

The Parable of Bread and Wine
World Communion Sunday
October 7, 2018

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?”

²⁶ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?” ³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”

³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.³⁷ All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.⁴⁰ For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

⁴¹ At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

⁴³ “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered.⁴⁴ “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me.⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father.⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life.⁴⁸ I am the bread of life.⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died.⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die.⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”

⁵³ Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live

because of me. ⁵⁸ *This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.* ⁵⁹ *He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.*

John 6:25-59 (NIV)

We are continuing our series “Discovering God’s Heart through Jesus’ Parables.” In some ways Jesus’ teaching about “The Bread and Wine” is not a parable, and in other ways it is, especially if a parable is defined as a short story that involves earthly, tangible, or ordinary things which was given by Jesus to teach a spiritual lesson, or a spiritual truth. In fact there might not be a more important parable. There is so much theology packed into that passage. But this morning, since it is “World Communion Sunday” on the Christians calendar and many churches around the world will be celebrating communion this morning we will focus on “the bread and wine.”

How one views the communion elements has divided churches and denominations throughout Christian history. Some churches like the Catholics, Lutherans and some other Protestant denominations celebrate communion each and every Sunday, the entire service focuses on communion. Others celebrate it much more infrequently – monthly, quarterly, just a few times a year. But it is not just how often the churches celebrate communion that divides them, it is also how they view the elements themselves.

Romans Catholics believe in a theological concept called “transubstantiation” which means they believe that when the priest blesses the bread and the cup in a very proscribed manner, the bread actually becomes the body of Jesus Christ and the wine or juice in the cup becomes his blood. You might ask, “how do Catholics come up with a belief that seems so absurd?” The truth is they draw a lot of it from Jesus’ words from our passage this morning.

⁵³ *Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.* ⁵⁴ *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.* ⁵⁵ *For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.* ⁵⁶ *Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.* ⁵⁷ *Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me.* ⁵⁸ *This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.”*

Mennonites, other Anabaptist Christians, as well as many protestant denominations see communion more as a memorial. In the account of the Last Supper recorded in the Gospel of Luke Jesus commanded his first disciples, “do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19). But in each of the three versions of the “Last Supper” instituted by Jesus recorded in Matthew, Mark & Luke Jesus specifically refers to the bread as his body and the wine/juice in the cup as his blood. Was the bread and the wine that was there on the night of the Last Supper when Jesus was actually present, any more or less his actual body and blood than it is when we celebrate communion today in an appropriate, God honoring manner?

As with many of the theological concepts/beliefs that have divided the church over the centuries, especially when they seem to be divided to the extremes, the truth is probably somewhere towards the middle. I think that’s true of how we are supposed to view communion.

Yes, it is something that we are supposed to do as a memorial of what Jesus has done for us on the cross, a memorial like none other. But I also think it is much more than that. When done in an appropriate God honoring way, then the earthly, physical bread and wine/juice, becomes the spiritual body and blood of our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ. The resurrected Jesus actually comes to live in our bodies through the Holy Spirit which is an extension of the Incarnation. God came to earth to live in the earthly body of Jesus. Likewise, believers have the opportunity of the spiritual God/Jesus living in us. Which is really what a parable is all about – Jesus taking something that is common to life here on earth, there isn't anything much more earthly and common than bread and wine, and giving it a spiritual meaning.

There is mystery involved in communion, much like there is mystery in many of the concepts that Jesus introduced, whether it be baptism, how one specifically comes to faith in Jesus (how much is by our power and how much is God's), Christian marriage, exactly how our bodies are going to be resurrected, or communion. If there wasn't mystery involved we wouldn't need faith. Truth be told, most of us earthly, common human beings who need to have it all figured out, don't do very good with mystery. Unfortunately I think we miss out on a lot, especially being able to see God at work in the world, in our own lives, when we do that.

On the evening of the Jewish Passover Jesus gathered with his closest disciples,

²⁶ *While they were eating, 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."*

²⁷ *Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you."²⁸ *This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.²⁹ 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."**

³⁰ *When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

Matthew 26:26-30 (NIV)