

It's been quite a while since we have celebrated the Lord's Supper and because we can't all be together in one worship service, we will celebrate the Lord's Supper during both the morning and evening worship services today. I thought it would be nice to preach about the Lord's Supper at each service as well. Years ago, when we moved to celebrating the Lord's Supper on a monthly basis, I preached 6 sermons on the Lord's Supper, but there has not been much directly about the Lord's Supper since and so I thought it would be good to take a little deeper look at this sacrament today. What I'm going to do today is summarize one of the themes of the meaning of the Lord's Supper – the theme of remembrance.

The Lord's Supper has many different aspects to it that make it a very rich part of our worship. It is easy for us to focus on only a few of these when we celebrate the Lord's Supper while perhaps neglecting others. One of the wonderful things about everything having to do with our relationship with God is that there is simplicity so that everyone can understand the essential message, yet there is a breadth and a depth so that there is always more to learn and to appreciate and to enjoy. And part of our calling as believers is to grow in our knowledge and enjoyment of God which includes growing in our knowledge and enjoyment of everything having to do with him.

Our focus this morning will be on the fact that the Lord's Supper is a memorial. It is about remembering. It is about remembering Jesus as the one who gives himself to us as the crucified and risen saviour. When he instituted the supper he said, "Do this in remembrance of me." We are to remember that he gave his life for us. The symbols of the Lord's Supper point to his death on the cross. We remember his broken body and we remember his shed blood. But we do not remember him as someone who is still dead. If Jesus had remained dead, the Lord's Supper would be a waste of time – it would be a funeral. All we could do would be to remember Jesus as someone who was a fraud which there would be no point of doing. Jesus' death apart from his resurrection would be no different from any other death except it would be more pathetic because of his claims. At the Lord's Supper we remember Jesus' death in the light of his resurrection. We remember him as the one who died for our sins, and who rose from the dead having won the victory over sin and death. Any focus on the death of Christ always takes place from the perspective of the resurrection.

The risen Lord Jesus calls his people to remember him as the one who gave his life for us. But this remembrance is more than a recollection. This remembering is more than a reminder that Jesus gave his life for us. Part of the symbolism of the Lord's Supper is that Jesus is present in the celebration of the Lord's Supper and that he actually gives the symbols of the bread and the wine to us. There is also this strange language which has been the cause of so much controversy in the history of the church. "This is my body, which is for you." "This cup is the new covenant in my blood." I don't want to get into that controversy, but what the controversy does indicate that there is something very profound about what Jesus is saying. Jesus is saying more than that the bread and the wine are just symbols of his broken body and his shed blood. There is a profound way in which he is present in them. The Reformed way of saying that is that Jesus is spiritually present in the bread and the wine so that when we receive them by faith we receive him in a real way.

There is some background that can help us to understand this. I'm thinking about the Passover celebration and some of the language that is used in the OT to describe its significance for the generations that came long after the event that the Passover celebrated. The Passover feast was a memorial of the night God rescued his people from Egypt. On that night an angel from God went through the whole land of Egypt to kill the firstborn son of every family. God told the people of Israel to kill a lamb and paint the doorposts and the lintel of their houses. When the angel saw that blood he would pass over that home and the firstborn son would not be killed. That night was the turning point and Pharaoh let the people of Israel go.

And God told Moses to teach the people to hold a Passover celebration each year from then on through the generations. It would be a memorial.

But it is interesting that this was a very special kind of memorial. Its significance was far deeper than simply remembering. It included the idea of each generation participating in the blessings of the original Passover as if they had been there. It is significant that in the instructions concerning the Passover given in Numbers 9, Moses says that a person who did not keep the Passover would be cut off from the people. In that passage Moses deals with the situation of those who could not participate in the Passover because they were unclean through touching a dead body or were away on a journey. That passage gives another date so that such people could celebrate the Passover later. And thus Moses says in Numbers 9:13, <sup>13</sup>"But if anyone who is clean and is not on a journey fails to keep the Passover, that person shall be cut off from his people because he did not bring the Lord's offering at its appointed time; that man shall bear his sin."

