

January 30, 2011  
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

Matthew 28:18-20  
1Corinthians 11:17-26

### Worship: Celebrating the Sacraments

Children's Chat – Theme – Sacraments

- 1) They are special. (Share something that is special to me with kids.)
- 2) They are a gift from God (grace). (To show God's love.)
- 3) They are to be shared in community (not kept to ourselves).

### **Introduction**

This morning we have two scripture readings. The first one comes from the very end of the Gospel of Matthew. It is referred to often as, 'The Great Commission'. Jesus, after his resurrection and before he ascends into heaven gathers his disciples and commands that they should 'go' – 'make disciples of all nations' – 'baptize' – and 'teach'.

Our second reading comes from Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth. In this passage Paul is admonishing the Corinthians about their practices of eating together and observing the Lord's Supper – which are two different things.

The fellowship meal is more like a pot-luck with a purpose and that purpose is to show charity to the poorer members of the community. However, unlike most of our 'soup kitchens' or 'feeding programs' that provide food for those in need – this meal was an occasion to be in community with one another – to share not only food together but time and conversation together.

The problem in Corinth was that the practice was breaking down along class lines – the more wealthy members were able to gather earlier in the day while the working class servants and

slaves had to work. These members were going ahead and eating without waiting and either consuming the food or consuming the best portions of the food that had been gathered. This practice was spilling over to their practice of the Lord's Supper – which was a meal of 'remembrance' if you will.

Why – I have chosen – these two verses – is because they represent the represent Jesus' command that we should 'do these things' – baptize and celebrate the Lord's Supper. In these passages we hear too the words that establish these sacraments.

What I say as I baptize is that *'I baptize you in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'*

What I say as we celebrate the Lord's Supper is, *'This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'* *'This cup is the covenant, sealed in my blood. Do this, in remembrance of me.'* *'For as often as you eat of this bread and drink of this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again.'*

This morning we will continue looking at Worship and looking at why the 'sacraments' are placed in the midst of our worship.

## **Sermon**

Let's take a moment to review where we have been thus far in the series on 'worship'.

First, we talked about worship – *what it is*. Here we learned that the act of worship takes many forms. It can be singing, dancing, and sitting in silence. It can be prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. It can be listening, speaking, and offering. I have summed all these acts up by saying that worship is simply *our response to God's mighty acts*. Which is true – because God initiates our worship.

We also talked about how worship is *God focused* (not us focused). How worship is our service of God. How worship is a *verb* that requires us to participate. How worship is an *act of discipleship* – it is in worship where we come to know what Jesus' knows and we come to learn to live as Jesus lived.

Secondly, after talking about what worship is – we began to talk about **why we do what we do** in worship. We talked about how our *gathering rituals* (practices) are meant to *refocus our attention* on the God who is 'holy'. We talked about how those movements of worship are meant to remind us of who God is and what God has done – and they often consist of us offering our praise in response.

With our focus on God – and reawakened to the holiness of God – we are ready to confess our sin. The *confession of sin* is an act that restores us in relationship with our God – so that we can hear God speak to us.

This is what we talked about last week – about how at the *center of our worship* – is the proclamation of the 'Word' – hearing God speak. We were reminded that our understanding of

this ‘Word’ is not so simple – but that the world of God comes to us – in the person of Jesus Christ – in the reading of scripture – in the preaching – the proclaiming of that word (this might include the Anthem, drama, liturgical dance, art) – those ways that point us to what God has to say to us in Jesus and through scripture.

We talked about how *our response* to God’s speaking to us was to be prepared (a sense of expectation – readiness to hear God speak), to listen actively (to take our notes, to write down our questions), and to wrestle with the text. We also saw the important role of the Holy Spirit in illuminating – show us the way – the meaning – that God has for us in this speaking.

By now, hopefully, we are beginning to realize that our ‘order of worship’ does not only help us to form our response – it doesn’t just shape our service of the Holy God into whose presence we are drawn – but our *order of worship also mediates the movement of God* acting and us responding.

God acts – we respond

God acts – we respond

Back and forth

Round and round it goes

Like a dance in which God leads and we follow – finding the rhythms of His grace – back and forth – round and round – as we are caught up in the beauty of worship.

There is no place in our worship – where this acting of God and this responding by us is so intertwined than when we come to the celebration of the sacraments.

God acts in the sacraments expressing the depth of his love for us; expressing his love in very real touchable and taste-able ways. Like the kiss of a mother and child, like the embrace of friends, like those special things we do for others ‘with love’. In the sacraments God shows – in very physical ways – his love for us.

The word ‘sacrament’ all by itself gives us a hint about the depth and breadth of God’s love. The prefix ‘*sacra*’ reminds us that the sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism are not only ‘sacred’ (set apart from the ordinary) but also ‘*sacrificial*’. In sacraments we see, feel, taste, and touch God’s extravagant love – his ‘sacrificial’ love for us. Saint Paul reminds us of this love when he writes to the Romans saying that: *‘Indeed rarely will anyone die for a righteous person – though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare die. But God proves his love for us in that while we were sinners Christ died for us.’* (Romans 5:7-8)

In Baptism we are joined to Christ in his dying so that we might be joined to him in his rising. In Holy Communion we partake of the body that was broken and the cup that was poured out for us and for our salvation.

**God acts** by giving himself – by expressing his love for us in sacrificial ways. God acts in real tangible – touchable – taste-able – seeable ways. Water poured out – bread broken – cup poured out. God acts – claiming us as his children – joining us to himself in Jesus Christ – washing us in waters of forgiveness – promising to us an eternal life. God acts nourishing – sustaining – strengthening – encouraging us with the bread broken and cup poured. God acts by showing his love for us.

God acts in the sacraments – in every word – every droplet – every morsel – God acts – and in worship we respond.

**We respond** by **coming** – not in perfect faith nor as perfect people – but as people in need:

in need of wholeness in the midst of our brokenness

in need of healing in the midst of our sickness

in need of peace in the midst of our chaotic lives and our out of control world

in need of more of God and less of ourselves

We come at God's gracious invitation – anticipating our encounter with the living God in whole we meet – there in the water – here at the table.

We respond in *thanksgiving*. When we come with our need and we see the extent of God's love for us – of God's self giving – sacrificial love – how can we not be moved to thanksgiving. Both our Baptismal and Communion rites include 'prayers of thanksgiving' in which we thank God for God's works of creation and redemption – this even as we call on Him to let us experience anew the fullness of his saving love in Jesus Christ.

Thanksgiving – is the soil from which gladness comes – from which joy comes – from which peace comes – the peace borne of the Holy Spirit that opens us to be transformed.

We respond by *receiving*. Receiving is an act of great humility – isn't it? When we are given a gift – a precious gift – a gift of great value – our first response is to refuse it. No, I am sorry, I could never .... It is too precious .... Too valuable .... Please – really – I can't.

Receiving the sacraments – the extravagant gifts of God's love – gifts that affirm our identity as children of God who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb – children who have been given the gift of eternal life. Receiving the sacraments allows us to receive the benefit of that gift – the love and life that allows us to live more confidently in a world filled with uncertainties and more faithfully as we respond to God's self-giving by giving our selves fully and wholly to God.

Receiving the extravagant gift of God's love – also leaves us vulnerable to the transforming work of that love. See in our receiving of the sacraments we risk being more generous ourselves – we risk living more sacrificially ourselves – we risk loving more completely God and one another.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen