them to see that I am no longer a slave to sin and death. I want them to marvel at YOU and be drawn to YOU. I want all to see that you are hallowed and honored in my life. So Lord, please, let your will be done on earth as it is in heaven – well, in me at least!"

I think that the bottom line is that we want to be used and this is what we are asking for.

Benediction

Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. – Hebrews 13:20-21