This shows that the remembrance idea was more than just keeping the idea fresh in people's minds. They were participating in what the original Passover had accomplished. They were expressing faith in God's provision for sin in the Passover sacrifice. They were being protected from the judgment of God against sin by participating in the ordinance. Here is how this is expressed by Iain Duguid in an article called "Christ our Passover." He writes, "Each time the Passover was celebrated, the participants joined together in a sacred meal before the Lord. In it, through the death of the sacrificial lamb, the participants experienced renewed fellowship with God, who protected them from his own judgment curse that fell on their enemies and promised them a glorious inheritance."

This idea is carried over into the Lord's Supper. Jesus commanded his disciples to keep the Lord's Supper in remembrance of him. But when Jesus says that the bread **is** his body and the cup that is poured out **is** the new covenant in his blood, the idea is that by receiving the bread and the wine by faith they were participating in what Jesus' broken body and shed blood accomplished. There is more than just remembering going on when we participate in the Lord's Supper. We remember to be sure, but by that remembrance we participate by faith in the saving benefits that Jesus obtained for us through his sacrificial death.

I want to spend a little more time with this as it is a little difficult for us to understand and appreciate. The biblical idea of memorial is that we are to see ourselves as participating in the event that we remember. In the

book of Deuteronomy, Moses is addressing the people of Israel just before they enter the promised land. Only three people of all of Israel at that point had literally been involved in the events of the exodus, Moses, Joshua, and Caleb. The rest of the generation which had experienced the exodus had died off during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. But listen to how Moses addresses the generation which had not been born yet at the time of the exodus. Deuteronomy 15:15, “You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you.” Deuteronomy 16:3 in connection with the Passover, “[T]hat all the days of your life you may remember the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.” There is a quote from an ancient Passover liturgy that says, “Each man is obligated to see himself as if he came out of Egypt.”

So the remembering associated with the Passover was not simply a recollection of a past historical event. The ancient Israelites were to see themselves as participating in that event. Because the past event had such profound implications for them in their present, God instructed them in the Passover to see themselves as actually participating in the original exodus.

And it is in the light of this way of thinking about the Passover that Jesus in instituting the Lord’s Supper in connection with the celebration of the Passover instructed his disciples – “Do this in remembrance of me.” That that instruction is also addressed to us is clear from the fact that Jesus instructs the disciples to continue celebrating the Lord’s Supper until his return. The remembering associated with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is seeing ourselves as participating in the Lord’s death and resurrection which is the ultimate fulfillment of the exodus where we are delivered from the slavery of sin and Satan.

This fits well with what we have been studying about our union with Christ in our studies in the letter to the Colossians. We have been thinking about the biblical idea that we have died with Christ and that we have been raised with Christ. We are united to him in his death. We are united to him in his resurrection. We were in him when he died. And we were in him when he rose from the dead. By celebrating the Lord’s Supper in remembrance of Jesus we are to think of ourselves as participating in Jesus’ death and resurrection, just as the ancient Israelites were to think of themselves as participating in the original exodus.

This is significantly different than simply recalling and meditating upon Jesus’ death and resurrection. The remembering of the Lord’s Supper is much more profound than bringing to mind something that happened long ago. We see ourselves as participating in Jesus’ death and resurrection. We are there. We are involved. As one author has put it in connection with Israel’s celebration of the Passover, “[T]hey inserted themselves into the public history of YHWH’s saving action on behalf of his people.” By telling us to eat and drink in remembrance of him, Jesus is telling us to insert ourselves into his saving action on behalf of his people.

When Jesus says, “This is my body, which is for you” and “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” and then tells us to eat and drink in remembrance of him, he is telling us to remember that we participated with him in his death and resurrection. We are receiving him by faith as the one who died and who rose from the dead.

And so we are united to him in his death and resurrection. We see this idea in 1 Corinthians 10:16 where Paul writes, “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ.”

