

Sermon: "Communioned"

Scripture: I Corinthians 11:23-26

Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans

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When we come to this table we speak of Jesus broken body and spilled blood and we repeat the words that Paul said that Jesus said "this is the new covenant in my blood." And we're like yep, ok, new covenant, blood of Jesus, broken body, and we put the bread or the cracker in our mouths and we dip the bread or drink a sip of the juice or wine and we eat the body and drink the blood... and whether we come from a more Catholic mindset that sees the substances as actually transformed into the body and blood or see it from the Protestant lense as being symbolic, what we are saying is still pretty extraordinary, about blood sacrifice being the center point of human covenant with the Divine.

So I just want to take some time this morning to double click on this phrase – "the new covenant in my blood" – because it's fascinating, I think, where it comes from and ultimately what it's saying and hopefully will help raise our awareness of what we are participating in when we come to this table and receive this bread and cup. What you hold in your hands right now and what's sitting on this table or on the table in front of you who are joining us on-line might look like merely bread and juice but with the words and actions we surround it with in the church, the ritual draws forward ancient history into this present moment to facilitate our meeting of nothing less than God Godself.

So when Jesus tried to explain who he was and what his death would be about and when he asked his disciples to share this meal to remember him he understood it all in light of the ancient Hebrew understanding of their relationship with God in covenant and it's this very notion of covenant that is the backbone of

the whole sacred cannon of scripture from beginning to end. IN fact another word for covenant is testament and so we as Christians name our Bible as being divided into stories and teachings and writings in the Old Covenant and then stories, teachings and writings in New Covenant. And in that chasm between the two stands Jesus and his cross.

Now I could talk you through that whole movement from Old to New Covenant but not nearly as succinctly and effectively as the Bible Project with Tim Mackie and Jon Collins does. This is a wonderful Bible Study resource on-line that Jonathan and I will be using in our retreat with the Confirmation youth next Saturday but I thought you would appreciate it as well. Though it's cartoon and illustration, it really is for all ages as they take big biblical themes and explain them succinctly and clearly. They in 5 minutes explain biblical covenant and actually the whole arc of the salvation history that will be clearer to you than anything I could lay out. They do come from a more evangelical tradition so I just ask you to excuse the exclusively male representation of God and see if their explanation of covenant is helpful...

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And that is the story of the covenant partnership as it unfolds over the course of the Bible, where we are called to work alongside God to accomplish the goal of making it on earth as it is in heaven which is what we pray for every Sunday.

But one of the dynamics that we have to take into account when we think of our partnership or covenant with God, the Divine Creator of Universe, is the

perfect infinite completeness of God and the imperfect, finite, sinful, and incompleteness of us. How can we who are bound and limited, incomplete and lacking wholeness be realistically in a partnership with God, the Complete and Whole One? There has to be a bridging of that gap for covenant to work, so we don't just cower before God or high tail it in the other direction, so that God's glory doesn't simply overwhelm and pulverize our lack of it. The sun is the star by which we can see anything and everything on this earth and yet if we were to look directly into the sun without any technology of protection we would go blind.

Similarly, as the Hebrew people understood it there needed to be some technology, some processes, put in place so that they could relate to God such that God's glory would not simply turn them into an ash pile. So that's why they had the whole tabernacle and the temple system and the rites and rituals of the priests and the sacrifices of animals, the blood of whom would be substituted for their own blood when they sinned and fell short of God's glory, therefore bridging the chasm between God's infiniteness and our finiteness.

And as the Bible Project illustration explained, the Hebrew scriptures themselves say that in the covenantal relationship with God, they were continually breaking covenant and God continually having to forgive them and pick up the pieces of their relationship and carry on. And eventually it was believed that something dramatic and radical would have to happen for humanity to truly move towards heaven on earth and not just be in a spin cycle of failure and forgiveness. So in the writings of the New Testament, it is explained that Jesus offered a new covenant through his blood sacrifice, not a lamb's or a bull's, but as human being before God but also as God Godself before humanity so that through the cross and the resurrection and the Spirit of Jesus that resulted, this

chasm was forever forged between God and humanity, writing the promise on our hearts finally that God was our God and we God's people.

Ideally now with the Spirit of Christ dwelling within us and within our communities, we then manifest the goodness and truth and mercy of God to the world. With Christ's blood running through our hearts and out into our veins and with his body becoming a part of ours, since we are what we eat, the divine purposes for this world are fulfilled of justice and love and peace and community. But.... It's a process. We thought it might happen kind of instantaneously but it's working itself out over generations and generations and although there are always those who claim they know, the Bible itself says no one knows the day or the time when it will all finally be fulfilled.

In the meantime, though we remember the covenant, we enact the feast at the end of time here at this table, we try to align ourselves more and more fully to Jesus Christ and God's purposes for this world. We take the bread, we drink the fruit of the vine one more time and pray, not for salvation for ourselves, but for God's strength and wisdom and purposes for this world, for our neighbors and enemies alike, to be fulfilled through our lives. And we fail at that. We acknowledge our failure, receive God's forgiveness and pick ourselves back up through God's grace and work again to be faithful to the covenant God has invited us into and we do it together. Not individually and separately but together. Just as we pray OUR Father not MY father, we seek covenant faithfulness with God together so even if individually we are failing to uphold our part of the bargain we are part of a collective where someone else in that moment is doing it shinely! And we celebrate that! And when we are feeling distant and separate from God and prayers are dying on our tongues we trust that someone else in our covenant

community is praying with and for us. It is one loaf that we partake of... at least symbolically it is if not literally right now, we all eat of one loaf and as Christ lives in us and us in Christ so too does the I become US and the ME becomes WE in this act of comm-union where we are united with one another in covenant and then to God.

I becomes

you and me becomes

we and God.

You see, that was the exact opposite of the movement in the story of the Garden of Eden. We and God at the eating of the fruit became Adam and Eve and in their separation from God even their “we” became separated into I’s and me’s and mine in conflict with one another and the movement back toward the fulfillment of all time is our conflicted I becomes again you and me which becomes we and God altogether. That’s what’s symbolized at this table. We invite you here individually but only in so far as your individuality becomes “communioned” with mine and ours together communion-ed with God. And our work in the world then is to take this communion-ed state and draw others into the covenant that we, out of the pure grace of Jesus have been invited into ourselves, not by any achievement of our own except that we have accepted God’s grace and love and not rejected it, that’s the only thing. And if we have rejected it for some reason cause we are in a tough place in our lives right now, we are a part of a collective where someone else is holding out the faith that we do not know right now. And that my friends is something of what communion is about...

So come now, my siblings in the faith, ministers of God's word and followers of Jesus' way, let us come to this table prepared here or before you at home. You don't have to understand everything or be certain in your sense of what it means to be certain to come to this table of love, you only have to be open to receiving the love of God for the sake of sharing that love with others. That's why we come... and you are all welcome at Christ's table!