The affect of this teaching about the Lord’s Supper as a memorial is to draw us much closer to Christ in his death and resurrection than if we just remember it as Jesus dying for us. We are authorized to see ourselves as participants in dying with Christ and rising with Christ. We are authorized and even commanded by Jesus to place ourselves in the action of Jesus dying for our salvation and rising from the dead. And all of that is to impress upon our minds that Jesus’ death and resurrection are not just events happened long ago, but that they are events that we participated in. Like the ancient Israelites with respect to the exodus, we are to see ourselves as there - united to Christ as he died for us and as he rose from the dead.

The purpose of this is to assure us of our involvement in what Jesus accomplished for us. We are to think about ourselves as participating in that great event, just as the Israelites of later generations, when they celebrated the Passover were to think of themselves as having participated in the exodus. It is easy for us to think of ourselves as somehow isolated from the death and resurrection of Christ. It is easy to think of ourselves as separated from God because of our sins. And the memorial aspect of the Lord’s Supper is to remind us as believers in Jesus of our profound connection to Jesus death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

What this does is to bring the relevance of Jesus’ death and resurrection and our participation in those events into the present. This whole idea of remembering in the Bible has to do with how we think of ourselves in the present. We are to see ourselves as participating in the death and resurrection of Christ in the past so that we will live in the present in the light of what has happened in the past. And so the relevance of the past is brought into the present. In his book *A Holy Meal* Gordon Smith writes, “This act of remembrance is one in which the past shapes, informs, and penetrates the present. We live now, in our work, in our relationships, indeed, in each dimension of our lives, as a people for whom everything is altered, for good, by the reality of Christ Jesus’ death and resurrection.” (p. 39)

This is why the remembering is so profound and meaningful. It brings us into the past and it brings the past into the present. We are authorized to think of ourselves as united to Christ in his death and resurrection and when we do that it brings the significance of Jesus’ death and resurrection in our present to shape how we think of ourselves and thus how we live our lives. The reason for remembering in this way is to cause what Jesus did for us in the past to shape our lives in the present.

But in this we are not to lose sight of the fact that Jesus is alive. We do not remember a dead martyr. We remember the one who died and who rose again and who is present with us in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. We do not remember someone who is dead and gone, but someone who is alive and present with his people and who says to us – “This is my body, which is for you” and “[T]his cup is the new covenant in my

blood.” As we remember Jesus’ death and resurrection, he is present with us by means of the Holy Spirit. He is present with us by means of his Word. He is present with us spiritually in the bread and the wine. He is the host at the table. As we remember him he meets with us in the present and offers himself to us in the symbols of the bread and the wine.

And so we interact with the living present saviour as he offers himself to us. He offers and we receive his offering. He gives and we receive. We remember what he has done for us and he is present with us to receive our thanksgiving and our praise.

And all of this strengthens us and encourages us. Our relationship to Jesus is made vivid and lively in the remembering that he has instituted for this very purpose. The remembering is an antidote to forgetting. We are prone to forgetting. Both the remembering and the forgetting are more than mental. They are about a relationship that is growing by remembering or a relationship that is fading by forgetting. Forgetting is drifting away. It is moving away from intimacy with Jesus. Remembering is about nurturing the relationship. It is about intimacy. It is about love and thanksgiving.

It is also significant that the memorial involves actions as well as words. The Word of God is central in our salvation and our relationship with God. But it is significant that God has given us the sacraments that engage our other senses besides our hearing. We see, touch, taste, smell. That has a purpose. We are involved physically as well as mentally. Our other senses are engaged, but there are also actions. We take what is offered. We eat and drink. We are engaged physically.

Why is that? There is something about ritual actions that helps bring the reality of the spiritual realities home to us. Hearing the message of Jesus’ death and resurrection and his offer of salvation is the primary way we receive the good news and a huge part of our life with God is responding to the message heard in faith and repentance and obedience. But clearly Jesus saw the need for these symbolic actions as well to impress upon us more deeply the reality of the truth of Jesus giving himself for us and to us. The seeing and the actions are intended to make the truths more vivid and concrete to us.

One of the things about learning is the more senses that are involved the better. The more that our bodies are involved the deeper the impression. There is something about ritual actions that underscore the significance of an event. The sacraments reinforce the message of the gospel as tangible signs and seals of the promises of the gospel. In the Lord’s Supper, the Lord reinforces the truth that he gives himself to us as our Saviour by giving us a visible and tangible acting out of the gospel offer. And we are involved physically to reinforce the reality of the faith by which we receive him as our saviour.

The sacraments are given because of the weakness of our faith. They are given we need more than just the gospel in audible form. The fact that Jesus gave us the sacraments teaches us that just hearing the word is not enough. That is not a note that we are used to hearing because we rightly put great emphasis on the absolute

necessary of hearing and responding to the word of God for our salvation. The word of God is powerful. The word blessed by the Spirit changes our hearts – God renews us through the power of his word. Those are wonderful truths that we often celebrate.

And yet in his infinite wisdom Jesus gave us baptism and the Lord's Supper. He did not make them optional. They are not an extra for those who are more drawn to symbols and rituals. Since Jesus instituted them and requires that they be practiced, must conclude that they are necessary for our spiritual wellbeing.

It is necessary for our spiritual wellbeing that we remember the Lord's death, not just by thinking about it, but by taking part in the celebration of the Lord's Supper where we see the bread broken and given to us, where we see the cup with wine/juice given to us and where we receive the bread and the wine and eat and drink. We do this because Jesus has told us to do it and understand that its purpose is to help us in our walk with Jesus.

The Bible does not spell out exactly how this helps us, but we can figure it out by reflecting on the words and the actions of the Lord's Supper. There can be no question that Jesus wants to assure us of that he died for us and that he offers himself to us as the one who died for us. His words make that clear. "This is my body, which is for you." "This cup [that I am giving to you] is the new covenant in my blood." And then there are actions. The symbols of his broken body and blood are given. And they are received. And they are ingested. Jesus and we together act out the gospel at Jesus' insistence. It is as if he is saying – I have told you in words, now let me show you in actions along with my words.

And that is intended to be beneficial. It is intended to give us greater assurance that Jesus does really give himself to us as the one who died and who rose again. The actions alongside the words make a spiritual transaction visible and tangible. It is to make the spiritual realities more real to our minds and hearts so that we are less likely to doubt that Jesus does really give himself to us. The purpose is to give us greater confidence and assurance of the reality of what is being signified.

But there is significance in our actions. The actions in the celebration of the Lord's Supper involve both giving and receiving. The Lord's Supper is not just in the giving. The meaning requires receiving. The symbols of Jesus' broken body and shed blood are given to us – but we must receive them. We must take. We must eat. We must drink. And that too is intended to be beneficial to us.

We express our faith physically. We express our faith publicly. We express our faith together with others. These actions reinforce our faith. They are a renewal of our reception of the gospel offer. They are a renewal of our public confession of faith. They are a renewal of our identification with this congregation as those who are united to one another by means of our common union with Christ. The actions make it all more vivid and real. The actions together with the word – reinforce the reality of our faith or our confession, and of our connectedness as members of the same body of Christ.

So let's appreciate what Jesus has given us in the Lord's Supper. Let's remember Jesus in the deep sense of seeing ourselves united to Christ in his suffering and death and resurrection. We do not just remember some event of long ago. We remember the saving acts of Jesus as those who participated in them. We were very much involved because we were in Christ when he died and when he rose again. Let us think about what that means for us in the present as Jesus offers to us the symbols that point to his broken body and shed blood. Let us ponder the actions and how they reinforce the words and make them physical. And let us ponder our actions and how our actions also make physical our faith and our confession and our connectedness to this body.

How wonderful to think of these things! Jesus has given us this ritual meal for our benefit – to help us in our struggles – to make the gospel concrete and tangible – so that we might be more certain of his love and our acceptance with God.